

Water rate hike heads to Saratoga Council

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Published: Thursday, January 12, 2012 2:07 AM MST

Water rates in Saratoga will increase 3 percent a year for the next five years under a plan endorsed by the Saratoga Joint Powers Board Wednesday.

The Joint Powers Board's recommendation now goes before the Saratoga Town Board, which will hear the proposal on first reading at its Jan. 17 meeting. The Town Board must vote at three different public meetings, and conduct a public hearing prior to its third vote, before the rate increases become official.

The Joint Powers Board also supported a separate ordinance amendment that permits the town to enter into agreements with water customers who live within a one-mile buffer outside of town. The base monthly rate for these customers must be at least 1.25 times more than the rate for customers living within the town limits.

The Joint Powers Board, along with Public Works Director Chuck Bartlett, devised the five-year incremental plan where the monthly base rate increases 3 percent each year. The residential monthly base rate in town rises from \$25 to \$25.75 in 2012 if the Town Council officially approves the plan. It will be \$29 a month by 2016.

The commercial rate increases from \$28 to 28.84 in 2012, and rises to \$32.50 by 2016.

The town of Saratoga has allocated money to fix leaks in the water system and has been installing new water meters. The day-to-day costs of maintaining the system has also gone up and were among the reasons for the rate increases, said Joint Powers Board chairman James Elliott.

"The town has not raised water rates for a number of years," Elliott said. "That's why we came up with a incremental plan so customers don't get slammed with a big increase."