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Posted: 6:03 p.m. Wednesday, April 23, 2014

Fairfield's water, sewer rates lowest in Butler County

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By Eric Robinette

Staff Writer

FAIRFIELD — Fairfield residents pay the lowest amount on their water and sewer bill in Butler County, according to an annual water and sewer rate survey.

That survey, compiled by the city of Oakwood, finds not only that Fairfield is low, but that Butler and Warren county communities rank low in the overall list as well.

The rates in the survey are based on the use of 22,500 gallons in three months. The rates are the ones that were in effect as of March 1 of this year.

Fairfield's rate is \$161. The next lowest on the list is Warren County, at \$183, followed by Butler County at \$202. Middletown's rate is \$209, while Hamilton is on the higher end, with \$243. The average rate for all of Southwest Ohio is \$238, with Trenton having the highest combined rate in Butler County at \$258.

By contrast, Union, Ohio has the lowest rate at \$132, while Miami County has the highest rate of \$419.

Dave Crouch, Fairfield's director of utilities, said that the city's rates have been low for years, largely by design.

"We have for years only had very small, incremental rate adjustments. I think the City Council and city management have always been pretty proactive in looking to the future and what the needs are going to be," Crouch said.

"Along the way, they've established water surplus and sewer surplus budgets that are sustaining our budget. Because they accumulated those types of reserves since 1957 when we started the utility service, it's allowed us to keep our debt pretty low. By the end of the decade, we'll have zero debt in the utility department," he said.

The city's annual report for 2013 states that in 1957, water cost \$4.25 for 3,000 gallons. Today, the same amount costs \$8.91, an increase of less than 10 cents a year.

Crouch also noted the department has a low ratio of staff to customer. He couldn't provide the exact figure but said, "We run the department 24/7 with less employees than we had (in the past). Part of that is technology. We've taken advantage of technology where we could to help us do things more efficiently."

Butler County as a whole saved \$28 million by negotiating a new water deal with the city of Hamilton on March 31. The new contract, beginning next year, calls for a county rate decrease from \$2.78 per thousand gallons to \$1.66. However, county customers who buy Hamilton water might not see their rates drop, because the county has been subsidizing the rate. Hamilton customers will probably see an estimated \$2 per month increase next year, according to city officials.

A study conducted by Columbia University late last year states that nationally, utility debt and water rates increased by 23 percent and 33 percent, respectively, between 2000 and 2012.

Combined water and sewer rates

Fairfield \$161.06

Butler County: \$202.35

Middletown: \$208.53

Monroe \$213.69

Oxford \$219.51

Hamilton \$243.18

Trenton \$257.88

Rate based on 22,500 gallons over three months

Source: City of Oakwood finance department

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- Posted by supercoupe at 6:25 p.m. Apr. 23, 2014
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that's still super high water rates.



- Posted by Hold_On_A_Sec at 6:51 p.m. Apr. 23, 2014
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Way to go, Hamilton!! Second highest rates of those surveyed and set to go up again due to the new agreement with Butler County. Atta' boy, Joshua Smith and City Council!!! WAY TO GO!!!



- Posted by AndreaGlock at 6:59 p.m. Apr. 23, 2014
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Hamilton is on the higher end, and Hamilton residents will pay even more due to the agreement that was reached with the county. Well done, city council. Thank you for overseeing the best interests of the citizens.



- Posted by wildman69 at 9:50 p.m. Apr. 23, 2014
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As most people know Fairfield is a nice place to live & raise a family.