

Plan revealed to hook up 5 water systems

□ Customers say rate increase not justified

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

KINGSTON TWP. — Customers of Aqua Pennsylvania think they pay enough for the water quality and service they receive. The company thinks they don't pay enough.

Unhappy customers brought their complaints — and in one case some evidence — to a public hearing before an administrative law judge, called by the Public Utilities Commission to take testimony on proposed increases of up to 44 percent.

"We pay so much for water, and I'm paying for filters every month."

Edward Diction
Midway Manor, Shavertown

Residents of the Maplecrest subdivision in Trucksville will be hit hardest if the rate proposal is allowed to stand. They absorbed a 45 percent increase in November, 2002 and the company is asking for 44 percent now.

"An 89 percent increase in your water rates in less than two years is a bit much," said Barry Wagner, vice president of the Maplecrest Homeowners Association. He asked that the rates for his development be left alone.

Concerns were also raised about the effect of connecting five Kingston Township systems to one another.

Chuck Steever, who lives in Sunrise Estates, off Carverton Road in Trucksville, said he was concerned that the good water service in his development would be degraded if plans to interconnect several systems are put in place.

Michael Hassell, an attorney representing the company, said Aqua PA "has been proud to combine systems where necessary to provide good service to everyone." He confirmed the company is planning to interconnect systems in Sunrise Estates, Windsor Farms, Cedar Lane, Maplecrest and Midway Manor.

Combining the systems may address an issue brought up by several residents of Maplecrest, which is off Manor Drive and adjacent to Sunrise Estates. A relatively new subdivision, Maplecrest does not suffer from dirty water and leaks that have plagued Midway Manor for years, but it has low water pressure, so low that fire hydrants,

What's Next

The Public Utilities Commission will hold a series of four hearings in Harrisburg during April. An administrative law judge will recommend a rate schedule by June 14, and the PUC will make a final decision by August 14.

which were required when the land was developed, are lying unused until there's sufficient pressure to use them.

Along with connecting the systems together, Hassell said the company was seeking a low-interest state loan to finance the installation of storage tanks, probably in 2005. That would create the pressure and volume needed to make hydrants useful.

Most of the local systems were previously owned by National Utilities, Inc., which was notorious for poor quality and slow service. The people who spoke at the hearing have not seen much improvement.

Edward Diction, who lives in Midway Manor, a Shavertown subdivision, illustrated his complaint with samples of the 28 water filters he said he has replaced since April 2002.

"We pay so much for water, and I'm paying for filters every month," he said.

Other customers testified about low pressure, dirty water and leaks that turned their yards into fields of mush.

"Why do we have to pay for their (National Utilities) ineptitude?" asked David Broadhead, who also lives in Midway Manor. Under the company's proposal, his rate would increase by 42 percent.

He described an area of his backyard that sinks a foot or more each year, due to a leaking water line, which the company has consistently denied exists.

Hassell, the company attorney, said even after the increase, rates in Midway Manor would be below those charged in the company's main service areas. It is PUC policy to "equalize" a company's rates across the state.

Because they are very recent acquisitions by Aqua PA, no rate increase was proposed for Windsor Farms or Cedar Lane. Hassell announced at the hearing that a proposed 33 percent increase for Sunrise Estates had been withdrawn.

Other systems included in the rate request are: Oak Hill, Lehman Twp., -1 percent; Rhodes Terrace, Harveys Lake, 19 percent; Warden Place, Harveys Lake, 42 percent.

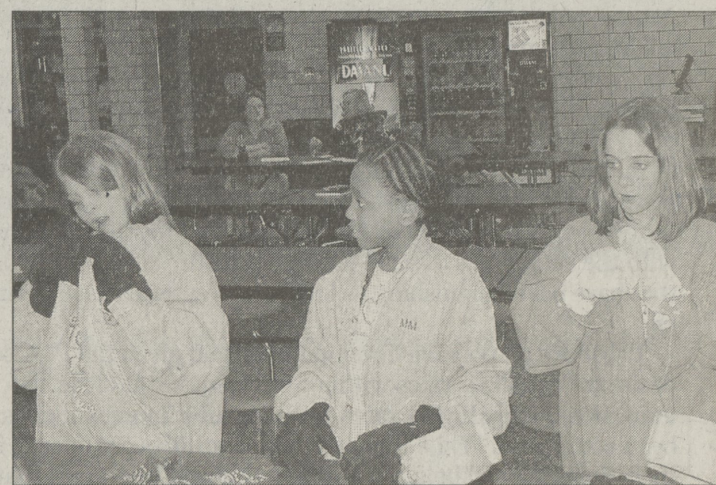
No one from those areas spoke at the hearing



Some of the Cadette Girl Scouts who worked at the event included, from left: Katie Confer, Lauren Yurko, Amanda Musto, Katie Gilligan, Megan Hine, and Amy Vodzak.



Senior Girl Scout Kelly Williams played a game with Juniors, from left, Arianna Brennan, Olivia Zurad, and Lindsay Stammer.



Brownie Girl Scouts, from left, Morgan Gilhooley, Amber Ford, and Leah Benedetti, learn how to focus on ability. They tried to button shirts with thick gloves on their hands.

Scouts

(continued from page 1)

ship bracelet, which will be sent to Girl Scouts in California who lost everything in last summer's wildfires. In addition, they donated school supplies for Operation Pencil Box. The scouts who attended earned the Brownie Around the World Try It or the Junior Girl Scouts Around the World Badge.

Other scouts who assisted in the program were: Senior Kelly Williams; Cadettes Brienne Bolton, Katie Confer, Megan Hine, Heather Mines, Stephanie Gonczol, Debra Ketchner, Nicole Madden, Samantha Marquart, Alyssa Miller, Amanda Musto, Amy Vodzak, Megan Youells, Lauren Yurko, and Leader Michele Makarewicz.

Lake

(continued from page 1)

The borough received its first grant to combat the problem in 2000. The \$100,000 sum was used to stabilize two streams, one near the Sandy Beach and another near Grotto Pizza. Lubnow said adding rock to the banks of one and introducing native plant species to the other reduced the amount of algae-inducing chemical washing into the lake at those areas.

At Hemlock Gardens, \$156,000 worth of storm water infrastruc-

ture — including the addition of piping, and catch basins — made a significant difference in the amount of phosphorus leaching into the lake, said Lubnow. Educating the public has been a big part of the process, as well. Lubnow said grant money has been used to create educational pamphlets that are sent to residents twice a year.

Curiously, residents are much more active and interested now than they were when this process

started, said Lubnow, a factor that has helped the borough's efforts.

"We have people coming up to us and saying, 'this site may be a problem, or that site.' In that respect I think we've come a long way."

Lubnow agreed a lot has been done to improve the health of Harveys Lake, but said there is still much to do. Over the next six to eight months, water samples will be taken to judge how the reduc-

tion in phosphorus has affected the lake's algae numbers.

This spring, an already awarded \$134,000 federal grant will be used to add several filtering technologies to existing storm water piping. The "retro-fits" will catch solids and phosphorus that still dump directly into the water.

If they prove effective, they could be installed at numerous locations around the lake.

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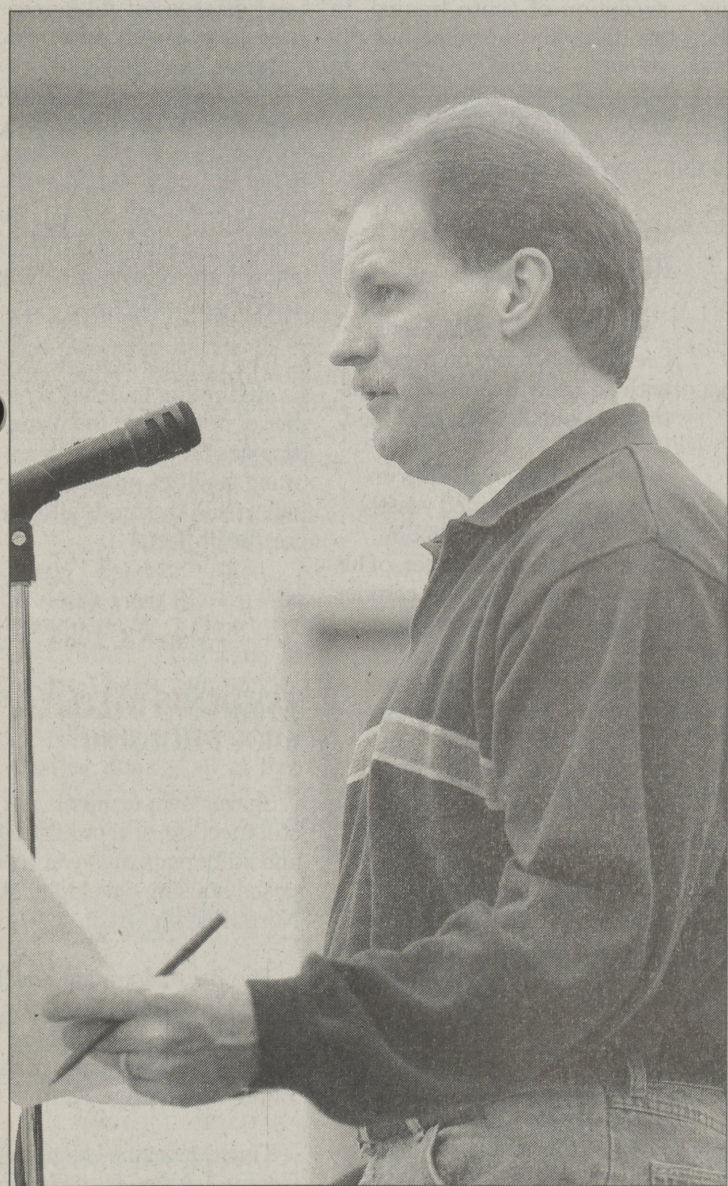
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FOR THE POST/PETE G. WILCOX

Barry Wagner of the Maplecrest Homeowners Association in Shavertown addressed judge Cynthia Fordham and a panel of lawyers at the Feb. 26 hearing to discuss proposed water rate hikes.