

## **MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN**

Of major consequence to both Village government and individual residents is a proposed increase in water costs and fire hydrant maintenance charges by our water provider, United Water of New Rochelle. Because this is all unfolding during the summer months, I did not want it to catch Villagers unaware especially in light of the fact that the proposed rate increase is astronomical – an increase of 50% over the next four years. By way of comparison, Con Edison is seeking a 4% increase over the next three years. To challenge this rate increase, Bronxville has joined a consortium which represents nine of the ten municipalities within the Westchester County United Water service territory. We have jointly hired an attorney to help us navigate the process through the Public Service Commission.

While we anticipated a rate increase due to major capital expenditures undertaken by the water company - most notably the new pumping station in Eastchester which connects us to the Delaware Aqueduct and ensures continued and uninterrupted water service - the amount proposed is unacceptable for many reasons.

Not only is the increase too high, but imbedded in the calculation is an overall rate of return to water company shareholders of over 11%. Though called United Water of New Rochelle, it is a subsidiary of Suez Environnement, a multi-national utility company headquartered in Paris, France.

In addition, when building the new Delaware Interconnection Project, which is the main driver of the increase, United Water never bothered to apply for Federally-backed financing through the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund which was available to them. Instead, they financed the project privately at double the interest rates available through the government program.

Of particular distress to the Village is the skewed apportionment of the increase between actual water use and hydrant maintenance. This distinction is extremely important because hydrant fees are currently paid directly by municipalities and thus the costs are only passed through to the portion of the water using population that pays real property taxes. The dollar amount is significant. The Village has 193 hydrants and we are currently being charged \$543.39 per hydrant, per annum, an amount already one of the most expensive State-wide. As part of the rate increase proposal, the cost would skyrocket to \$1,504.00 per hydrant, an amount that has no relationship to the actual cost of upkeep of the hydrant.

The members of the consortium agree that whatever rate is determined to be fair by the Public Service Commission should pass through directly to all utility users because everyone avails themselves of possible fire hydrant use for fire protection. To place the burden solely on property tax payers is clearly inequitable. The water company's method of billing the municipality is actually not the norm – rather the costs for social benefit requirements imposed on utilities such as the 911 Service or Public Access Channel fees in the cable context are passed through to the general rate paying public and not billed to government entities.

Adding to the frustration with the rate increase is the fact that over time, United Water has not proven to be a good partner to the Village. We do not receive yearly hydrant maintenance and flushing reports despite repeated requests and during a “brown water” alert back in the spring, the Village heard about the water use ban from the news media first, not the water company.

Along with our eight neighboring communities, we will remain diligent in fighting this exorbitant increase request now before the Public Service Commission. State Senator Jeff Klein has also been extremely helpful in presenting our case to the Public Service Commission. I ask all residents to add their voices in opposing a 50% increase in water rates over four years by writing to Jaclyn Brilling at the New York State Public Service Commission, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223.

Another topic percolating over the summer months is the proposed changes to the Village Zoning Law relating to the installation and operation of solar energy and other renewable energy systems that was introduced by the Trustees at the regular July Board meeting.

The proposed changes are posted on the Village website and there will be a public hearing to discuss the amendments at the September 13<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting. In the interim, if you have any comments, direct them to me at [mayor@vobny.com](mailto:mayor@vobny.com) or call 337-6500.

The purpose of this new legislation is to continue to keep the Village in the forefront of green initiatives in Westchester County by allowing and encouraging solar energy systems and equipment within residential and business areas according to certain safeguards and conditions. The intent is to balance the desirability and demand for alternative energy systems while maintaining the aesthetics of the Village by minimizing the potential for any negative impacts and ultimately protecting the health and safety of Village residents. Since many of our homes are in very close proximity to each other, it is paramount that we promulgate standards that foster energy saving initiatives without negatively affecting neighboring properties. We are confident the proposed legislation meets this standard, but we welcome any comments on the content of the legislation.