

March 29, 1999

Mayor David Cohen
Newton City Hall

Dear Mayor Cohen:

I am writing to urge you to veto the proposed ordinance on second water meters for the following reasons:

1) It makes a lot more sense for discretionary uses of water (lawn-watering & car-washing) to subsidize the less-discretionary (washing people, clothes & dishes, and flushing toilets), than vice versa. If the aldermen in favor of the ordinance were really interested in getting rid of subsidization, they would vote for the 26% compromise, rather than giving outside water use a free ride for the 74% of the total sewer budget not directly related to Newton's sewage volume. (I've looked at the MWRA Sewer Charge Calculation and the City of Newton Budget Summary, and was able to make this calculation myself.)

2) If it's true, as I've read, that 55% of Newton sewer volume comes from groundwater and storm runoff leaking into city pipes, outdoor water use itself is contributing to the volume, from the car-washing and sprinkler water that runs down the driveway, to the rain that doesn't get absorbed by the lawn because the lawn is already saturated from being watered.

3) Frequent lawn-watering is not even particularly smart, since grass will grow deeper roots from infrequent drenchings, which we get from rainstorms. Why encourage something that's not smart?

4) People with smaller yards, or who only water occasionally during dry spells, will not get any benefit from eliminating the sewer charge, because the annual savings would not be sufficient to justify the upfront cost of \$200-300 for the second meter.

5) According to the Boston Globe, citing information from the MWRA Advisory Board, 29 of the 60 MWRA communities use second meters. Since 31 don't, Newton would not be unusual if we keep the current system.

6) Many people already feel that water and sewer rates are unreasonably high. (I suspect some think a fair price would be "free.") Having two widely different rates for indoor vs. outdoor water introduces an element of "moral hazard," in that someone who's handy with plumbing will figure out a way to divert outdoor water to indoor use. Depending on where meters are physically located, it could be as simple as adding a branch line, or running a garden hose from an outdoor spigot to the washing machine. Before any changes are made to the current system, the City should ensure that fraud will not occur.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Julia Malachuk

CC: Brooke Lipsett, Board of
Aldermen

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