

Rate increase by Topeka draws ire of RWD purchasers

Rural water districts that purchase water from the City of Topeka have complained about the city's recent 36% cost increase to them. Topeka's users will also have an increase in their water bills this year and in future years. How much of an impact the increase will have on individual customers will depend on how much water they use. But the rate to RWDs is more because the new rate is based on use and Topeka is treating each of the wholesale purchasers as being one of their regular ratepayers.

A meeting of fire districts and rural water districts was recently held at the offices of Shawnee RWD 6. The entities agreed to form a new organization to be known as the Kansas Alliance for Rural Development. Supporters suggested that one of the objectives should be to help provide support to the possible search for alternative water sources.

According to an article in the *Topeka Capital Journal* on January 25, Dennis Schwartz, manager of Rural Water District No. 8, reported that it would cost RWD 8 about 36 percent more this year to purchase water from the city. In 2003, the district spent about \$244,000 for water from the city.

Basis for the increase is a study by Black and Veatch, that showed the RWDs were not paying a fair share. Later, in order to cover other administrative costs, the city

changed its budgeting process to increase the administrative fees the city's enterprise funds, which include water. Administrative fees cover the costs involved with different city departments, such as human resources and legal counsel and are not directly related to the production of water.

Shawnee Consolidate RWD No. 1 which serves nearly 1500 customers in the vicinity of Auburn and along the west side of Topeka, have halted further development of an improvement project. District officials comment that their improvements had been planned with a second meter and connection to the city. The surprise for the RWD was when a new contract was proposed

that included a \$500,000 connection fee.

RWDs that purchase water from Topeka include Jackson 1, Shawnee Consolidated 1 and 2 and Shawnee RWDs 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8, Douglas RWD 3 and the Metropolitan Topeka Airport. The total amount of water purchased is about 780 million gallons per year.

The RWDs continue to debate what course of action to take.

The RWDs question why Topeka hired an engineering firm to review water rates when the city only then later added administrative costs to the equation.

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