

Port Huron's water-rate crisis should come as no surprise

The real charm of Port Huron is living on one of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. Millions of gallons of clean, fresh water flow by our front door every day.

We know how valuable our water is because the city is busy turning municipal water into liquid gold. It's comparable to having a high-quality oil well in your back yard and still having to pay \$20 a gallon for gasoline.

With the City Council's proposed water-rate increase - 100% through the next five years - and the 50% increase in the past five years, you will be hammered with a 150% increase for water during a period when costs rose about 30%.

How did we get into this mess?

The city knew for decades there was a problem with its storm sewers dumping into our sanitary sewer. Instead of beginning years ago to fix it, previous City Councils ignored it and spent your tax dollars on other pet projects.

You get a big, public pat on the back from your friends and the media for building condos, industrial buildings, etc., but not for having appropriate sewer systems.

It doesn't do much for public officials' egos to point to a sewer pipe in the ground instead of pyramids rising on the water as their legacy.

The truth is there are no surprises here. Estimates given by City Financial Director John Ogden five years ago, projected almost to the dollar, the crisis the city now faces. The council was told five years ago massive water-rate increases would lead to substantial usage reductions.

According to City Manager Karl Tomion, former City Manager Tom Hukta informed the City Council year after year a crisis was developing.

What was the council's response to Ogden's projections and Hukta's warnings? Apparently, it was to work hard on the city's birthday party.

Six years ago, even the Thomas Edison Inn Casino Committee saw the threat and tried to help. As part of the campaign for the casino development it pushed for an annual 5% fee, about \$5 million, to be paid to the city by the casino for the sewer-separation project's debt payments.

We have yet to hear one new piece of information or idea from the consultant, City Hall or the council that we didn't know six years ago as to how we can pay for this mess.

Port Huron should thank the citizens of Port Huron Township, Clyde, Kimball and Fort Gratiot townships for helping us pay for our sewer-separation, water and street projects with their substantial contributions to our water fund.

During a 10-year period, city water charges to the townships will have increased about 85% at a time when cost increases will be about 30%. I never understood why township officials failed to defend their citizens against these outrageous increases.

Tell me this: With yet another crisis and bad publicity, who would bring their family or business to Port Huron?

Port Huron is in a leadership crisis. What are you going to do? The filing deadline for council candidates is just eight weeks away.