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Verona rejects new water contract

Councilors balk at deal with Oneida that would double penalty for going over limit.

By Aaron Gifford
Staff writer

The Verona Town Board has refused a new water contract proposed by Oneida because the agreement would double the penalty for exceeding daily allocations, officials said this week.

Core water rates under the proposed contract would remain at \$1.69 per 1,000 gallons for up to 240,000 gallons per day, as the two municipalities agreed upon in 1995.

But if Verona drew more than 240,000 gallons in a day, which it has almost every day for the past two years, the rate would increase by 10 percent to \$1.86, Oneida Water Superintendent Art Smolinski said.

In the 1995-2005 agreement, that surcharge was 5 percent, for a total of \$1.77 per gallon. The city doubled it to 10 percent when the contract expired in May, city officials said.

"It's meant as a disincentive not to go over your permit limit," City Engineer Jim Bachter said. The city is trying to protect its water supply, which comes from a reservoir in Amn-

ville, and ensure there's enough on hand during an emergency, he said.

Verona buys water from the city and supplies customers along Route 365, which includes downtown Durhamville and the Oneida Indian Nation. The nation, which has experienced major growth since the 1995 contract, is the town's biggest customer.

Verona officials want the city to sell them 650,000 gallons of water a day, a request Oneida is unable to meet, city officials said.

"If we had it, we would supply it," Smolinski said. "It's a nondebatable point."

There was one month in the past two years, he said, when the Route 365 district used, on average, 539,000 gallons per day. The Durhamville district has consistently exceeded its agreed-upon limit of 40,000 gallons per day, consuming an average of 56,056 gallons per day during one month in 2003, Smolinski said.

The Verona Town Board received the agreement last month but didn't take any action on it. Councilor Darrell Curtis said.

"There was not even a motion," he said Thursday. "It couldn't even be brought up for a vote because nobody was in favor of it."

On Wednesday, the council appointed new Verona Supervisor Owen Waller to initiate water negotiations with Oneida. No meetings have been scheduled yet.

Waller could not be reached for comment.

If the two sides don't come to an agreement before Jan. 31, the city will start billing Verona at the "outside district" rate that many residential customers pay. That charge is \$3.24 per 1,000 gallons up to 150,000 gallons per day, with the rate decreasing to \$2.16 per 1,000 gallon after that.

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