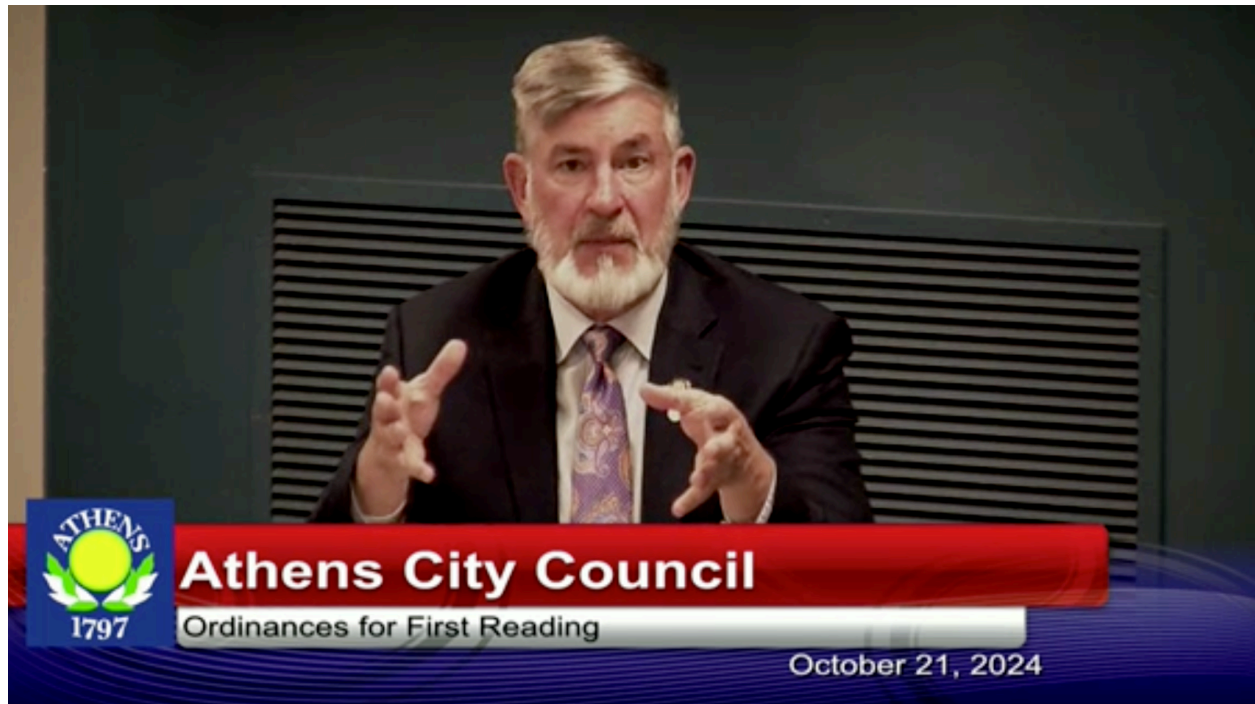


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Reporting Public Issues  
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Mayor Steve Patterson clarifies city debts relating to sewer and water rates are used for treatment plant repairs. Photo credit to Athens City Council.

### **City Council proposes ordinance for increase in sewer rates, water rates remain low**

An ordinance was proposed to the Athens City Council to establish code fees and sewer rates. Introduced by all members of the council, Council Member At-Large, Micah McCarey stated each of the categories that are subject to change effective at the earliest moment permitted by law on its passage by approval of Mayor Steve Patterson.

Council member McCarey read that each sewer rate has been established and amended as follows: the residential rate had changed from \$6 to \$6.18, the commercial rate had changed from \$6.79 to \$6.99 and the industrial rate had changed from \$7.49 to \$7.71. He added that each category's monthly base rate charge is per 1,000 gallons.

Council member, Alan Swank, 4th Ward, spoke for comments on the ordinance. He included that The Ohio State University conducted a study on behalf of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Both institutions gathered responses from municipalities in Ohio and found that the annual sewer bill for over 200 municipalities was \$289.95. Swank used the study to show the prevalence of inflation in the United States and how it has affected citizens.

“...The average citizen using 4,000 gallons of water, which is pretty much average in the state of Ohio, was \$43.83 in 2024,” Swank said. “The average rate for someone using 4,000 gallons of water in the city of Athens is \$81.36, a full \$5 per month, less than the average in the state of Ohio,” Swank said.

Swank added that thus far in 2024, the Athens sewer rates were close to 13% higher than the average in past years. He said that this is because of inflationary pressures. Swank said that water and sewer rates are decided separately as sewer rates are handled by the Athens City Council.

Council member Swank explained outside of the regular city council meeting that the city council has the responsibility of setting the sewer rate and per a recommendation from the Athens City Administration, proposed to raise the rates by 3% this year. He concluded by saying the city has done a good job of keeping the water rates low.

“We are right in line when you combine water and sewer [rates] with everybody in the state, in fact, we are a little cheaper,” Swank said. He then asked for Mayor Patterson to speak on what the city administration has done to control the cost of sewer and water rates.

Mayor Patterson spoke for comment on the ordinance. He clarified that the cost for both has to do with the debt that the city has for renovations at both the water treatment plant and the wastewater treatment plant.

“So a lot of these increases, if you think about it, are the ways in which these proprietary funds, both of them are enterprise funds, both water and sewer and so therefore since they are proprietary, it is that revenue that is used to make improvements, it is used to make repairs...” Patterson said.

Council member, President, Sam Crawl responded to Mayor Patterson. Crawl believed the solar arrays, multiple solar panels generating electricity, at both the water treatment plant and wastewater treatment plant would reduce the city’s electricity costs and the operation. Mayor Patterson gestured in agreement.

McCarthy spoke to appreciate Swank’s point about how the water rates have been low, saying it has resulted in significant savings to community members.

The ordinance was moved to a second reading to be read again at the next council meeting.

In other business:

- An ordinance is proposed by Council Member Solveig Spjeldnes, 1st Ward, to urge city council to authorize the purchase of a salt truck for the street department. She read that this would be necessary to help the city's needs. The council moved to approve the ordinance for a second reading.
- In the One Reading Resolution portion of the meeting, Council Member Beth Clodfelter, At-Large, read a resolution by a nonprofit organization, Indivisible Appalachian Ohio. The resolution supported the proposed Issue 1 amendment to be added to the Ohio Constitution. The council moved to work with the nonprofit to pass Issue 1.
- Athens resident Andrew Guidarelli spoke to the city council regarding the increase in homelessness. Council Member Spjeldnes responded by saying the Athens City Foundation has been working to find solutions through a project called Co-Create.