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Bay Point residents to pay more for water

By Rick Radin
Contra Costa Times

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BAY POINT -- State regulators have approved a water rate increase of as much as 36 percent for residents and businesses in this low-income community beginning Saturday.

Unincorporated Bay Point is the only community in Contra Costa County served by San Dimas-based Golden State Water Co.

The income from the increase will be used in part to cover the cost of building a pipeline from a Contra Costa Water District treatment plant in Oakley to Bay Point.

Golden State closed a decades-old Bay Point treatment plant in 2008 because its water did not meet state Department of Public Health standards.

The company decided it would be cheaper to build the pipeline to transport water purchased from the Contra Costa Water District than to renovate the Bay Point plant, said Darryl Gruen, an attorney for the Public Utilities Commission's Division of Ratepayer Advocates.

The PUC in San Francisco voted 4-1 on Dec. 16 to ratify an administrative law judge's decision last month to allow the increase.

The company applied for the rate increase in

January.

Commissioners also allowed Golden State to pass on \$72,133 in costs to ratepayers based on its agreement to purchase water resulting from the closure of the Bay Point plant.

Golden State has 4,767 customers in Bay Point, including 4,509 homes.

Average bills for customers using 500 cubic feet of water per month will rise from \$41.70 to \$47.73, a 13.75 percent increase, according

to the commission's documentation.

Customers using 2,000 cubic feet will see their bills rise from \$100.71 per month to \$128.32, an increase of 27.42 percent.

Customers in the highest-usage categories will see bill increases of more than 30 percent.

The decision allows Golden State's estimated net operating revenue from Bay Point to rise from \$454,200 to \$1.01 million for 2011.

Supervisor Federal Glover, whose district includes Bay Point, called the decision "a disservice to the community and people who are suffering" from the recession.

"We're looking at ways to get away from Golden State and find a different provider, but you have to find a willing buyer and a willing seller," said Glover, who attended the meeting and spoke to the commissioners.

Bay Point resident Judy Dawson also attended and told commissioners that she thinks the increase was too steep.

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"It's very unfortunate that our low-income community is being asked to cough up more money," Dawson said. "I wish they had made it a graduated increase, but they jumped right in at 36 percent."

About 19.3 percent of Bay Point's 22,041 residents are below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Bay Point resident Glenn Zumwalt believes Golden State wants the increase to pay off bad contracts in other parts of the state.

"Instead of eating their costs, they want to keep their shareholders happy," Zumwalt said. "The PUC paid no attention to the comments people made."

Golden State officials were unavailable this week.

Bay Point residents using less than 800 cubic feet of water per month were already paying about 20 percent more for water than nearby communities served by Contra Costa Water.

Service charges are also higher in Bay Point, where customers pay \$25.15 per month for a 5/8-inch meter compared with about \$16.40 for Contra Costa water customers.

Contra Costa Water serves Concord and Clayton and portions of Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill and Martinez with treated water.

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