



CITY OF SHREVEPORT

MAYOR TOM ARCENEUX

For Media Inquiries Only:

Tari T. Bradford

Senior Assistant

Tari.Bradford@shreveportla.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tom Arceneaux

MAYOR

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MAYOR ARCENEUX PROPOSES CHANGES TO SWAP ELIGIBILITY

Mayor Tom Arceneaux has proposed changes in the city's Shreveport Water Assistance Program (S.W.A.P.) to offset some of the impact of a proposed 10% increase in water and sewer bills that would go into effect with the April customer bills.

The City Council will have the rate increase on its February 27 agenda for final passage. The Council has requested that the Mayor explore ways to lessen the impact of this increase on the city's lowest-income citizens.

S.W.A.P. has been in effect since 2001. Although its original purpose was to assist low-income people with their water and sewer bills, the program has had only limited success. The eligibility and application requirements have been confusing and difficult for the affected citizens to understand and access. It also could only be used twice a year, which limited its effectiveness.

Even so, working outside the S.W.A.P. framework, the Department of Water and Sewer has worked with thousands of citizens over the years to help them when they needed it. They deal with situations such as when someone needs more time to pay off a bill because of a large unplanned expense or when an adjustment is needed because of a high bill caused by a leak that has been repaired. The Administration intends to continue those efforts.

In an effort to mitigate the financial burden of the proposed rate increase, the Mayor is proposing a new approach in addition to the current S.W.A.P. eligibility. Rather than have complicated eligibility requirements for citizens, possessing a valid SNAP card will make one eligible. Rather than limiting the number of times someone can access the program, citizens who register for the revised S.W.A.P. and who qualify will be provided a 10% discount off their total water and sewer bill each month. For most customers, this will amount to a savings of \$5-10 per month. This will help to mitigate the additional costs associated with the 10% rate increase. The tentative plan is to require citizens to re-certify once a year.

Not every detail of the proposal is final, but the Administration's commitment to the Council and the public is to have an assistance program that works much better for the city's citizens than the S.W.A.P. does now, and to have it in place as soon as possible after the proposed rate increase. The Administration also believes the city can make the program work within the \$500,000 currently budgeted for S.W.A.P. or close to it. The final number will be determined depending on how many residents sign up for the program.

This proposal does not solve the problems of every citizen. However, the Administration believes it is responsive to the Council's desire that the rate increase's impact on many citizens be minimized or eliminated.

The Mayor has the statutory authority to implement this program without significant additional Council legislation. However, the Council's suggestions are welcome.

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