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May 26, 2023

Dear Neighbors,

The Town Council has recently voted to advertise a 24% increase in water and wastewater rates for the 2024 Fiscal Year budget to take effect July 1, 2023. The public hearing on the advertised rates and fees will take place June 7, 2023, at the Town Office, 23 Main Street, at 7:30 pm, and you can participate either in person or remotely. You may also send written comments to the Town Clerk at hwest@roundhillva.org, and those comments will be read by Council and become part of the public record.

The decision to raise rates was not easy for the Town Council, and it was only reached after extensive debate and study over a long period of time. We have set up a web page at <https://www.roundhillva.org/finance/pages/2023-rate-study> with links to various documents for those wanting to study the issue as closely as we have.

Round Hill has prided itself on having some of the lowest rates in Loudoun, but we have had to set that aside in the face of rising costs and a very uncertain inflation and interest rate environment. The costs to provide utility services are often determined by forces beyond our control. We can ignore those forces and allow our system to decay and our funds to evaporate, or we can guarantee safe drinking water and effective treatment of wastewater by respecting our responsibility as stewards of this system. The Town makes no profit from the utility system – all revenue from rates and fees is used solely for its operation, but those rates and fees must match the costs.

After many months of cutting both operating and project costs from the budget, the Town Council was left with a final set of necessary projects that they refused to cut. These include expansion of water capacity so that we do not face water restrictions should a well or treatment facility go out of service, a second water tank so that any future failure of our aged main tank will not represent a major extended system outage, and other vital safety and operational upgrades needed to keep the system in good operating condition.

I am proud of this Council for taking their responsibility seriously. They had a way out to prevent a rate increase, it just required pretending many of these projects were not necessary, or that inflation was not driving all our costs up significantly, or that paying for them could be a problem left to be solved in future years. We could just start to build the projects and delay the required rate increases, but the bill always comes due, and this Council wanted to make the hard decisions now instead of later. Doing so will substantially reduce the final size of that bill, as ignoring your fiscal problems only makes them grow.

Any rate increase will apply equally to both in-town and out-of-town ratepayers. The Council did not change the current 1.5x rate multiplier for out-of-town customers, but it is my goal to have everyone in this community paying the same utility rates. The right mechanism for that, however, is to expand the

boundaries of the Town so that Round Hill can access state and federal funds in proportion to our true service population. Those funds are only sent to us in proportion to our official population, and we will need all the state and federal funds we can get to stay in front of their increasing mandates.

Just in the last five years Round Hill has missed over five million dollars in federal grants and state funding due to this mismatch between our official and true population. That lost money could have been used to prevent this rate increase. If you live out of town and want to pay in-town rates, our door is open, and I promise you our grass is just as green. We are currently engaged with the Round Hill Owner's Association to discuss this topic and welcome engagement with other out-of-town neighborhoods and individual households as well. We will also be exploring ways with Loudoun County to make the process of adjusting our boundaries less cumbersome.

Any approved rate increase does not mean we stop looking for ways to lower rates again. There is a reason we had the lowest utility rates in Loudoun towns and will still have the lowest property tax rates in Loudoun (at 6.9 cents). Your Town Council hates high rates and taxes just as much as you do – we are your neighbors, pay these rates and taxes ourselves, and share your opinions on those topics. We will continue to hunt for federal grants, state grants, county assistance, operational efficiencies, improved financial practices, and anything else you can help us come up with to allow us to lower rates again in the future. What we will not do is pretend our challenges do not exist or refuse to meet them.

I encourage everyone concerned with this topic to participate in the public hearing if that is your preferred method. While public hearings are a legal requirement and can serve as a focal point for feedback on a particular topic, they are unfortunately not very effective at public engagement. I want to use this opportunity to let everyone know, whether you live within our corporate limits or not, that you can also convey your comments in writing on this topic or any other public issue at any time you choose. Your Town Manager is Melissa Hynes and can be reached at mhynes@roundhillva.org, and you can reach me with questions or comments at mayor@roundhillva.org.

While the Town has a Facebook page, I prefer letters and emails that provide an opportunity for us to engage with you directly over trying to track down, read, and correct every public comment I read on the Internet that is wrong – there are just too many of them to take on that task and it seems the loudest voices on the Internet are not those that most need to be heard. We also welcome suggestions on how to improve our communications, and only ask that you also try to avail yourself of the resources available on our website or direct engagement with us via email (or mail/deliver a letter to the Town Office).

I have been fortunate to serve as your mayor for the past 12-plus years, and my greatest regret is not getting to know more of you during that time. The Town continues to need more volunteers and engaged citizens, so please do not hesitate to help us as we figure all of this out.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Ramsey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Scott Ramsey
Mayor, Town of Round Hill