

Liberty Utility rate increase hearing

September 19, 2024

Prior to this meeting, I have contacted both the Missouri Public Service Commission and the Office of the Public Counsel portals to register my concerns.

In June of 2020, voters approved the privatization of Bolivar's water and sewer utilities and subsequently turned over the utility systems to Liberty Utilities.

In the lead up to that vote, voters were told publicly that, if the city kept the utilities and worked to fix the EPA challenges, rates would increase 38% of the next 18 years.

Liberty told the public that if they were to own and manage the utilities, their rates would increase in the range of \$8.22 to \$9.52, or a 19% increase over the same time period.

They understood the challenges facing the sewer systems here in Bolivar and said they knew they could fix the problems for a cost of about \$6 million dollars, about 2/3 of what the city would have to spend for the same work. They obviously had done their due diligence.

They also stated that their rates would be about 15% less than the same rates from the city.

To assure voters prior to the 2020 ballot issue, both the city and Liberty stated that our rates would be better with Liberty. Liberty, going as far as to say that if the ballot issue fails, the city will have no new revenues for other city priorities in the community without raising taxes. The voters were misled with those public statements.

In my personal experience with Liberty Utilities, I wish to describe a billing matter that I have been trying to resolve with Liberty since May of this year. Month after month, I have had a base water rate of \$30.03 based on an actual reading of my usage. In May 2024, my bill stated an estimated reading of my usage and increase my base rate for that month to \$38.04, over a 26% increase. I called and spoke with a Liberty customer service representative and was told that my case would be sent to the proper Liberty department and to not pay my bill until this was resolved. I called Liberty each month after and was told the same thing. My bill is fully paid now as I could not wait any longer for their resolution. The \$38.04 charge still remained on my bill.

Liberty is now asking for an increase of around ~~\$38.61~~^{60.71} for residential customers. For my own situation, that represents an increase of over ~~28%~~^{287%} in my base rate. I understand that utilities typically ask for more than they expect to receive, but in this economy and given the statements that Liberty has made publicly, this is more than any person can reasonably afford or should be expected to pay. Given Liberty's assurance that their increases would be half of the city's increases, or 19% over 18 years, I feel they should be held to that forecast. Thank you for the opportunity to express my feelings and concerns to you today.