
From: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ)
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2015 1:17 PM
To: Murray, David (GOV); Wurfel, Sara (GOV); Agen, Jarrod (GOV); Muchmore, Dennis (GOV); Wyant, Dan (DEQ)
Subject: Muskegon Heights poised for Flint-esque water play ... heads up

<http://fox17online.com/2015/03/23/what-happens-when-muskegon-hts-loses-70-percent-of-its-water-customers-next-month/>



What happens when Muskegon Hts. loses 70 percent of its water customers next month?

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS, Mich. — From weeks of frozen pipes to water customers telling FOX 17 they were being overcharged by hundreds or even thousands of dollars more on their bills than they believed they should've been, the water issues in Muskegon Heights have been well documented in recent months.

But there could be an even bigger issue looming in just weeks.

On April 15, water customers in Norton Shores and Fruitport Township will stop getting their water from the Muskegon Heights water system, representing about 70 percent of the city's wholesale customers. The two communities apparently couldn't come to an agreement on new contract terms or rates.

Under a new agreement, as part of the newly created West Michigan Regional Water Authority, both communities will receive water from the city of Muskegon's water filtration plant.

Construction in the Norton Shores and Fruitport area has already begun in preparation for the switch over, a decision made in 2012, with new water pipes being installed under streets and a new water tower constructed.

In Muskegon Heights, it remains unclear how the city will recoup the loss of three quarters of its water customers. After Monday night's city council meeting, several council members and the interim city manager directed all questions regarding a transition plan to the Mayor Darrell Paige.

Paige, however, did not attend Monday night's meeting.

When asked why widespread discussions weren't already taking place on what the city will do, council member Eddie Jenkins said the discussions "should've happened months ago."

"I always bring it up: 'What's our next plan, what are we going to do?'" he said. "There's no one else left for us to contract out to, because Muskegon has the last of our contracts with Norton Shores and Fruitport. So, now it's, like, how are we going to sustain ourselves?"

FOX 17 made several phone calls and went to the mayor's home seeking comment. He later returned our calls Monday evening but only said details on the transition plan would not be made public until after the changeover takes place.

"There is a plan, but we are not going to divulge that right now," he said over the phone, adding there could be a possibility of a rate increase, but he wouldn't be specific.

"We're not divulging anything until it's done and gone and we know we have our calculations correct."

When asked whether the city's water department could be sustainable after losing 70 percent of its customers, Paige said that while it would be a tough fit, he feels confident they've implemented a plan to help the city be successful.

Paige would not provide an exact date for when the city would reveal any details of the transition plan.

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