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From: Maninder Singh [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, May 24, 2026 9:22 PM
To: Water
Cc: Jesse Clingan; All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: RATE HEARING

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To the Somerville Water & Sewer Department, Mayor Wilson, and Members of the City Council.

As a resident and homeowner of the City of Somerville, Ward 4, I am writing to formally object to the proposed FY2027 water and sewer increase.

Another 15% increase in water volumetric revenue and another 15% increase in sewer volumetric revenue is not a routine adjustment. It is a second consecutive major hit on residents after FY2026 already raised water volumetric charges by 18%, sewer volumetric charges by 12%, changed residential tiers, and moved households from triannual billing to quarterly billing. Your own hearing notice even says these FY27 increases are "higher than is typical," yet the notice does not publish the actual FY27 residential rate table or household-by-household bill examples.

It is also important to note that the proposed FY27 sewer increase of 15% is higher than the 12% the City itself projected for FY27 in its FY26 long-range model. So by Somerville's own forecasting, the picture is getting worse, not stabilizing. Residents deserve to know why.

The lack of transparency in the hearing notice is unacceptable. Do not ask residents to reverse-engineer what "15% more in volumetric revenue" means for their home. Publish the exact proposed FY27 residential rates by tier, the meter-size base charges, and clear examples for single-family, two-family, and three-family homes before any vote. As it stands now, the public is being asked to comment on percentages without being shown the real bill impact.

This burden falls hardest on ordinary homeowners, especially older one-meter properties. Under current FY26 quarterly residential rates, everything above 18 CCF per quarter is billed at the highest residential tier. For a standard 5/8-inch meter, the current base charges are already \$15 per quarter for water and \$30 for sewer. That means normal family usage moves

into the highest tier quickly, and another 15% volumetric increase would land on top of a rate structure that is already steep for occupied homes.

Your own FY26 materials acknowledged that 1-, 2-, and 3-family users had been paying more than their fair share under the prior structure, and the City's own appendix showed that three dwelling units on one meter could pay 10.5% more than the same three units on three meters. So before asking for another major increase, please explain clearly how this FY27 proposal affects one-meter two-families and three-families, which are a huge part of Somerville's housing stock.

Massachusetts law makes this even more serious. Owners of older one-meter homes cannot simply pass the City's bill through to tenants. Under M.G.L. c. 186, § 22, a landlord can only charge tenants separately if each unit is lawfully submetered, common-area water is separately measured, conservation devices are installed, the tenancy qualifies, and the lease complies with the statute. The landlord also remains the customer of record and remains responsible for the bill. In real life, that means many owner-occupied two-families and three-families absorb these costs directly and then face pressure to raise rent or cut elsewhere just to keep up.

Using the City's own published average residential use examples — 18 CCF for a single-family, 30 CCF for a two-family, and 42 CCF for a three-family per triannual cycle, as used as recently as the FY26 rate presentation — and converting them to quarterly use because Somerville changed residential billing from four months to three months, another 15% volumetric increase would raise an illustrative quarterly 5/8-inch-meter bill from about \$335 to \$378 for a single-family, from about \$580 to \$660 for a two-family, and from about \$847 to \$968 for a three-family, before any separate stormwater charges. Those are not small changes for working households. They are significant recurring increases on top of everything else residents already pay.

In my own case, my current water/sewer bill was \$2,258.44 for 79 units of use. I reviewed the FY26 rates and understand how the bill was calculated. That is exactly the problem: the math may be technically correct, but the burden is outrageous. If this FY27 proposal translates into a straight 15% increase on volumetric charges with base charges unchanged, that same bill would jump to roughly \$2,590 for the same use — about \$332 more for one quarter and more than \$1,300 more over four quarterly bills.

I also want to know why residents are being asked to bear this increase without a full breakdown of what is driving it. The hearing notice cites essential infrastructure, the federally mandated CSO plan, and flood-mitigation work. A separate City update says the draft updated CSO control plan is a \$1.29 billion legal requirement and that its costs will drive rate increases for customers here and across the MWRA system. The Financial Capability Assessment prepared for that plan projects a typical Somerville single-family sewer bill (54 CCF annual usage) rising from \$852 today to between \$2,094 and \$2,367 by FY 2055 — a

146% to 178% increase. So the City already knows this is a multi-decade affordability crisis, not a one-time adjustment. At the same time, your FY26 presentation showed that the water and sewer budgets are dominated by MWRA assessments, debt service, and capital outlay, and that fixed costs account for between 66% and 84% of the annual budget. If those are the true drivers, then show the public the FY27 numbers plainly and honestly.

Your own FY26 presentation also said the failed FY25 increase created "dire" FY26 financial circumstances, and last year's model already projected another major FY27 increase. Residents should not be forced to absorb the consequences of prior rate-setting failures, deferred decisions, or financing choices through repeated double-digit utility hikes. If the City has a sound mathematical case for this proposal, it should publish that case in plain English before taking another dollar from households.

The City also told the public in FY26 that affordability efforts were limited by legal constraints and that it was still evaluating ratepayer assistance. The official City discount page shows a 25% discount for certain income-eligible seniors, surviving spouses, and minors — but Massachusetts law (Chapter 298 of the Acts of 2018) actually allows Somerville to offer up to a 30% discount. The City chose 25%. There is also still no broad relief for working-age households that are also struggling. Please explain what affordability relief exists right now for non-senior homeowners, tenants, and small landlords facing these bills, and why the City has not exercised the full 30% authority the state has already granted it.

Please also explain how much revenue is being collected from developers and other non-residential sources before asking residents for another 15%. Your FY26 presentation said the I/I fee (Item ID 25-1069) would increase revenue collected from developers. How much has that fee generated to date, how much is budgeted for FY27, and how much state, federal, or MWRA funding is being used to reduce the burden on residential ratepayers? Those numbers should be public before any vote.

Residents are also being told that parking permit and meter fees are going up on July 1, 2026. Whether those charges sit in a different part of the budget or not, the reality for households is the same: the City keeps coming back to residents for more money. Property taxes, water, sewer, parking, permits, inspections, and other city-related costs do not hit people in isolation. They stack. And for many residents, that stack is becoming unsustainable.

I also want to point out a glaring contradiction in how the City approaches residents. During election season, candidates and their teams go door-to-door, make phone calls, send mailers, and personally ask for our votes with detailed promises of change and better service. The outreach is constant, organized, and well-funded. But when the City makes a decision that will increase every household's water and sewer bill by hundreds or even thousands of dollars a year, the entire public process is one hearing on one evening, with a noon written-comment deadline on a workday, and the rates are then approved by a small group of officials. If door-to-door outreach is possible to win an election, it is more than

possible to explain a major rate increase before it is voted on. And a change of this magnitude — one that affects every single household and small property owner in Somerville — should arguably be put to the voters directly, the same way other major financial decisions are. Transparency cannot be a campaign promise that disappears the moment the votes are counted. It has to be how the City actually operates when residents' money is on the line.

I am asking the City to answer the following questions before approving any FY27 increase:

1. What are the exact proposed FY27 quarterly residential water and sewer rates by tier and by meter size?
2. What is the modeled impact on an average single-family, two-family, and three-family bill, both quarterly and annually?
3. How much of the new revenue will come from 1-, 2-, and 3-family residential properties versus large apartment, commercial, institutional, and other high-volume accounts?
4. What portion of this FY27 increase is attributable to MWRA assessments, local debt service, capital outlay, staffing, flood mitigation, and CSO-related obligations?
5. How much outside funding is being used to offset resident bills, including MWRA assistance, state/federal infrastructure money, and any development-related fees?
6. How much revenue has the I/I fee (Item ID 25-1069) generated to date, what is budgeted for FY27, and why is that not being shown alongside this proposal?
7. Why has the City chosen a 25% senior/surviving-spouse/minor discount when state law allows up to 30%, and what relief exists right now for non-senior households, tenants, and small landlords?
8. Has the City modeled the effect of this proposal on one-meter owner-occupied two-families and three-families that cannot simply bill tenants separately under Massachusetts law?
9. Why does the FY27 hearing notice provide percentages but not actual bill examples for households, when the FY26 presentation included household impact tables?
10. Will the City postpone approval until this information is published clearly, in plain language, and in the major languages spoken in Somerville?
11. Given the level of door-to-door outreach the City and its candidates conduct during election season, why is comparable outreach not being done to inform residents about a rate increase that will affect every household in the city, and would the City consider putting a change of this magnitude to a direct vote of the residents?

I also want to formally note the inadequacy of the public notice itself. The City published this hearing notice on Friday, May 22, 2026 — going into a Memorial Day holiday weekend. That leaves residents roughly three business days to read the notice, understand what a 15% volumetric increase actually means for their household, compose written testimony, and submit it before the noon deadline on Thursday, May 28 — the same day as the hearing. For a proposal that will raise costs on every household in Somerville for years to come, a three-business-day window opened over a federal holiday weekend is not meaningful public notice. It is procedural compliance dressed up as public engagement. The City should not be

permitted to push through a decision of this magnitude on this kind of timeline, and I am asking the Council and Department to acknowledge that the notice period itself is a reason to postpone the vote.

Somerville is home to a significant multinational population, with residents who speak many different languages. A decision of this scale deserves the same standard of public communication that the City already applies to elections — proper notice, well in advance, translated into every major language spoken in the city, and delivered directly to residents rather than relying on a website or social media post.

At minimum, a proposal of this magnitude should be noticed at least a month in advance, with the full proposed FY27 rate tables, household impact examples, and hearing details translated into every major language spoken in Somerville and mailed directly to ratepayers. Residents have a right to know what their City is doing before it is decided, not after. Transparency must come above all else.

One 6 p.m. hearing — even at the Highlander Forum at Somerville High School and even with a virtual option — combined with a noon written-comment deadline on a workday, is not enough outreach for a proposal of this size. Many residents are working, caregiving, commuting, or managing multiple jobs. If the City is serious about public input, then it should not rely on a single hearing window and a social media post. It should mail clear examples to ratepayers, publish translated summaries, and make the actual household impacts impossible to miss.

I respectfully ask the City to withdraw or postpone this proposal unless and until a full residential impact analysis is published. Another 15% is too much. Residents should not be the automatic shock absorber for every financing gap, deferred decision, or infrastructure plan. If Somerville wants to call itself fair, then it needs to prove with actual numbers that this proposal is fair to the people who live here and pay the bills.

Please include this email in the official hearing record.

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Maninder Singh

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