

TOP STORIES

Suffolk water rate hike approved

BY RICK BRAND

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The Suffolk County Water Authority board last night unanimously approved what officials termed a “modest” 4.2 percent rate hike — \$14.68 annually for the average customer — citing rising energy and infrastructure costs.

James Gaughran, authority chairman, said the hike is needed because the agency faces fixed costs such as a \$20 million

per year electric bill to pump water. He also said the authority must continue to fund a \$63 million capital program to replace aging mains that have broken at an “unprecedented rate” during recent cold snaps.

The increase, effective April 1, will bring in \$5 million a year, raising annual bills for the average customer who uses 160,000 gallons from \$350 to nearly \$365 a year.

Nick Caracappa, head of Local 393, which represents util-

ity workers, who have been without a contract for 18 months, criticized officials over a fifth-straight year of rate hikes at the same time services have diminished.

During the meeting at the authority’s Oakdale headquarters, Caracappa told the board it has cut overtime by nearly \$500,000 for the coming year, delaying responses to emergencies and leaving some customers without service from 12 hours to two days.

Jeff Szabo, the water authori-

ty’s chief executive, said emergencies involving public safety always get immediate priority treatment, especially when it involves public facilities like hospitals or schools.

However, he said, the authority prioritizes its response to emergencies to deal with situations that affect the most customers first. The authority, which has 556 employees, serves 390,000 homes and businesses, or about 1.2 million of Suffolk’s residents.