

Overdue utility bills a concern

By Toni Mailloux

"We need to decide if we're really running a business or running a charity. Are we really going to proceed in a businesslike way?" David Crofoot, a Northport Village Corporation overseer and chairman of the utility committee, asked his fellow overseers at their monthly meeting Sunday morning. He was referring to the list of significantly overdue utility bills.

Crofoot said there are two options for dealing with unpaid sewer bills: place a lien on the property or take the customer to small claims court. He said the opportunity to place liens was already missed on the last batch of unpaid sewer bills (around \$10,000) "but there are other options available. The bills are still collectable," he said.

As for water bills, Crofoot said the Public Utilities Committee (PUC) has a defined process for shutting the water off for customers who don't pay

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"The first step is for the overseers to see the list," agreed overseer Judy Metcalf.

Overseer Mary Hanrahan said it's important to remember the Northport Village Corporation, commonly referred to as Bayside, is "a community."

Someone else said there may be some utility customers who can't afford to pay such large bills.

"Maybe some should be billed monthly; should go to the town for help or maybe we should write some of it off," said Crofoot.

But, he said, after the election for the new board of overseers in August and the billing system is operating properly, the board should be prepared to proceed with setting up a process for collecting utility bills.

"Shut the water off in the summer when it hurts," suggested one overseer.

While the overseers voted in June to charge 6.5 percent inter-

their bills. However, he said the billing process needs to be fine tuned first.

Crofoot said the incorrect water bills that were sent out last month are in the process of being corrected and in most cases new bills have been sent. He said a new billing software system has been purchased to help with that process when the next billing is done in September.

He said it's important not only that the water be drinkable but that the customer be able to understand the bill and get a correct one.

Jo Huntoon, president of the Northport Village Corporation, said once the overseers get a list of delinquent customers, they make an assessment of whether the customer likely forgot to make payment or is deliberately not paying. "We should contact people and ask, 'What's the problem?'"

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est on overdue utility bills. Sunday they voted to change that to the utility interest rate as set by the state of Maine formula. Currently that is 12 percent.

"We want there to be more incentive to pay on time," said Crofoot.

In other action, the overseers:

- learned the contract with Lynch Construction for sewer work is in substantial compliance and the one-year warranty period has started;
- learned the water main is in and customers on the Bluff Road are being hooked in and the road is under construction. That contract should be in substantial compliance by the end of the month;
- appropriated another \$700 for repairs to the police cruiser; and
- set up a reserve account for the wastewater plant replacement investigation costs.

The next meeting of the utility committee has been set for Friday, Aug. 6, at 2:30 p.m. and the overseers will meet again on Sunday, Aug. 8, at 9:30 a.m.

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