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Some residents raising concerns about natural gas price

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by Phil Keren

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Silver Lake -- Since the natural gas price offered in the village's aggregation program for the winter months is increasing by nearly 58 percent from last year, many residents are trying to learn about other offers that are available.

In July, leaders from Silver Lake, Munroe Falls and Stow established a price of \$15.128 per 1,000 cubic feet (or mcf) in the communities' aggregation program with Vectren Source serving as the supplier. This price will be in effect from November 2008 through April 2009. This winter's rate is a 57.7 percent increase from last winter's rate of \$9.59 per mcf per month. Village officials said residents who are in the Vectren Source program now will pay \$9.88 per mcf in September, \$9.53 per mcf in October, and would then begin paying \$15.128 per mcf in November.

The large hike recently received renewed attention in Silver Lake after Cuyahoga Falls announced at the end of August that it would offer a price of \$10.463 per mcf in its natural gas aggregation program with Direct Energy.

After the Falls' gas price announcement was released, Suzanne Lipan, the village's administrative assistant, said the village received about "five or six calls a day" for about a week and a half about the natural gas program.

Stow Mayor Karen Fritschel said the city's service department has received a few complaints so far.

"People aren't using as much natural gas right now as they will be this winter," she said.

"We acted now because the hurricane season is on us," she said. "We are looking to see if we can get a lower price for next winter."

Bill Myles, a Riverview Road resident, expressed concern at the Sept. 2 Silver Lake Village Council meeting about the higher natural gas price being offered for winter.

"We struck a price in July after months of watching the price go up," explained Village Mayor Bernie Hovey. "The best we could do was put a stopgap [on the rising prices]. If it had gone up to \$20 [per mcf], we would have looked like geniuses. Now it's come down. It was a decision made at the time based on the information we had. We felt it was the best decision at the time."

"We could have waited," added Council President Carol Steiner (District B). "It's just a gamble."

"It would be in the best interests of our residents to opt out," said Myles. "It is a dramatic difference [between the natural gas price for Silver Lake and the price for Cuyahoga Falls]. We're not talking pennies. We're talking dollars."

Editor's note: Stow Sentry Associate Editor Mike Lesko and correspondent Lauren Krupar contributed to this story.

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