



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sweet Home Changes Waste Water Use Rate City Council Forced to Raise Waste Water Rates

SWEET HOME, OR – Facing a looming revenue shortfall that violates state finance requirements, the Sweet Home City Council was forced to raise the Waste Water (sewer) Use Fee at their meeting on October 24. The Waste Water Fund ended 2016/17 at a deficit and continued to show as a deficit into the first quarter of 2017/18. The City Council worked hard to keep rates low by absorbing increased costs for several years.

Oregon State Budget rules and regulations require all utility accounts operate independently, or like their own business, meaning they should be self-sustaining so charges should pay for costs. Through the recession the City's elected officials worked hard to keep rates low and money in the consumer's pockets. To accomplish this the City Council *lowered the Use Fee* in 2010, 2014 and 2016. There were slight increases in the Base Rate in those years.

"Nobody enjoys raising rates," said City Manager Ray Towry. "Staff loathes even bringing it up to the Council."

Water bills typically include a Base Rate and Use Fee as an industry standard. Industry standard often measures water use in cubic feet. Sweet Home charges in 100 cubic foot increments. There is 748 gallons per 100 cubic feet of water.

Sweet Home's waste water billing is composed of a Base Rate which includes 400 cubic feet of water use for \$40.87/month. The Base Rate is designed to pay for the cost of the waste water system: pipes, pumps and other physical improvements to the system including any debt payments for loans taken to improve the system. The new rate will not change the Base Rate but will decrease the amount of included water from 400 cubic feet to 300 cubic feet, a decrease of 748 gallons.

The Use Fee pays for water production. The first 400 cubic feet/month is included in the base rate for free. Users are currently charged \$6.12/100 cubic feet used above 400 cubic feet. Customers will pay \$9.78/100 cubic feet of use above 300 cubic feet beginning November 18.

The City is raising rates to keep up with current expenses forecasted for the 2016/17 fiscal year and pay back money borrowed from the General Fund to pay for revenue shortfalls over the past six months.

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Waste Water User Fees are set according to the winter water use. This method does not cause a rate increase for watering lawns, washing cars or other “summer time,” water use. Watering your lawn and flowerbeds won’t raise your waste water bill.

People can lower their water use by changing out shower heads. Energy Trust of Oregon even offers rebates for purchasing more efficient shower heads. You can find information here: <https://www.energytrust.org/incentives/energy-efficient-showerheads/>.

Other tips from <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/20-ways-to- conserve-water-at-home.html> include:

- 1. Shower Bucket.** Instead of letting the water pour down the drain, stick a bucket under the faucet while you wait for your shower water to heat up. You can use the water for flushing the toilet or watering your plants.
- 2. Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.** Water comes out of the average faucet at 2.5 gallons per minute. Don’t let all that water go down the drain while you brush! Turn off the faucet after you wet your brush, and leave it off until it’s time to rinse.
- 3. Turn off the tap while washing your hands.** Do you need the water to run while you’re scrubbing your hands? Save a few gallons of water and turn the faucet off after you wet your hands until you need to rinse.
- 4. If it’s yellow, let it mellow.** This tip might not be for everyone, but the toilet is one of the most water-intensive fixtures in the house. Do you need to flush every time?
- 5. Fix your leaks.** Whether you go DIY or hire a plumber, fixing leaky faucets can mean big water savings.

There are even more ideas at: http://eartheasy.com/live_water_saving.htm.

For questions about why the rate has to be increased, feel free to contact the City Manager’s office or Finance Director directly. If anyone has questions about their bill, they are encouraged to contact the City at 541-367-5128.

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