

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

TO: BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES  
FROM: KIMBERLY ZUNINO, DEPUTY DIRECTOR – ADMINISTRATION  
SANTA ROSA WATER  
SUBJECT: 2021 WATER AND WASTEWATER COST OF SERVICE STUDY  
PROPOSED FY21/22 THROUGH FY24/25 RATE SCHEDULE,  
AND PROPOSED UPDATE TO WATER SHORTAGE RATE  
STRUCTURE

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Board of Public Utilities Budget Subcommittee and Santa Rosa Water that the Board of Public Utilities, by three resolutions, recommend that, after compliance with applicable law and conduct of a public hearing pursuant to Proposition 218 on or about May 25, 2021, the City Council 1) enact increased charges and rates for water services; 2) enact increased charges and rates for wastewater services; and 3) adopt a change to the Water Shortage Rate Structure.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, Santa Rosa Water (SRW) hired The Reed Group, Inc. (TRGI) to develop a ten-year long-range financial plan, followed by a thorough cost of service analysis and recommendation of a new water and wastewater fee schedule. TRGI found SRW's financial health is such that at the end of the current fee schedule, set to conclude on June 30, 2021, only moderate annual water and wastewater rate increases would be required. Proposed increases between 2-4% each year for water fixed and usage charges and 2% each year for wastewater fixed and usage charges are proposed to help ensure that SRW continues to meet all service and financial obligations. In July 2021, SRW amended the TRGI contract to have TRGI analyze and update the Water Shortage Rate Structure, which is part of the City's Water Shortage Contingency Plan. The City's Water Shortage Contingency Plan is required by State law and an update to the Shortage Plan is due to the State on July 1, 2021. To assist SRW with managing water supply and potential financial deficits during declared stages of drought or water shortage emergency, an update to the Water Shortage Rate structure is also being proposed.

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BACKGROUND

In 2018, TRGI was hired to provide a comprehensive financial plan and assist with other fee development as well as emergency financial recovery planning based on the Tubbs Fire in 2017. Over the last two years TRGI has developed a comprehensive and detailed financial model that will be used by SRW over the next ten years to track expenditures, respond to unexpected financial increases and decreases, and perform future financial planning. The financial model uses actual historical financial data to assist with planning future budgeting needs. Data includes, but is not limited to, expenditures, revenues, debt service, capital improvement plans, catastrophic reserves, development fees, etc. At the end of each fiscal year audit, actual expenditures will replace projected budgeted financials to allow staff to monitor in detail the financial health of the Department.

Approximately 95% of expenditures are covered by rate revenue. The financial model is the primary tool for determining the financial needs of SRW and providing the basis for necessary water and wastewater rate schedules. The capability and reliability of such a robust financial tool allows SRW to develop rate schedules for several years providing stability for the Department and clarity for the rate payers.

There are two rate setting objectives that are primary and fundamental to guiding the rate-setting process, (1) water rates must generate sufficient revenue to meet the utility's service and financial obligations, and (2) water rates must be calculated consistent with the requirements of the California Constitution, Article XIID (Proposition 218) and relevant case law. Other objectives include rates being viewed as fair and equitable by the public: rates should be simple, understandable, and easy to administer; and rates should strike an appropriate balance between fixed and usage-based charges.

After the revenue needs are determined a cost of service analysis is required to develop the rate schedule. This portion of the study analyzes SRW customer water and wastewater use data to determine the appropriate distribution of fixed, capacity and commodity costs between customer classes and the usage versus fixed charges. While there are changes based on customer data to the distribution of costs between customer classes, and between fixed and usage charges, the overall fee structure is not changing.

The City's Water Shortage Contingency Plan (Shortage Plan) is required by State law and describes how SRW intends to respond in the case of a water shortage. The Shortage Plan provides the City Council, staff, and the public with clear steps for effectively responding to a water shortage. The City has had an adopted Shortage Plan in place since 1992 and it has been revised and readopted several times since then. SRW is currently preparing an update to the Shortage Plan which is due for submittal to the State Department of Water Resources by July 1, 2021.

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The Shortage Plan anticipates various levels of water supply shortage conditions and provides guidance for managing and mitigating water shortages with steps designed to respond to actual conditions and allow for efficient management of a water shortage. In April 2009, the City Council adopted an ordinance adding Section 14-04.015 Water Shortage Rate Structure to the Santa Rosa City Code, based on the Shortage Plan that was in place at that time. The current update to the Shortage Plan, as required by State Law, proposes changes to the Shortage Plan that necessitate changes to the Water Shortage Rate Structure. The updated Water Shortage Charges (WSC) proposed to be implemented during Stages 2 through 8 of the Shortage Plan encourage customers to reduce water use commensurate with the water shortage target and helps recover a portion of the revenue shortfall. If a customer reduces water use consistent with the water shortage target, their water bill will not significantly change (relative to standard rates with normal usage) even after the water usage rates are increased by the WSC. Excess Use Penalties (EUPs) are also proposed to be implemented in stages 5 through 8 of the Shortage Plan but are not relied upon for revenues necessary to meet operating costs. EUPs are entirely avoidable by all customers if they meet Shortage Plan stage reductions and allocations for their individual account water use.

## ANALYSIS

### ***Proposed Rate Schedule Factors***

The ten-year financial model is the tool used to determine the appropriate rate schedule for covering Operation and Maintenance (O&M), Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), and Debt Service costs.

The main drivers for the proposed rate schedule include:

- The most significant cost assumptions that affect rates include: O&M Expenditure increases at 3%; increase in general and construction inflation; 2% salary and benefit increases, 4% increases in utility costs, including incorporating the additional costs from converting to the Evergreen rate for electricity; and a 5% increase each year for the purchase of water.
- Interest earnings are expected to remain low at 1.5%.
- Growth rates, which produce connection fee revenue, increases at 0.86%.
- Water demand is expected to remain stable. Water use has been consistent over the last 10 years and is being projected, for the purpose of rates, to remain within a stable range.
- Investment in the CIP Program will increase yearly by 3%, based on the general construction cost index, for both Water and Wastewater. The Regional System, in agreement with the Regional Partners, has been increasing the CIP Program cash investment by \$1 million a year to reduce debt financing for projects.
- Existing debt service has been included in the model based on the repayment schedules.

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SRW is proposing increases to the target catastrophic reserves for the water enterprise and local wastewater enterprise based on an engineering analysis. The regional catastrophic reserve is still under review. Staff is recommending increasing these target catastrophic reserves slowly to avoid significant impacts to the rate payer and bringing an update to the reserve policy in future years. Building up the target catastrophic reserve slowly over time is possible because, in the event of an emergency, in addition to the current catastrophic reserves, there is cash funding for CIP projects available that can be redirected by the Council.

Based on the cost of service study, drivers, and proposed changes to the catastrophic reserve, the proposed Water and Wastewater schedule is as follows, with increases applying equally to fixed and usage rates:

	Water Rate Adjustments	WW Rate Adjustments
July 2021	2.0%	2.0%
July 2022	3.0%	2.0%
July 2023	3.0%	2.0%
July 2024	4.0%	2.0%

**Customer Impacts**

The cost of service analysis determines how the costs are distributed between each component of the water and wastewater fixed and usage rates. The distribution to each component is based on actual customer usage data and adjusted with each update to rates. Due to the redistribution of the costs, the first year of increase affects customer classes at varied percentages. The increase percentage by customer class ranges from -0.5% to 3% as shown below. Following the first-year, increases will be consistent to all customer classes and components of the rate at the amounts shown in the rate increase table shown above.

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	Meter Size	Wtr. Use (TGAL)	WW Use	Bills With Current Water /WW Rates			Bills With Proposed Water /WW Rates			Change in Total Bill	
				Water	Wastewater	Total	Water	Wastewater	Total	\$	%
Single Family Residential											
Low Water Use	5/8"	4	4	\$37.12	\$85.29	<b>\$122.41</b>	\$38.13	\$86.56	<b>\$124.69</b>	<b>\$2.28</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
Median Water Use	5/8"	7	5	\$56.54	\$100.15	<b>\$156.69</b>	\$57.62	\$101.62	<b>\$159.24</b>	<b>\$2.55</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
High Water Use	5/8"	12	6	\$89.54	\$115.01	<b>\$204.55</b>	\$90.63	\$116.68	<b>\$207.31</b>	<b>\$2.76</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
Very High Water Use	5/8"	20	7	\$142.91	\$129.87	<b>\$272.78</b>	\$143.92	\$131.74	<b>\$275.66</b>	<b>\$2.88</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
Duplex	5/8"	8	6	\$62.38	\$115.01	<b>\$177.39</b>	\$63.59	\$116.68	<b>\$180.27</b>	<b>\$2.88</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
Small Apartment (4 DUs)	1"	15	12	\$123.86	\$240.58	<b>\$364.44</b>	\$126.64	\$241.54	<b>\$368.18</b>	<b>\$3.74</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
Large Apartment (24 DUs)	2"	80	80	\$589.57	\$1,384.52	<b>\$1,974.09</b>	\$601.72	\$1,392.12	<b>\$1,993.84</b>	<b>\$19.75</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
Very Lrg. Apart. (100 DUs)	4"	320	320	\$2,271.36	\$5,363.44	<b>\$7,634.80</b>	\$2,316.45	\$5,397.52	<b>\$7,713.97</b>	<b>\$79.17</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
Small Retail	5/8"	6	6	\$50.96	\$99.95	<b>\$150.91</b>	\$52.05	\$100.66	<b>\$152.71</b>	<b>\$1.80</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Large Retail	2"	80	80	\$589.57	\$1,183.72	<b>\$1,773.29</b>	\$601.72	\$1,178.52	<b>\$1,780.24</b>	<b>\$6.95</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
Office Building	1 1/2"	40	40	\$307.36	\$616.91	<b>\$924.27</b>	\$313.95	\$613.92	<b>\$927.87</b>	<b>\$3.60</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
Car Wash	2"	60	60	\$465.57	\$936.72	<b>\$1,402.29</b>	\$475.72	\$930.72	<b>\$1,406.44</b>	<b>\$4.15</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
Mixed Comm. w/ Food	1"	35	35	\$247.86	\$774.86	<b>\$1,022.72</b>	\$252.64	\$791.97	<b>\$1,044.61</b>	<b>\$21.89</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
Hotel w/ Restaurant	3"	200	200	\$1,413.36	\$4,437.58	<b>\$5,850.94</b>	\$1,441.20	\$4,526.32	<b>\$5,967.52</b>	<b>\$116.58</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
Restaurant	1 1/2"	50	50	\$369.36	\$1,140.91	<b>\$1,510.27</b>	\$376.95	\$1,162.82	<b>\$1,539.77</b>	<b>\$29.50</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
Supermarket	2"	160	160	\$1,085.57	\$2,832.52	<b>\$3,918.09</b>	\$1,105.72	\$2,870.52	<b>\$3,976.24</b>	<b>\$58.15</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Mortuary	1"	20	20	\$154.86	\$469.46	<b>\$624.32</b>	\$158.14	\$478.62	<b>\$636.76</b>	<b>\$12.44</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
Small Winery	1"	10	10	\$92.86	\$265.86	<b>\$358.72</b>	\$95.14	\$269.72	<b>\$364.86</b>	<b>\$6.14</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
Sm. Irrig. (Wtr Budg.=18 tg)	1"	20		\$151.74	(na)	<b>\$151.74</b>	\$156.24	(na)	<b>\$156.24</b>	<b>\$4.50</b>	<b>3.0%</b>
Lrg. Irrig. (Wtr. Budg.=250 tg)	4"	300		\$2,129.36	(na)	<b>\$2,129.36</b>	\$2,118.45	(na)	<b>\$2,118.45</b>	<b>-\$10.91</b>	<b>-0.5%</b>

SRW purchases wholesale water from Sonoma Water. With the previous rate schedule, 2016-2020, the cost of wholesale water was passed through to SRW water customers after the wholesale rate increase was approved by the Sonoma Water Board of Directors each year. Sonoma Water's wholesale rate increase varies each year and is unknown until approved. Historically, the wholesale rate increase was unpredictable with large variations creating uncertainty in required revenue to cover the expenditure to SRW. In recent years, SRW and the other water contractors that purchase wholesale water have worked with Sonoma Water to achieve more consistent and predictable rate increases allowing SRW to recommend removal of the pass-through rate. The pass-through created uncertainty for SRW customers, who would not know the affect to their monthly billing until right before the increase was implemented. The removal of the pass-through allows stability and predictability for SRW customers and creates a more simplified and clearer rate structure.

**Water Shortage Rate Structure**

To compensate for potentially reduced revenues during a declared Water Shortage, the proposed update to the Shortage Plan contemplates the implementation of a Water Shortage Rate Structure. Under normal water supply conditions and in shortage Stage 1 - Voluntary, the then-current water rate structure remains in place. Beginning in Stage 2, a WSC of 5 percent will be added to the then-current water usage rates on every unit of water sold for all customer accounts. The WSC will increase to 7.5. percent in Stage 3, 10 percent in Stage 4, 15 percent in Stage 5, 25 percent in Stage 6, 35 percent in Stage 7, and finally 45 percent in Stage 8. In addition, beginning in Stage 5 and continuing through Stage 8, the tiered water usage rate structure for Single-Family, Duplex, and Dedicated Irrigation accounts is replaced by the then current uniform water usage rate applicable to Multi-Family and CII accounts.

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Shortage Stage	Water Shortage condition	Water Shortage Charge
1	Voluntary – up to 10% reduction in use	N/A
2	Mandatory - 15% reduction in use	5% of then existing rates
3	Mandatory - 20% reduction in use	7.5% of then existing rates
4	Mandatory - 25% reduction in use	10% of then existing rates
5	Mandatory - 30% reduction in use	15% of then existing rates
6	Mandatory - 40% reduction in use	25% of then existing rates
7	Mandatory - 50% reduction in use	35% of then existing rates
8	Mandatory - more than 50% reduction in use	45% of then existing rates

Implementation of the WSC during Stages 2 through 8 are designed to encourage customers to reduce water use commensurate with reduction goals. Customers meeting the reduction goals will still see reductions in their monthly water bill.

While the WSC and Shortage Plan are both important fiscal and water supply management tools for SRW, it's important to note that updating the City Code allows for this tool to be available for use, but implementation of the WSC is discretionary and can only be triggered by action of the City Council in a publicly noticed meeting.

***Excess Use Penalties***

In addition to the WSC, the proposed update to the Shortage Plan also outlines the implementation of allocations for individual water service accounts beginning in water shortage Stages 5 through 8 and “Excess Use Penalties” to ensure enforcement of the allocations. In Stage 5, the EUP consists of a 10% penalty for use from 101% up to 150% of the water allocation and a 20% penalty for use over 150% of the water allocation. In Stage 6, the EUP consists of a 25% penalty for use from 101% up to 150% above the water allocation and a 50% penalty for use over 150% of the water allocation for all customer accounts. In Stage 7, the EUP consists of a 40% penalty for use from 101% up to 150% above the water allocation and an 80% penalty for use over 150% of the water allocation for all customer accounts. In Stage 8, the EUP consists of a 50% penalty for use from 101% up to 150% above the water allocation and a 100% penalty for use over 150% of the water allocation for all customer accounts. The structure of the EUP is summarized in the table below.

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Excess Use Penalty (EUP) for Water Used in Excess of Allocation in Stages 5, 6, 7, and 8	
WATER USE COMPARED TO ALLOCATION	EXCESS USE PENALTY (EUP)
Water use up to 100% of allocation	No EUP
Water use from 101% up to 150% of allocation	Stage 5 – EUP = 10% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 6 – EUP = 25% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 7 – EUP = 40% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 8 – EUP = 50% of Water usage rate with WSC
Water use over 150% of allocation	Stage 5 – EUP = 20% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 6 – EUP = 50% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 7 – EUP = 80% of Water usage rate with WSC Stage 8 – EUP = 100% of Water usage rate with WSC

It’s important to note that EUPs are entirely avoidable by all customers. Therefore, no EUP revenues are planned for or relied upon in the rate study analysis or for forecasted future operating revenues for SRW. EUP revenues are not intended to be used as operating revenues during the declared water shortage emergency, but may be used to: (1) offset the extraordinary costs of the water shortage emergency such as additional conservation support; (2) rebuild the Catastrophic Reserve; and/or (3) establish a rate stabilization fund for the post-emergency recovery.

**Proposition 218 Notice**

Proposition 218, also known as the “Right to Vote on Taxes Act” was approved by California voters in 1996. The proposition establishes a process for public notification when increasing property related rates, including water and wastewater rates. The notification requires a 45-day period for review and protest prior to the public hearing. The written notice, which will include detailed information on the proposed rate increases and proposed changes to the Water Shortage Rate structure, will be mailed to customers in late March to allow customers to submit written or verbal responses to be submitted at the public hearing. As the use of EUPs are specific to ensuring compliance with water shortage stages, and further not relied upon to ensure sufficient general operating revenues for SRW, they are not subject to Proposition 218 requirements. However, the proposed EUP changes will be incorporated into the written notice to ensure full transparency. The public hearing is scheduled to occur at the May 25, 2021 City Council meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The proposed rate increases will ensure that Santa Rosa Water’s Water, Wastewater, and Regional enterprise funds continue to meet all service and financial obligations. The proposed update to the water shortage charge will compensate for a portion of the

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loss of revenue due to a declared water shortage emergency.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On October 13, 2020, October 29, 2020 and December 15, 2020 the Budget Subcommittee of the Board of Public Utilities met to review recommended rates and the cost of service study. At the December 15, 2020, the Subcommittee also reviewed the proposed Water Shortage Charge structure.

On January 19, 2021, the Budget Subcommittee reviewed the FY21/22 through FY24/25 Proposed Water and Wastewater rate recommendation, 2021 Santa Rosa Water and Wastewater Rate Study, and proposed Water Shortage Charge Structure and unanimously recommended approval to the Board.

On February 4, 2021, the Board of Public Utilities held a study session to review the FY21/22 through FY24/25 Proposed Water and Wastewater rate recommendation, 2021 Santa Rosa Water and Wastewater Rate Study, and proposed changes to the Water Shortage Rate Structure.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – 2021 Santa Rosa Water and Wastewater Rate Study

Attachment 2 – Resolution Recommending Increased Charges and Rates for Water Services

Attachment 3 - Resolution Recommending Increased Charges and Rates for Wastewater Services

Attachment 4 – Resolution Recommending Changes to the Water Shortage Rate Structure

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