

**City Council**

Mayor Diana Rich  
Vice Mayor Stephen Zollman  
Councilmember Neysa Hinton  
Councilmember Sandra Maurer  
Councilmember Jill McLewis

**City Manager**

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## City of Sebastopol

**Dear Sebastopol neighbor,**

Quality water and sewer service are essential to daily life. From fire protection and sanitation to maintaining ball fields and quenching our thirst, water and sewer service is a shared community benefit. It's also one of our City's most important responsibilities.

As your new City Manager, I am writing to provide context to the enclosed notice regarding potential increases to your water and sewer rates. No one wants to increase rates, so you deserve to know why we need to do this, how we got here, and how we're going to minimize future increases.

**How this will impact you**

The proposed changes will increase your water and sewer bill. The impact will vary depending on how much water and sewer service you use, your meter size, and whether you are a residential, commercial, or irrigation customer. For a typical single-family household, we project the bi-monthly bill for water and sewer will increase by about \$86 (or \$43 per month) in the first year, and then continue to increase in smaller increments over four additional years. This notice explains the proposed rates.

**How we charge for water and sewer service is changing**

Currently, everyone pays a fixed amount based on their meter size. We've adjusted how this fixed bi-monthly charge is calculated to better align customers' charges with the costs to serve them. This primarily affects large commercial and irrigation customers.

The rest of your bill is based on how much water and sewer service you use. Right now, everyone pays the same amount per 1,000 gallons. For single-family residential customers, we are proposing to change that so the cost per 1,000 gallons will be in three 'tiers.' The first tier will cost less per 1,000 gallons. This ensures that essential water use—what you use inside your home for cooking, drinking, and sanitation- is charged at the lowest possible rate.

**Why these increases are being proposed**

We've used our reserves over the last five years to keep rates down. This benefited our community as we weathered COVID and economic uncertainty. However, that resulted in the revenue from rates being below our operating costs. This is not sustainable. Additionally, with lower rates we have not invested enough in maintaining our systems. Many parts of our systems are at or near the end of their useful life. This increases the risk of failures that could result in residents not having water or sewer service for several days. We have had minor disruptions

and hope to prevent major problems by replacing the aging parts of the systems and improving maintenance. We need to raise rates to cover the costs of replacement.

Other factors include higher expenses from inflation and the pandemic (remember supply chain issues?) and paying off debt to pay for new water meters and other improvements.

We know that raising rates will be a challenge for some. If you, or someone you know, is struggling to pay their bill, please call 823-1153 so we can help. Looking ahead, I am committed to stabilizing the reliability of our systems and our finances so that future increases will be smaller and more predictable. This will include better tracking our revenues and expenses, and implementing plans so we better understand how best to invest in maintenance and repairs.

The City Council will consider adopting these recommendations at a public hearing scheduled for Tuesday, June 18, at 6:00 p.m. at the Youth Annex on Morris Street. As with all City Council meetings, you are welcome to attend in person or via Zoom.

I hope that you find this explanation helpful. This is a complex issue, and City Council has approved some measures beyond what staff recommended to reduce the impact on you. Know that if there were another way we could solve this, we would. If you'd like more information, please go to our website: [www.cityofsebastopol.gov/our-community/utilities/](http://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/our-community/utilities/).



Sincerely,  
**Don Schwartz** | City Manager