

Warrenton: New rates, fees will go into effect in July

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Water and sewer hikes

Water and sewer rates are going up by 7 percent and 5 percent, as they also did last year. This will be a base rate increase of \$1.96 for water and \$2.78 for sewer, according to Collin Stelzig, the public works director.

With China's new regulations on imported recyclable materials driving up the cost of doing business for recycling and garbage companies, recycling rates are going up for many communities. For Warrenton ratepayers, this means a 3.5 percent increase that adds 25 cents monthly to the cost of carts and just under \$2 to the monthly cost of cardboard containers. Rental rates and fees for the Warrenton Community Center went up last year and are going up again this year.

The new rates and fees will go into effect in July following a second reading at the commission's next meeting.

Proposed land use application fees, some of which would have increased substantially, were also on the table, but the three commissioners present Tuesday opted to hold off voting until the full commission could discuss the changes with interim City Planner Kevin Cronin. The city plans to hold a special session later this month to discuss the proposed increases and new fee categories Cronin suggested.

The city is trying to be proactive by raising rates and fees to fund operations and address upcoming repairs and ongoing maintenance, said Commissioner Rick Newton after the meeting. What residents pay in property taxes doesn't even cover the city's police

department, and the departments behind some of the fee increases commissioners discussed Tuesday night are enterprise funds that rely on revenue to pay their expenses, not tax money, he and Mayor Henry Balensifer said.

"Yeah, it's nice to keep the same rate for years, but in reality you're cutting your own throat," Newton said.

Playing catch-up

"There's a lot of aging infrastructure that we need to play catch-up on, but also the cost of services has increased, the cost of the materials to do those services has increased," Balensifer said.

In some cases, city business has become more expensive due to new state and federal standards, he added. And the city must also take into account rising costs for the state's pension program.

For years, Warrenton put off improvements at the Hammond and Warrenton marinas. Now, the city has invested serious dollars into both facilities — one major project being the new commercial dock in Warrenton — and this forms part of the justification for raising rates and fees next fiscal year.

"When you've invested \$2 million to improve your facilities, if we don't keep on track to take care of them and maintain them, we're going to be in the same position we were in before," said City Manager Linda Engbretson.

There's millions of dollars more that could be put in at both marinas, she said. Hammond will still need to be dredged in the near future, a project expected to cost as much as \$1.3 million. In fact, there's not a single city department or fund that couldn't



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Utility technicians with the city perform maintenance on a sewer line.

benefit from an infusion of money, she and the commissioners noted. Increasing rates and fees is just one small step, commissioners said.

"It all factors down in the end to the livability in Warrenton when it reaches wherever we're headed in the next 10 years," Newton added. "Because if we're going to have livability, we have to have water there. We have to have parks. We have to have roads. We have to have sewer. We have to have garbage. We have to have all those things, and if you don't plan ahead, you're going to be putting fires out like crazy."



John Pozdolski, utility technician for Warrenton, keeps an eye on the display from equipment examining underground pipes.

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