

2022 Water and Sewer Rate Study Sessions Comment Form

Provide your question or comment in the text box below:

(This comment was addressed during the October 20 workshop.) No matter how you put it the cost is way too high for people that have lived in Westminster most of their lives. These people have larger properties and can't afford to water the property which declines the property values in the neighborhood. The neighborhoods I'm talking about for instance like east of 92nd of Sheridan. Most homes in that area used to be beautifully maintained and now it looks like crap and I can't imagine the value is going to hold up. Value in Westminster is going to go down we are going to lose money. Because why would anyone want to move here at these outrageous prices? Yes there are things that might need to be done but you can't do it by gouging people like this. This is a huge gouge and not many can afford what your suggesting. You can't just demand that people pay these high rates because you need the money. What happened to the people that hit the piping that didn't need to be repaired at the time? We the people of Westminster are now paying for something that did not need to be done now. You are not telling us the truth or at least the entire truth? Again people that have lived here most of their lives can I afford the gouge that you have enforced on them. Yep those are the people that have the older piping and need to probably replace things in their home to help save on water but I do think you're gouging them no matter. As I said before the neighborhoods that were once gorgeous, are ugly and do not look like the Westminster I grew up in. Now in the time of covid-19 you are asking people to choose

between heat, food or medical and possibly water? Which one do they choose this month to pay they Wonder? Sad, sad that you people that's it there and vote chose to vote your way and not for the people

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From last meeting's discussion, it appears that items are put into the capital budget based on industry standard life. I also know that if equipment is well taken care of, it often works longer than the industry standard. If that is true for Westminster, do the operators at the plant have input into decisions on which equipment is needed and when? Are maintenance records available for review? Has efficiency logs/diagnosis been done on the equipment to indicate need for replacement? Also, I believe there is back up equipment, that if not evenly rotated into routine operations, can see little wear or loss of efficiency. This would not need replacing as often as "industry standard". In my opinion as an operator for 30 years, tax dollars should be spent first diagnosing equipment for loss of efficiency before assuming that a large amount of money needs to be spent and that industry standard is a great way for salesmen and equipment manufacturers to sell products that don't need to be paid for at this time by taxpayers.

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Comment #1:

Council should absolutely be considering implementation of normalized billing cycles based on actual gallon usage. I just learned, and can't believe, that excess usage is rolled over until the next month. This methodology is antiquated at best and raises suspicion about unfair billing practices. It certainly bumps some users into higher Tiers at times, forcing those users to pay more than they would have otherwise. Ever heard of pro-rating? Hoping the next customer portal is as robust as promised and can be leveraged to bill users equitably.

Comment #2:

Part of the problem here seems to be lack of transparency and lack of understanding. IMO much of the talk about recalls is based on assumptions and not actual data. Information is power and can be used to mitigate some of the citizen concerns if done correctly. So much is happening at the same time - meter installations, rate increases, watermain breaks, development pressure, etc. COVID is just compounding everything. Consider a way to provide every customer with information about water usage, even before the new customer portal goes online. For example, consider a report as a bill insert that shows monthly usage (not cost) for the past 3 to 5 years at that address with an indicator as to when the new meter was installed (if applicable). I was able to get this info pretty easily and quickly via CORA request and has enlightened me in terms of seasonal trends and how much water my sprinklers are using. I was even able to rule out meter issues and leaks. I'm using data to understand my property specific condition and change my behavior.

Comment #3

The upcoming customer portal is certainly a welcome tool, but poses the same challenges as the discussion about outreach. How do you get information to/from citizens that don't have access to a computer? At a minimum the system should be compatible for use on a mobile phone, which will be accessible to more folks than just those with a PC. Also consider adding information on the bills that indicate how users without internet access can get detailed information from the new system (printed reports from staff, etc.).

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Comment #4:

In the first study session it was mentioned that something like \$4B worth of assets are tracked in an Excel spreadsheet. I sincerely hope that excel (not a proper database) is not the City's utility asset management database. If so, it begs the question about department credibility and upgrading to a real asset database should seriously be considered.

Comment #5:

Re: slowing down the process. Highly suggest Council have something figured out before next irrigation season and citizens get fired up about the rates when they turn their sprinklers back on. Dragging this out until COVID-19 is no longer a real challenge (who knows when) is an ineffective use of everyone's time and just kicks the can down the road even further. Yes, there is a need to gather input from a diverse cross section of citizens, but assuming COVID-19 goes away and that in-person meetings can occur is a terrible starting assumption. There is a need to get creative about outreach assuming current conditions and adapt if pandemic conditions improve, not wait around indefinitely. In other words, plan for the worst and hope for the best, not plan for the best and get derailed by reality.

Comment #6:

It is refreshing to see this this process occurring as a result of citizen concerns. I am learning more than I expected. I look forward to following these study sessions and staying engaged. I would be interested in being part of a focus group, if council decides to go that way. I've recently bought my house (July 7, 2020), which happens happens to have a large yard so I'm hitting Tier 3. Definitely shell shock on that first bill, especially compared to my prior residence with very little grass. Needless to say I've had to adapt. In addition to scaling back watering, I've utilized the City sprinkler consultation program, bought a smart irrigation controller through that program (at 1/3 the normal cost!), and made some sprinkler repairs (with more to come in spring). City staff has been very helpful in getting me information pertaining to my usage. I even filed a CORA request for water usage data under previous ownership so I can assess seasonal trends. I'm learning more about water usage and conservation than I ever wanted to. I'm also a Public Works employee at another jurisdiction's and although I don't work in potable water I do generally know enough to be dangerous in regards to utility infrastructure, utility fees, and public engagement. My unique water situation and government experience may provide useful perspective.

Question #1:

From the first study session about the utility condition index (UCI). I'm struggling to understand how UCI, specifically sewer, can drop so significantly (15%) from 2015-2017. Seems misleading from a planning standpoint and prompts questions about methodology. If you know that the infrastructure is nearing the end of useful life why a sudden drop over two years (coincidentally before a rate hike vote) rather than a gradual decline over many years prior? Did the way that sewer UCI is assessed change suddenly? Is there another underlying reason for the drastic decline? Is the water infrastructure UCI setup the same way and we are set to see another surprise UCI drop, which could result in additional rate hikes?

Question #2:

Can the implementation of the customer water portal be expedited? Is the citizen portal being developed/configured/tested in parallel with the meter installation, or in series? Why do properties with new meters have to wait until all properties have new meters to access a system that can be used to influence water usage, identify leaks, etc.? Can't the system be configured for residents who do have new meters; and new installations brought online incrementally?

Question #3:

Is the City analyzing the usage data they do have pre- and post-meter installation? Social media outrage seems to (anecdotally) indicate more problems post-meter than would otherwise be outliers. Can the data be used to identify potential trends on the larger scale (neighborhood, citywide, etc.), or otherwise debunk the theory that this is anyway related to new meter installation? This data could really help isolate financial impacts of meters (if any) vs usage vs rate structure. If analysis is being done, please share findings with the public.

I have been hearing that certain groups are publicly gathering signatures from residents under the pretense that it is a petition to reduce water rates, when in fact these groups will be using these signatures to strengthen their bid to have the mayor and city councillors recalled. If this is so, I hope these recall petitions will be rejected.

If you have to lie to make a point, perhaps there's something wrong with your point.

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