

City must upgrade wastewater treatment plant

Sewer, water rate increase proposed

The Merced City Council will hold a public hearing on proposed sewer and water rate increases on Dec. 4.

The new rates would pay for increased operating and maintenance costs, upgrading the facilities and adding tertiary treatment to the wastewater treatment plant. The rates will not be used to expand the 10 million gallon-a-day capacity of the sewage plant.

A complete explanation of the sewer and water rate increases has been mailed to residential users. Copies in Spanish and Hmong can be obtained by calling 385-6866.

Tertiary treatment adds an extra level of filtration and treatment that results in cleaner outflow. The state Regional Water Quality Control Board is requiring the higher standards because of changes in federal law. Most treatment plants in the Central Valley are facing the new requirements



The City must upgrade the wastewater treatment plant to meet new state and federal water quality standards.

because the water coming out of the plants ultimately ends up in the San Joaquin River. Plants that don't meet state standards can face fines exceeding \$3,000 a day.

The residential sewer rate is currently \$21.12 a month and if approved by the Council would increase to \$26.95 on Feb. 1. Proposed rate increases are: \$34.77 (January 2008), \$41.37 (2009), \$45.93 (2010) and \$47.30 (2011).

In comparison, Manteca residents currently pay \$31.40 a month, while the cost in Turlock is now \$40.45 a month.

The City has been considering expansion of the wastewater treatment plant because it is nearing capacity. Existing users will not pay for any expansion in the size of the plant. New residential and business users of the system would pay all expansion costs.

To tour the treatment plant or for more information, call 385-6892.

The water rate increase also will be spread over a 5-year period. The rate increase is due to tougher water quality control regulations, the need for more outside testing and rising operating costs. Residential users currently paying \$22.45 a month will pay \$24.92 starting Jan. 1. The proposed rates are: \$27.66 (2008), \$30.43 (2009), \$33.47 (2010) and \$35.14 (2011).

Questions & Answers

Q: What's the difference between a rate increase and a connection fee increase?

A: Rates are what current customers pay for services. By state law, they can only be charged the actual cost of operations and maintenance of the plant and the cost of upgrading the plant to improve treatment. Connection fees are the charges paid by new customers to buy into the system. Existing customers have been paying money for many years to maintain, upgrade and expand the plant to the current levels. A connection fee covers a new user's share of those costs.

Q: Are these rate increases going to be used for expanding the plant?

A: No. The City's policy is that new growth pays the cost of expanding the plant. Current users don't need a plant with more capacity, but they do need to pay for the upgrades at the facilities to meet higher state and federal standards. A separate process of public hearings must be undertaken in order to expand the plant. Any of those costs would be paid by new homes and businesses.

Q: UC Merced is now connected to the City wastewater system. Did they get that service for free?

A: The University of California at Merced paid \$4.1 million to build the sewer line from G Street to the campus. UC Merced will get repaid for the sewer line installation by new developments connecting to it. In addition, UC Merced has paid the City of Merced \$23,400 for sewer service and \$26,300 for water since September 2005.

Q: I can't get to the meeting, but I would like to make my views known to the City Council. How can I do that?

A: You may mail your comments to the City Council at 678 W. 18th St. Merced CA 95340, fax them at 723-1780 or send an e-mail to the Council at CityCouncil@cityofmerced.org.

Comments sought at public hearing

A public hearing on the proposed sewer and water user rate increases will be held at 7 p.m. Dec. 4, in the City Council Chambers, 678 W. 18th St., 2nd floor, Merced.

Una audencia publica acerca de la propuesta de aumentar los cobros del uso del drenaje y el agua se llevará a cabo el 4 de Diciembre, a las 7 p.m. en la Cámara del Concilio, 678 W. 18th St. 2^o piso, Merced.

Lus ceeb toom rau tsoom niam txiv kuv tig neej tsa paub. Peb yuav muaj ib lub rooj sab laj, hais txog kev nce nyiav rau dej thiab tshuab xaws (sewer). Lub ceeb toom pib Dec. 4 tau 7 teev tsaus ntuj, nyob rau hauv City Council Chambers, 678 E. 18th St., 2nd floor, Merced.

Holiday schedules

The City of Merced offices will be closed for Veterans Day, Friday, Nov. 10. The trash collection schedule will not be affected. City offices also will be closed Thanksgiving, Thursday, Nov. 23 and Friday, Nov. 24. Trash pickup will be delayed one day, so customers with regular pickup on Thursday will have their containers emptied Friday, and those with a Friday pickup will have Saturday service.

Emergency services will be provided, but the offices will be closed to the public.

The City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
 Mayor Pro Tem Joe Cortez
 Councilmember Michele Gabriault-Acosta
 Councilmember Rick Osorio
 Councilmember Carl Pollard
 Councilmember Jim Sanders
 Councilmember Bill Spriggs

Contacting us

The City of Merced wants the site www.cityofmerced.org to be a one-stop source for information on the City. It contains City Council agendas and minutes, the Municipal Code, the General Plan, news releases from the City, department listings, e-mail addresses, phone numbers and information on local officials.

Merced Civic Center
 678 W. 18th St.
 Merced CA 95340
 Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.,
 except holidays

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
Code Enforcement.....	385-6855
Finance.....	385-4718
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel	385-6839
Planning Department.....	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
Recreation/Parks	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department.....385-6891
 Police Department.....385-6912

Newsletter update

Coming soon: The winner of the Name-This-Newsletter Contest.

More additions to www.CityofMerced.org

The City of Merced Web site keeps getting bigger and better in delivering information to City residents.

One of the latest additions is consolidating all of the road closures on one Web page. Users can bookmark that page to find out what roads are closed because of maintenance or repairs. The traffic information is regularly used by transportation companies serving Merced, contractors and area school districts for bus scheduling.

An online Crime Reporting Tool has been added that allows people to report

minor crimes anywhere they have Internet access. Crime victims don't need to wait for an officer to file a report for things like auto burglaries, thefts, graffiti, vandalism and lost property. People can't use the online tool to report major crimes such as violent crimes, sex crimes, stolen vehicles or child custody problems.

A Crime Tip Reporting Tool also has been added to the site allowing people to anonymously report crimes they may have seen. It can be used to report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.



Leaf time

The City begins its annual leave collection service Nov. 6. Flyers were mailed to residents with collection days and other details, and it is posted on our Web site.

Preliminary online survey results in

The first results are in from the City of Merced's online survey, although it's a mixed bag.

Some people like the way services are delivered and some made it clear they think we could do a better job.

"We appreciate people taking the time to fill out the survey," said City Manager Jim Marshall. "City staff is looking at the results to see what we can do to improve our services. We value all of the comments, good or bad."

Seventy people went online to complete the Community Survey, which asks general questions about City services and the public's satisfaction ratings.

Individual surveys are

Please take the survey

The City of Merced is asking residents to take an online survey to help us improve City services. Each survey takes about 5 minutes to complete. Go to our home page at www.CityofMerced.org and look under Public Information.

being conducted regarding the Public Works Department, the Parks and Community Services Department and the Police Department.

Surveys results ranged from a pat on the back for police and firefighters, to issues with traffic lights and a lack of stop signs.

Growth and planning issues also concerned some people, while others said

better roads were needed.

People were also asked to rank what they felt were the most important services provided by the City. Police and fire ranked high on the list, but people are also concerned about graffiti, gangs and City planning.

National Data Online is providing the surveys to the City at no cost. Online surveys in Spanish and Hmong were scheduled to go online in October, according to the company.

Since some residents don't have access to computers, the City will be taking paper copies of the surveys out to public gatherings so that more people can fill them out. Some paper copies will be available at selected City offices.