Sonoma Water

SPRING 2021 NEWS

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SONOMA VALLEY COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM UPGRADES

The Sonoma Valley Treatment Plant (Plant) has a history of intermittent power outages inside the Plant. Much of the equipment was original to the 1978 construction and is deteriorating to the point of failures.

The electrical system upgrades that have been completed were needed to prevent potential hazards, reduce potential exposure to outages due to future Public Safety Power Shutoffs, and build in efficiencies to the system. One feature of the project was the installation of automatic transfer switches to simplify the process and allow for the connection of a portable generator.

A significant feature of the electrical upgrades was the main switchboard replacement. The original switchboard was installed in 1979, had exceeded its serviceable life, and needed to be replaced. It had also been installed at the service entrance and needed to be repositioned. The new switchboard and room layout provides a safer environment, and increased equipment clearances for reliable ongoing maintenance and operation.

These electrical upgrades will help the Plant run efficiently and safely for many more years.

LOCAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

The Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District (District) has begun the process to update its Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), which was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 2016 for a period of five years. The approval of this plan ensures the District's continued eligibility for project grants under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs.

This year the District is required to review and revise its plan to reflect changes in development, progress in local mitigation efforts, and changes in priorities, and resubmit the plan for approval in order to continue to be eligible for mitigation project grant funding.

A comprehensive LHMP is prepared in recognition of the District's responsibility to the community and its role in preserving the economic vitality of the region. The public places trust in the operators of wastewater systems to safely manage their operations in a manner that protects the health and safety of the public and the environment, even after a disaster.

We invite you to learn more about the LHMP online at www.SonomaWater.org/svlhmp and provide feedback on the draft plan this spring.

HOW YOUR SEWER SERVICE FEES ARE SPENT

Service fees collected from property owners are used to operate and maintain the sanitation facilities that are managed by Sonoma Water. This graphic depiction provides a snapshot of types of activities that are required to operate our facilities in an environmentally responsible and fiscally prudent manner, to replace worn out equipment before it fails.

COLLECTION SYSTEM
11¢

OPERATIONS
44¢

ENGINEERING, ADMINISTRATION, REGULATORY COMPLIANCE
21¢

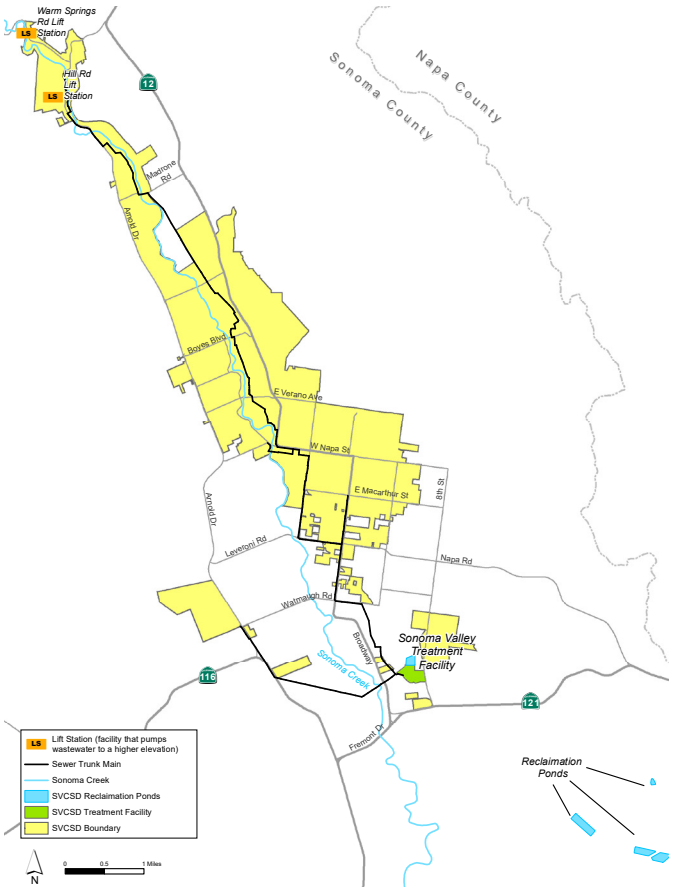
MECHANICAL & ELECTRICAL MAINTENANCE
24¢

BUDGET APPROVAL

After the proposed budgets and rates are developed, the budgets are available for public review at libraries throughout the county and at Sonoma Water's office located at 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa. They are also available online. Typically, this happens at the end of March. In addition, notices of the proposed rates are mailed to the owners of the properties in the districts and zones at that time. The public can protest rate increases up to the date of the rate hearings, which are typically held in mid-May at the Board of Supervisors chambers. (A protest form and rate hearing information are available on pages 6-7 of this notice).

ABOUT YOUR DISTRICT

In 1995 Sonoma Water assumed responsibility from the County of Sonoma for managing the county sanitation zones and districts, including your District. The District began operation in 1953. Currently, it serves 17,715 Equivalent Single-Family Dwellings within a 4,500-acre service area. The treatment plant has a design capacity of 3 million gallons per day (average daily dry weather flow) and treats wastewater to tertiary treatment levels (also referred to as advanced water treatment). High-quality recycled water is an important resource and its use offsets potable water demands and enhances the environment. Between May 1 and October 31, the recycled water is used for irrigation and wetland/salt marsh enhancement. Between November 1 and April 30, recycled water is discharged into Schell Slough or Hudeman Slough.



COVID-19'S IMPACT ON BUDGETS AND SEWER SERVICE CHARGES

To Our Ratepayers,

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on many residents and businesses throughout our county and beyond. As managers of eight small sanitation districts and zones, we are well aware of the financial burden of rising sanitation charges during these difficult times and we are making every effort to soften the impacts as much as possible.

The eight sanitation zones and districts managed by Sonoma Water are all experiencing financial constraints. Revenues are decreasing as some property owners are unable to pay their sewer service charges, and we anticipate that there will be more delinquencies as the economic impact of the pandemic continues. The districts and zones are faced with tight budgets, but we will work hard to maintain our facilities and continue to operate the systems in a safe and reliable manner. While we remain committed to operate and maintain the systems in a responsible manner, protect public health and the environment, and comply with regulatory requirements, the costs to meet those requirements continue to increase.

This year we have made several adjustments to keep rate increases at a minimum, including cutting overhead costs, deferring maintenance where it is possible, and delaying studies and capital improvement projects.

One of the challenges inherent with small districts and zones is that there are a limited number of residents and businesses to share the costs of operations, maintenance, and project implementation. With a smaller rate base, costs are borne by fewer customers. As the manager of these districts and zones, Sonoma Water continues to advocate for special districts and rural counties to receive COVID support and we are actively seeking support from state and federal sources.

Our hearts go out to the many individuals, families, businesses and communities who are suffering during this pandemic. We will continue to provide critical sanitation services to you and find ways to limit the cost of these services. As always, we will continue to keep public safety and system reliability our top priorities.

Sincerely,

Grant Davis
General Manager, Sonoma Water

WATER REBATES IN YOUR DISTRICT

SANITATION DISTRICT WATER SAVING REBATE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

If you are a City of Sonoma or Valley of the Moon Water District customer, you have some water saving tools at your fingertips! Please take advantage of the following water saving programs which are offered on a first-come, first-served basis while funding lasts:

Clothes Washers: Receive up to $50 back on the purchase and installation of a new, qualifying high-efficiency clothes washer (HEW). Rebates are available for all Energy Star Most Efficient listed clothes washers except those containing silver ion technology.

For more information, go to www.savingwaterpartnership.org/washer-rebate/.

PROPOSITION 218

Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING PROPOSED SEWER SERVICE RATE INCREASE

Date, Time, and Place of Public Hearing

On **May 18, 2021 at 1:30 p.m.** or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard, the Board of Directors (Board) of the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District (District) will conduct a public hearing to consider increasing the annual sewer service charge (Sewer Charge) and make rate structure modifications. If approved, the increased Sewer Charge will become effective on July 1, 2021.

> **Please note:** the Board of Supervisors Meeting will be facilitated virtually through Zoom and due to the pandemic, and in accordance with Executive Orders N-25-20 and N-29-20, the May 18, 2021 Board of Directors meeting will be held virtually. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC MAY NOT ATTEND THIS MEETING IN PERSON. Information regarding public online participation will be available on the Board's agenda 72 hours prior to the meeting at https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx

The Sewer Charge will be imposed on each parcel upon which is located one or more structures that are connected to the system and the Sewer Charge will be collected on the general property tax bill administered by Sonoma County. Payment of the Sewer Charge will be the responsibility of the owner of the parcel.

Reasons for the Sewer Service Charge and Use of the Funds Collected

The Sewer Charge is imposed to pay for the cost of providing safe and reliable sewer service to your property in conformance with legal requirements, and is necessary: (a) to finance the ongoing operation and maintenance costs of the system; (b) to pay the capital replacement program costs of the system, which provides for the long-term replacement of system facilities as they wear out; and (c) to maintain sufficient reserves. The District's Sewer Charge is reviewed annually to determine if adequate revenues are being collected for these purposes. The District recognizes the far reaching financial impacts of COVID-19 on its customers, and has gone to great lengths to cut operations and maintenance costs, defer maintenance where practicable, delay studies and capital improvement projects, and reduce the rate increase while continuing to keep public safety and system reliability our top priorities.

The draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2021-22 describes the District's total annual expenses in detail and is available for review at the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District, c/o the Sonoma County Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, California 95403, and on Sonoma Water's website at www.sonomawater.org/current-budget

Calculation of the Sewer Rate Increase

The District has two categories of users:

> **A) Non-Residential Users and Residential Users with No Public Water Connection.** This category of users has a Sewer Charge that is fixed. NOTE: Residential Users that have a Public Water Connection but have no water usage in winter months and multi-family complexes including condominiums with only one Public Water Connection for all of the units are also included in this category.
>
> **B) Residential Users with a Public Water Connection.** This category of users has a Sewer Charge that has both a fixed charge component and a volume-based component.

The method for calculating the Sewer Charge for each category of user is described in more detail below.

A) Amount of Proposed Sewer Rate Increase for Non-Residential Users and Residential Users with No Public Water Connection.

Effective July 1, 2021, the District proposes to increase the charge per Equivalent Single-Family Dwelling (ESD) from $1,094 per ESD per year to $1,132 per ESD per year for users in this category. This represents an increase of $38 or 3.5% compared to the current year. This increase to the ESD charge has been calculated by dividing the annual costs of providing wastewater treatment and collection service by the total estimated number of ESDs in the District.

A standard single-family home constitutes one ESD. Properties that are not single family homes are converted to ESDs based on industry standard methods and more information about this conversion is available from the District. Parcels which have other uses (for example, apartments and commercial buildings) will be assigned a number of ESDs using standard equivalency factors which estimate the probable quantity and quality of sewage effluent normally generated by such uses in comparison to a single-family home.

The Sewer Charge for Non-Residential Users and Residential Users with No Public Water Connection is calculated as follows:

$1,132 per ESD x Assigned Number of ESD's = Annual Sewer Charge

B) Sewer Rate Increase Proposed For Residential Users With a Public Water Connection

All residential sewer customers with a public water connection must pay a Sewer Charge with two components: a fixed charge and a volume-based charge. The Residential Users with a Public Water Connection category includes single-family dwellings, multiple-family units, apartments, and mobile home parks. A multi-family complex or condominium complex will also fall within this category if each unit in the complex has its own public water connection.

1. Fixed Charge Component: The fixed charge component of the Sewer Charge funds 70% of the District's costs to provide sewer services, including costs that the sewage treatment and collection system incurs regardless of increased or decreased sewage flow into the system.

Effective July 1, 2021 the District proposes to increase the fixed charge to $792.80 per ESD per year for residential users with a public water connection. This represents an increase of $26.80 (3.5% above the current year).

The fixed charge component of the Sewer Charge will be calculated as follows:

$792.80 per ESD x Number of ESD's = Fixed Charge Component of the Sewer Charge

2. Volume-Based Component: The volume-based component funds approximately 30% of the District's costs to provide sewer service, including costs to the sewage treatment and collection system that vary with the amount of sewage conveyed and treated. The District's volume-based component uses a customer's lowest winter water use (November – March) as the basis for the calculation. Winter water use is used because it generally provides the best available estimate of indoor water use and its impact to the District's treatment facilities because outdoor irrigation is usually minimal during the winter months.

The Volume-Based Component of the Sewer Charge has three parts, which are multiplied together:

Winter Water Usage x Number of Billing Periods Annually from your Water District x per thousand gallon = Volume-Based Component of Sewer Charge

Effective July 1, 2021, the District proposes to increase the volume-based component charge from $5.99 per thousand gallons to $6.42 per thousand gallons for residential users with a public water connection. This represents an increase of $0.22 per thousand gallons (3.5% compared to current year). Each residential user with a sewer connection and a public water connection with winter water use greater than zero will be charged as follows:

Total Sewer Charge (fixed charge + volumetric charge) for Residential Customers with a Public Water Connection

For Customers with a Valley of the Moon Water District bill:

$792.80 per ESD x Number of ESD's (Fixed Charge Component)
+ $6.42 per thousand gallons
X Lowest Winter Water Usage in thousand gallons
X 6 billing periods annually (Volumetric Charge Component)

For Customers with a City of Sonoma Water District water bill:

792.80 per ESD x Number of ESD's (Fixed Charge Component)
+ $6.42 per thousand gallons
X Lowest Winter Water Usage in thousand gallons
X 12 billing periods annually (Volumetric Charge Component)

Further Information Available Prior to the Hearing

At the hearing, the Board will consider adoption of an ordinance which will establish the increased Sewer Charge. A copy of the ordinance is on file and available for review at the Sonoma County Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, CA 95403. In addition, the following person may be contacted at the Agency at (707) 526-5370 for further information and/or obtaining copies of the draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2021-22: Kathy Badger, Administrative Aide.

Protest Procedure

This notice has been mailed to you because records of the Sonoma County Assessor list you as an owner of one or more parcels within the District that will be subject to the Sewer Charge while connected to the system. In the event you have sold property you may have owned within the District, please send this notice to the new owner. This document can be found in the spring newsletter online at: www.sonomawater.org/svcsd

Prior to the public hearing, property owners, or tenants who are directly liable for the payment of the Sewer Charges, may submit written protests respecting the Sewer Charge. At the public hearing, the Board will consider all written protests that have been received by the prescribed deadline. In order to be considered, a written protest must be made on the attached form. Only one protest will be counted per parcel. Only protests signed by the current owner(s), or tenant(s) directly liable for paying the Sewer Charge, will be allowed and protests must be received no later than the following deadlines:

> *If submitted by mail, they must be received (NOT postmarked) no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 17, 2021 at the mailing address on the form.*
>
> *If hand delivered, they must be delivered no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 17, 2021 at the mailing address on the form.*

Sonoma Water

404 Aviation Blvd.

Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Date of this Notice: March 29, 2021

RATE PROTEST FORM

NOTE: IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED, ANY PROTEST MUST BE ON THIS FORM

WRITTEN PROTEST

I am the parcel owner of the property located at the address on the back of this form, or a tenant that is directly liable for paying the Sewer Charge for the property. I am submitting this form to protest the proposed Sewer Charge increase.

Additional Comments: _____

_____

_____

Use opposite side or attach additional sheets if needed.

_____
Signature of Property Owner Required

_____
Print Name

Fold Here First

Place Postage Here

Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District
c/o Sonoma Water
404 Aviation Blvd
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Fold Here Second

Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District
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IMPORTANT
Sewer service fee NOTICE

(Prop 218) enclosed for
Sonoma Valley County
Sanitation District

HEARING DATE

May 18, 2021 at 1:30 p.m.

HEARING DETAILS

The Hearing will be held virtually through Zoom.
Hearing details can be found at
https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx

ATTENTION
IMPORTANT SEWER RATE INFORMATION INSIDE

INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE

Proposition 218 Notice for proposed
Fiscal Year 2021-2022 sewer rates.

The Notice with information about the proposed rates
is included on pages 5-6 of this newsletter.
The return protest form is located on page 7.

Sonoma Water

Clean. Reliable. Essential. Every day.

www.sonomawater.org/SVCSD