

FAQs

IN CASE YOU HAVE CONCERNS,
HERE ARE SOME FREQUENTLY
ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
TO HELP CLEAR THINGS UP.



OUR SEWER RATES HAVEN'T BEEN INCREASED SINCE 2009. WHY IS THAT A CONCERN?

On the surface, it might seem like a win for residents, but keeping rates flat for over a decade can actually create some serious long-term challenges. Pipes, pumps, and treatment facilities wear out over time. If they are not maintained or replaced, it can lead to costly breakdowns or even environmental hazards. The cost of labor, materials, energy, and regulatory compliance has increased significantly since 2009. Without regular rate increases to match inflation, there is often not enough revenue to fund necessary repairs or upgrades and makes it harder to maintain service quality.

WHY IS THE CITY PROPOSING A SEWER RATE INCREASE?

Nobody loves paying more for utilities, but raising sewer rates is necessary to keep the system running safely, sustainably, and legally. Since rates have not been raised in more than 15 years, the revenue hasn't kept up with rising costs. This means the system is underfunded and operating on borrowed time. To ensure that the city can continue to provide reliable sanitary services, system users make investments into utility (through paying their bill). Utilities, such as the sewer system, don't aim to make profits - they aim to break even. Utility payments aren't just bills - they are investments in the health, safety, and resiliency of your community.

AREN'T THERE GRANTS TO PAY FOR INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS?

Grants do exist, but they're rarely a silver bullet. Federal and state grants can provide one-time funding for a specific project, but sewer systems need ongoing revenue for daily operations, routine maintenance, emergency repairs, and long-term upgrades, which grants don't pay for. Utilities are expected to be financially self-sustaining and grants cannot replace a stable revenue stream. Even when awarded, grants often require local match funds (meaning the city still needs to contribute a portion - which is often collected through a rate increase).

WHY CAN'T THE CITY USE TRANSIENT LODGING TAXES TO FUND THE SEWER SYSTEM?

The city legally can't. How transient lodging tax (TLT) is spent is restricted under state law (ORS 320.300-320.350) and by local ordinances. Sewer infrastructure is considered a core public utility, not a tourism-related facility. Even though tourists use the sewer system, it is not classified as a tourism asset under the law.

I KNOW SOMEONE ALREADY HAVING TROUBLE AFFORDING THEIR UTILITY BILLS. ARE THERE ANY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE?

Yes! The City of Rockaway Beach and CARE Oregon have partnered together to provide utility assistance to low-income and elderly utility customers, or to customers who have experienced a recent death in the family. To learn more about this upcoming program, please watch or attend the December 10th City Council Workshop.

IF THE CITY MUST PROPOSE A RATE INCREASE, WHAT'S THE POINT OF ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS?

While raising rates is necessary, getting involved in the city's utility rate decision is one of the most powerful ways to shape how your money is spent and how our community functions. Public input helps guide where and how money is spent - not just how much is collected.

HOW WILL THE PROPOSED RATE CHANGES AFFECT MY MONTHLY BILL?

That hasn't been decided. HRD Engineers are currently evaluating the city's needs and drafting proposed rates, which will be presented at the City Council Workshop on November 12th. The public is encouraged to attend the workshop (or watch the recording later) to learn more.

NEXT STEPS

- **November 12th at 4:30 PM** HRD Engineers will present a rate analysis to the City Council at the Council Workshop.
- **December 10th at 6:00 PM** the City Council will hold a public hearing to consider adoption of new sewer rates.
- **January 1, 2026** new sewer rates to take effect.