

First Hearing Next Week for Proposed Water Rate Hike

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All customers with Truckee Meadows Water Authority are facing a rate increase this May.

Customers are encouraged to attend the first public hearing for the proposed rate adjustment happening at the TMWA Board of Directors meeting Wednesday, March 15th at 10 a.m. in the Sparks Council Chambers at City Hall.

According to TMWA, rates would increase in 2017 and 2018 with the option for increases each of the next three years after that. The first would take effect for all residential, commercial and irrigation customers in May 2017. The first increase of 3% would cost the average customer \$1.42 and the second coming in 2018 (also 3%) would cost, on average, an additional \$1.47. The TMWA Board of Directors would then have the option of a 2.5% increase each year for the three years after that "if necessary."

With an extremely wet winter, TMWA [announced](#) that the water reservoirs would fill in mid-February. With an increase in supply and water use down, according to TMWA, is a rate increase necessary? TMWA says yes. "Unfortunately that's the product we sell, but people aren't buying it. And at the end of the day, we have to make cost," says Andy Gebhardt, Director of Operation and Water Quality with TMWA.

TMWA says that 90% of its costs stay fixed regardless of water use adding that "it is important that our revenues cover the cost of providing water service to our customers." With less water consumption TMWA can save money with pumping power and water treatment, but that is not a large enough variable to recover costs. Gebhardt adds that no increase may impact TMWA's good credit rating and in turn, water customers, "[If] we aren't able to cover our costs then we're going to have to dip into some other sources of funds and that will affect our credit rating, which in the end is going to affect the customers and they're going to end up paying more."

Gebhardt says conservation efforts during the drought was one "indicator" of the rate increase but not the only one. He says consolidation of regional water services has led to a \$10 million decrease in revenue since 2013, "So it doesn't take a genius to figure out we're not making money." He adds that TMWA is and always has operated on a bare-bones staff, but with or without the increase, jobs are safe, "We staff up only when it looks like it's a permanent staffing need, or else we contract out. That way, in case situations arise, you know, times are tough, we don't have to lay anybody off."

The American Water Works Association says that TMWA is one of the most efficient utilities of its kind, selling more water per employee than the average top 25% of the country.

Residents are encouraged to attend the public meeting March 15th, or April 19th (both at 10 a.m. in Sparks Council Chambers) to share feedback and get information with the TMWA Board of Directors. If you cannot make the meeting you can send your comments to tmwaboard@tmwa.com or call with questions or comments at 834-8080. If you are disabled and need special accommodations for the meeting, you may contact TMWA at least 24-hours in advance at 834-8002.

Truckee Meadows Water Authority is a not-for-profit company.

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