

Rates Going up

By CARRIE HADERLIE / Boomerang

Laramie citizens will see an increase in their utilities bill this month.

The Laramie city councilors approved water and wastewater rate increases last fall, but the increases were not scheduled to take effect until this month. Water and wastewater bills will increase for every Laramie customer, but the extent of those increases will vary depending on how each customer uses water. For the "median residential customer" using 4,000 gallons of water per month and 3,000 gallons per month sewer, average bills will increase from \$43.60 to \$50.97, according to Shawn Garcia, business operations supervisor for the city.

More specifically, the water rate base charge for a residential user with a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch meter will go from \$17.91 to \$19.10. The cost per first 3,000 gallons of water used by a residential customer will go from \$2.30 to \$2.78, and the next 3,000 gallons will cost \$3.12. The base rate for residential wastewater users will go from \$9.83 to \$11.80.

The increases were the first in a series of four proposed years of rate increases, future councils will revisit changes proposed for 2011-2013.

The council also voted last fall to increase solid waste collection fees by 3 percent, and that increase was effective last September. Water and wastewater are effective January 2010, but flow-related charges — or a fee in addition to the base charge related to how much water a customer uses — will not be reflected until the February bill.

"The structure of the fees is set to recover the cost of service as it relates to each specific customer," Assistant City Manager Dave Derragon said. "That is why there are different rates for each (types of customer). That cost of service (recovery) is required by statute."

The city uses annual rate increases to keep pace with inflation and to pay for capital improvements to water and wastewater infrastructure. Each year, those rate increases have to be approved by the nine city councilors.

Red Oak Consultants from Denver found that Laramie water infrastructure is in need of \$85 million in repairs and that wastewater infrastructure is in need of \$28 million in repairs over the next decade.



Jim Moody, a utility maintenance operator with the city of Laramie, uses a metal detector to find a water meter underneath the snow Wednesday. Andy Carpenear/Boomerang photographer

The city does offer a low-income reduction of six units of water for low-income and people with disabilities. There is a process of qualification, and many private organizations offer help as well.

For more information, go to the city's Web site at www.cityoflaramie.com or go to the utility billing department in City Hall.

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