

For Release: Thursday, March 4, 2021

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Western Municipal Water District explores water and sewer rate adjustment

RIVERSIDE - During a Special Board Meeting on Monday, Feb. 22, the Western Municipal Water District (Western) Board of Directors hosted a public rate adjustment workshop, signaling the first step of many in considering a new rate proposal. The proposed adjustment helps water and sewer rates keep pace with the increasing costs of providing safe, reliable water and sewer services.

An overall median residential monthly rate increase of 2.1 to 3.5 percent is being proposed and could take effect beginning July 1, 2021, with modest increases thereafter for an additional three years. This is the lowest rate increase proposed by Western since 2014.

Between 35 and 50 percent of all associated costs included in the rate adjustment are outside of Western's control because they are related to the purchase and delivery of imported water from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California or local supplies from the City of Riverside. The remaining costs are associated with the operation, maintenance, and administration of Western's local system made up of 776 miles of pipeline, 128 pumps, 38 water storage reservoirs, 24 lift stations, one water desalination facility, and two wastewater treatment plants.

"Western knows that water is not the only thing on our community's mind during these challenging times," said General Manager Craig Miller. "It is important to remember that even during the global pandemic, Western must continue to keep safe, high-quality water flowing to our customers—that means keeping pace with increasing costs of purchasing water as well as electricity and natural gas costs used in the daily transport of water."

Periodically, Western studies the need for rate adjustments in consideration of the rising costs of imported water, operations, maintenance, environmental and regulatory compliance.

"The most recent study is showing that revenues generated from current retail water and sewer rates are insufficient to support necessary expenses," said Assistant General Manager/Chief Financial Officer Rod LeMond. "Your water flows through hundreds of miles of open aqueducts and pipelines, and this journey to your home or business is expensive."

Western keeps costs as low as possible by improving business and operational efficiencies, adopting advanced asset management systems and seeking grant funding from local, state and federal programs.

Western has been working to enhance its grant procurement efforts—seeking grant funding to support critical projects. In the past five years, Western has been awarded more than \$27 million to support major infrastructure improvements, regional partnerships and customer technology.

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If approved, residential, commercial businesses, agricultural, landscape, commercial customers with private fire service, and those who receive sewer service from Western will be affected by the rate adjustment.

The last time Western's Board moved to adopt a new rate series was in 2017, which spanned a three-year period.

To ensure the public is adequately informed of the proposed process, rate adjustment, and opportunities to participate in the discussion, Western's Board will host two additional Special Board Meetings in March, and a series of customer informational sessions in April. Should the Board elect to move forward, a formal public hearing to make a decision will be scheduled for early June.

The next Special Board Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 11 at 1 p.m. Information to join the discussion or attend the meeting virtually can be found at wmwd.com/BoardMeeting.

Due to COVID-19 safety precautions, all meetings will be held virtually via Zoom. For anyone unable to attend a virtual Board meeting, written comments must be submitted by 4:30 p.m. the day before the meeting by emailing boardsecretary@wmwd.com. Following the meeting, a recording of the workshop will be posted to Western's website.

For more information about the proposed rates, upcoming meetings or ways to stay informed and offer input, visit wmwd.com/2021ProposedRates.

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Western Municipal Water District is one of the largest public agencies in Riverside County, providing water and wastewater (sewer) services to nearly a million people, both retail and wholesale customers who live, work and play within 527 square miles in one of California's most populous regions. Learn more: wmwd.com.