



# Water and Wastewater Rates Frequently Asked Questions City of Whitefish, MT

The City of Whitefish has set a goal for its Water and Wastewater Utilities to be financially sustainable – to cover the costs of providing quality water/wastewater service while also protecting the environment. In addition to an emphasis on efficient operations, the City is striving to achieve this goal through the use of utility rates designed to be equitable in proportion to the services and benefits rendered. In 2016, the City completed a comprehensive Cost of Service Analysis, the results of which formed the basis for recommended rates for FY17. The rates will be evaluated annually and adjusted as appropriate based on changing system conditions. Frequently asked questions related to the Water and Wastewater rate structures are addressed below.

## [How are my Monthly Water and Wastewater Charges Calculated?](#)

Costs associated with billing, meter reading/maintenance, administration, and a portion of fixed utility labor and expenses are generally charged through a fixed rate, with the remainder of fixed operational, capital and variable operating costs recouped through the volumetric rate. The monthly charge for water use includes a fixed charge and a volumetric charge per one thousand gallons of metered water use. Fixed charges increase by meter size based on standard ratios that reflect the relative increase in cost associated with meters of increasing size. Both the fixed and volumetric components vary based on user class/type – Inside City, high elevation Pressure Zone (PZ), Outside City, or Irrigation.

The monthly charge for wastewater includes a fixed monthly charge and a volumetric charge per one thousand gallons based on the average water use for the billing periods of November through May. Similar to water, both the fixed and volumetric components vary based on user Service Class (SC) or type – SC-1, SC-2, SC-3, Grinder, or septic-tank-effluent-pump systems (STEP).

## [Why are Pressure Zone rates different from Inside City rates in the Water rate structure?](#)

The Whitefish water system has five (5) pressure zones throughout the City, some of which require substantial pumping. Certain components of the system, such as supply, treatment, and transmission, are utilized in the same manner by all user types. A significant differentiating factor between the user classes is the additional pumping cost, pumping and storage infrastructure, and related labor/materials associated with providing service to the high elevation pressure zones. To avoid unfairly charging all users for costs only associated with service to high elevation areas, specific rates associated the PZ user class have been calculated to reflect the cost related only to service in high elevation areas. In addition, because the cost of service results showed that PZ rates were not generating revenue commensurate with PZ cost, the FY17 PZ rates are increasing at a higher percentage than Inside City rates.

## [Why are the rates for Irrigation water use increasing more than those for Non-Irrigation water use?](#)

The City of Whitefish has historically supported the subsidization of outdoor water use in an effort to promote City-wide beautification. The City has made significant investment in its water infrastructure, which is sized to meet peak day capacity nearly three (3) times what is used on an average daily basis. The irrigation water use is one contributing factor that drives the size of the facility but is only roughly 22 percent of total water sales in a typical year. As a result, the cost associated with the ability to provide extra capacity for irrigation water is actually quite expensive on a per volume basis. To promote equity and the value of water, the City is working to achieve a balance of charging irrigation rates that are more reflective of the cost of service while also not significantly reducing City-wide irrigation practices.

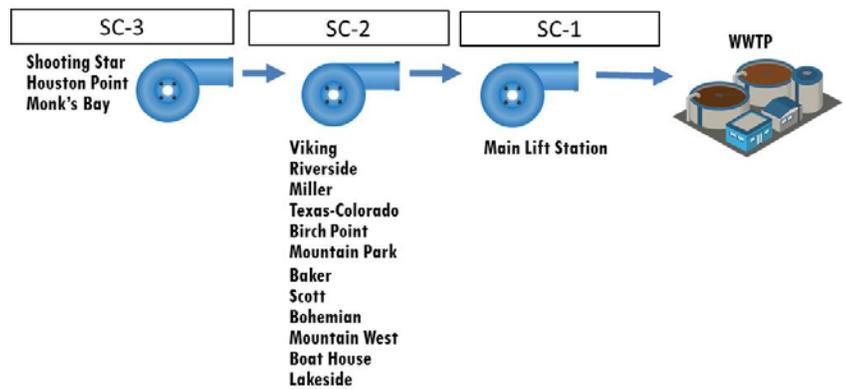
### When does the Sprinkling water rate go into effect and how does it work?

In June through October, water customers that do not have an irrigation meter are allowed up to 12,000 gallons per month at a reduced rate. The amount of water subject to the reduced rate is that water in excess of the average monthly usage for November through May. There are no wastewater charges on this excess volume.

### What is the basis for the Service Class (SC) designations in the Wastewater rate structure?

The City operates an extensive network of collection system gravity mains, forcemains, and lift stations. In addition, the City receives wastewater from areas with centralized STEP systems and Grinder systems that have additional service requirements. Certain areas within the collection system require significant pumping to convey the wastewater across the City to the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). To address costs attributable to the various user types and service zones, the City's Wastewater rate schedule distinguishes between three different service classes in addition to the dedicated rates associated with providing service to Grinder and STEP users:

- SC-1: areas in which wastewater is conveyed by gravity pipelines to the main lift station and is then pumped to the WWTP. Wastewater is pumped one time (1X);
- SC-2: areas in which wastewater is pumped by an intermediate pump station prior to the main lift station, from which it is pumped to the WWTP. In general, the wastewater is pumped two times (2X). Several lift stations that were previously classified as SC-3 have been reclassified as SC-2 based on projected buildout of the City and anticipated operation of the sewer system: Baker, Scott, Bohemian, Mountain West, Boat House, and Lakeside; and
- SC-3: areas in which wastewater is pumped either once or twice by an intermediate pump station to get to the main lift station and is then pumped to the WWTP. Depending upon location, wastewater from SC-3 is pumped a minimum of two times, and sometimes three times (2-3X).



### Why are the criteria for Low Income rate eligibility changing?

The City of Whitefish feels strongly about providing a discount on utility rates to low income users. The current policy extends a discount on the fixed portion of the Water and Wastewater rates to those that show proof of active status in a Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) through the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and to senior citizens providing proof of age 65 or greater. To minimize the potential for discrimination, the City is revising the current policy to eliminate eligibility based on age. Under the revised policy, Low Income rate eligibility will be based strictly on LIEAP eligibility, regardless of age.

### Tell me about the new wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) project

The City is currently in the planning stage for the construction of a new WWTP to meet increasingly stringent environmental standards. Specifically, new requirements for removal of ammonia, nitrogen and phosphorous. Our current lagoon system, which was constructed in 1979, has served the City well but is approaching the end of its useful design life and will not be able to meet the new standards. The recommended project includes replacement of the existing lagoon system with a mechanical WWTP capable of full compliance with the new discharge permit. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2019 and be completed in 2021.

### What is the City doing and what can I do to minimize future Wastewater rate increases?

The City is actively pursuing grant funding to pay for a portion of the new WWTP to minimize the impact to rate payers. The design and ultimately the cost of this new facility are highly dependent on the volume of wastewater the facility must be capable of treating. As a result, it is important that citizens do not increase the volume of wastewater flow by running water from basement sumps through the system. Please be sure that sump discharge lines drain outside of the building so that seepage water can be delivered to the stormwater collection system and so the citizens of Whitefish do not pay for an unnecessarily oversized WWTP.