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Rate increase for water and garbage services?

By [Reid Wright](#) Journal Staff Writer

The Cortez City Council is once again tasked with a decision to potentially raise rates for city water and garbage services in the coming year to keep pace with increasing costs. Since the vote comes during the holidays in a struggling economy, an increase may be hard to swallow for Cortezians.

“We used to fund a lot of our water line projects on grants,” City Public Works Director Jack Nickerson told the council Tuesday. “Those are gone.”

He estimated the increase would bring in an additional \$76,000 in revenues to the water fund, however he said a leak under a water tank would take \$25,000 alone. City staff argue that raising rates in small increments every year or two would be less painful to customers than a large increase down the road.

In a memorandum to the council, Nickerson said the city water fund is currently able to maintain operating costs, but rate adjustments are necessary to keep up with rising costs of repairs, capitol improvement projects and water treatment chemicals.

“These slight adjustments need to be made now in order to provide for future needs, without having to make drastic increases at a later date,” Nickerson wrote. “The city has identified many water lines that will need replacing in the future, as well as periodic improvements to the water plant.”

Nickerson proposed a 25 cent increase in the residential base rate for water service from \$13.50 to \$13.75 per month. A 10 cent increase is proposed to the additional usage rate from \$1.65 per 1,000 gallons to \$1.75.

A new \$25 vicious animal fee is also proposed for situations when animal control needs to be called to allow city water employees to work at a home. City staff believe delinquent users put vicious dogs out to prevent their water from being shut off after non-payment.

Due to increasing fuel costs and a 2.09 percent increase in disposal costs trickling down through the state and Montezuma County Landfill, Nickerson also proposed an approximate 3.4 percent increase to refuse fees.

“We’re over budget on our fuel this year,” he told the council.

Further, the county rate for cardboard recycling is going from \$30.12 to \$41.30 per ton. The city's recycling program operates at a loss and is subsidized by the refuse fund, Nickerson said.

"We're behind the 8-ball again," he said. "We've tried to keep it at a minimum, we're treading water again. If diesel goes up a buck a gallon this year — look out."

He estimated the increase would generate approximately \$21,000 in revenue.

A 50 cent increase is proposed for residential, multi-family residential and small commercial rates from \$14.50 to \$15.

For commercial-sized dumpsters, an increase of 50 cents from \$26.50 to \$27 is proposed for 1.5 or two cubic yard dumpsters as well as a 75 cent increase from \$38.50 to \$39.25.

The proposed increases will go before the council for vote at its Dec. 13 meeting, currently scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at city hall. If approved, the new rates would take effect Jan. 1, 2012.

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