

Memorandum 13-073 Proposed Water and Sewer Rates

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TO: MAYOR WYTHE & HOMER CITY COUNCIL

FROM: WATER & SEWER RATE TASK FORCE

THRU: RENEE KRAUSE, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK I

DATE: APRIL 5, 2013

SUBJECT: PROPOSED WATER & SEWER RATES AND ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Attached is the Water & Sewer Rate Task Force's ("the Task Force") recommendation regarding the rate-setting model for the City of Homer Water & Sewer services. The Task Force was established in accordance with the provisions of Resolution 12-027(A), consisting of five City of Homer residents (Ken Castner, Bob Howard, Sharon Minsch, Lloyd Moore and Terry Yager) and two City Council members (Barbara Howard and Beth Wythe), appointed by Mayor James Hornaday through Memorandum 12-056. Subsequent to the original appointments, community member Terry Yager submitted his resignation from the Task Force and the seat remained unfilled for the duration of the review process. Also, following the October elections, Beth Wythe was authorized to continue on the Task Force through Resolution 12-094 following her election as Mayor. Barbara Howard resigned from the Task Force in November and was replaced by Council Member Beau Burgess through Memorandum 12-161(A). Copies of all Resolutions and Memoranda are included in the appendix of this report as supporting documentation.

Following the establishment of the Task Force the initial meeting was held May 9, 2012. At this meeting the Task Force established the framework for a meeting schedule for meeting the first and third Tuesday of each month; the first Tuesday being a work session and the third Tuesday being a regular meeting. Work sessions and meetings were scheduled in the conference room with the exception of public hearings which were held in the Council Chambers.. The schedule was adjusted from time-to-time to accommodate holidays and scheduling conflicts for members of the Task Force.

The initial meetings of the Task Force were primarily focused on determining the types and sources of information that would be required to allow the Task Force to more fully understand rate making concepts and the nature of the City of Homer's current rate design. This process included:

- Reviewing the 1991 Water and Wastewater Utilities Rate Study conducted by KPMG Peat Marwick.
- Reviewing the 1997 Utility Rate Study prepared by Montgomery Watson. Task Force Members Castner and Moore were participants in that rate study as well and were able to provide valuable insight into the resulting rate model which was successfully used by the City until recent history.
- Reviewing budget documents from several prior years, as well as more current information included in the proposed 2013 budget.
- Reviewing the areas served by the Water & Sewer Enterprise and discussions related to potential users that have a disproportionate impact on the existing infrastructure. These include the requirements of the system specific to providing fire hydrant services, commercial building sprinkler services, and the expense of delivering water to, and returning sewage from the Spit.
- The requirements for certified staff and the staffing plan for the water and sewer treatment plants were reviewed, as was the allocation of other staff services to the Water & Sewer Enterprise.
- The loss of large volumes of treated water as a result of dead-ended lines were a major concern and were considered regularly throughout the process as this appeared to be a substantial expense to the system as a whole.
- Rates from other nearby communities were reviewed and the reasons for the difference in operating costs, as well as anticipated impacts of new regulations on these systems as compared to the Homer system, were discussed.
- User data was reviewed to develop a sense of the "average" user, and again to develop a better understanding of the disproportionate users.
- Staff provided an overview of both the water system from treatment to return, and the sewer system from return

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to treatment.

- Fire protection expenses were also discussed periodically as a substantial contributor to the expense of the system that was not adequately or properly allocated.

Following the collection and review of this information the Task Force considered a variety of ratemaking formulas giving consideration to fairness and consumer satisfaction. The following rate evaluation illustration was provided in the American Water Works Association manual M54, Developing Rates for Small Systems (2004, p. 38).

OBJECTIVES INCREASING RATE MODEL UNIFORM RATE MODEL SEASONAL RATE MODEL FLAT RATE MODEL
FAIRNESS
CONSERVATION
EQUITY
COST OF SERVICE BASED
UNDERSTANDABLE
FEASIBLE
DEFENDABLE
REVENUE STABILITY
COST RECOVERY
LEGAL

Low Satisfactory High

Upon considering the various rate design options, the Task Force determined that focusing its energy on designing a commodity based, uniform rate structure that considered expenses that were not directly related to the delivery of service to all consumers, such as system size due to fire hydrants, delivering water to the Spit, water used to flush dead-end lines, and water leakage in the harbor. The Task Force also considered extraordinary expenses on the sewer system including the impact of high biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) waste which increases the cost of waste processing and the requirement in some areas for lift-stations to deliver waste to the treatment plant.

The recommendations of this report are based on this information and result in a balanced budget for the Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund. The recommendations also provide a new rate model that will ensure the collection of the required funding into the future. Distributing the expense for the system more equitably based on a cost-causer, cost-payer is the foundation of the proposed rate model.

The recommendations of the Task Force include:

- Replacing the current rate model with the proposed commodity based model found on page A1-A4.
- Continue to periodically review the allocation of administrative and other overhead expenses to ensure they properly reflect the actual expenses being charged to water & sewer.
- Clearly delineate water and sewer rates, by location, in future budget documents (i.e., revenue from City facilities and related expense lines in Port & Harbor, Water & Sewer, and other administrative budgets.)
- Confirm that ALL City of Homer facilities receiving water and sewer services are being properly metered and billed.
- Consider alternatives for refreshing the water in deadened lines that does not result in the waste of large volumes of treated water.
- Renew the contract with Kachemak City and ensure that the rates adequately reflect the cost of this area on the system as a whole, including any added administrative expenses.
- Consider methods for rate-setting that will not allow political influences to result in the under collection of rates in the future.

While this review may not have fully exhausted the rate design possibilities available to a rates consulting firm, it is the belief of the Task Force that the information and recommendations found in this report have met the fundamental review requirements that the Task Force was requested to consider in the development of their

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recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

HOMER WATER & SEWER TASK FORCE

Chair: Beth Wythe

Vice Chair: Beauregard Burgess

Current Members: Ken Castner, Robert Howard, Sharon Minch, and Lloyd Moore

Related Resolutions **Memorandum - Related Resolutions:** [Resolution 13-048\(S-2\)\(A-3\) Amending the Fee Schedule Water and Sewer Fees](#).

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