

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Sewer Rate Increase

#### How much is the DPU proposing to increase the sewer rate?

The Department of Public Utilities is proposing sewer rate increases covering a four-year period that require approval by the Board of Public Utilities and adoption by the County Council. The increases are across the board – monthly service fees, flat rates for residential customers and variable rates for commercial and non-residential customers.

FY 2023	2 percent
FY 2024	2 percent
FY 2025	2 percent
FY 2026	2 percent

#### Why do we need these sewer rate increases and what do they cover?

Due to the topography in Los Alamos, DPU needs to maintain and operate two wastewater treatment plants, a complicated network of pipes, pumps and lift stations. While the City of Santa Fe requires only four lift stations to service 83,000 citizens, Los Alamos requires 27 lift stations for 18,000 citizens.

The Los Alamos wastewater treatment plant was replaced in 2007 and DPU is still paying off that loan. We have now secured a low interest loan to replace the White Rock wastewater treatment plant, which was built in the 1960s. As a condition of the loan DPU needs to demonstrate adequate revenue to pay back the loan.

To keep the system that collects and treats wastewater resilient and sound, DPU has planned future capital projects to:

- Ensure adequate infrastructure to support increased demand for new housing in both White Rock and the Los Alamos townsite,
- Repair and replace aging infrastructure to reduce leaks and prevent sewer main breaks, including several lift stations and vulnerable vitrified clay pipes,
- Maintain safe, quality effluent that meets all federal and state standards.

Further, in 2016 the Board of Public Utilities adopted financial policies to build cash reserves for each utility fund to ensure the department’s ability to meet operational needs, handle system retirement obligations, and meet debt service requirements, and in preparation for unanticipated system failures or external disruptions.

**DPU has been raising sewer rates each year. When will these rate increases slow down?**

The Board of Public Utilities approved an approach to improve the financial health of the wastewater fund, pay down the existing loan for the Los Alamos wastewater treatment plant and build reserves to replace the White Rock plant through financing. DPU rate increases are as follows:

FY 2020	6 percent
FY 2021	3 percent
FY 2022	2 percent
FY 2023	2 percent
FY 2024	2 percent
FY 2025	2 percent
FY 2026	2 percent

Currently, DPU is proposing an ordinance that has gained approval of BPU and now awaits Council review and adoption. It covers four years of rate increases in one ordinance, as represented in the orange cells above.

**Where can I find the draft ordinance?**

The draft ordinance is included in this PDF starting on page 6. Current rates are always available on the DPU website at <https://ladpu.com/rates>.

**What is the process for raising the sewer rates?**

The BPU held a public hearing on January 19<sup>th</sup> and approved the ordinance. It will be introduced at the County Council meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup>. The Council will then hold a public hearing to consider adoption at the February 22<sup>nd</sup> County Council meeting.

**When will these rates take effect?**

The proposed ordinance states that the increases will go into effect as follows:

FY 2023	October 1, 2022	2 percent
FY 2024	October 1, 2023	2 percent
FY 2025	October 1, 2024	2 percent
FY 2026	October 1, 2025	2 percent

**Are the BPU and County Council locked into these rates for the next four years?**

No. Rates can always be modified if the BPU and County Council determine it is appropriate and approve and adopt a new rate ordinance.

**Has the DPU neglected the wastewater/sewer infrastructure?**

Maintaining the infrastructure is an ongoing process. DPU has carefully prioritized capital improvement projects. For the next 10 years going forward, DPU plans to reinvest \$7,677,584 in wastewater collection and \$11,429,000 in wastewater treatment systems. These projects include sewer main restoration and replacements, lift station maintenance and replacements, and upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities and equipment. These projects do not include the construction of the new \$30,000,000 White Rock Wastewater Treatment Facility.

**How will these rates impact my bill?**

For residential customers:

	Current	Oct. 01, 2022	Oct. 01, 2023	Oct. 01, 2024	Oct. 01, 2025
<b>Monthly Svc Fee</b>	\$12.35	\$12.60	\$12.85	\$13.11	\$13.37
<b>Flat Rate</b>	\$44.72	\$45.61	\$46.52	\$47.45	\$48.40
<b>Total Bill</b>	<b>\$57.07</b>	<b>\$58.21</b>	<b>\$59.37</b>	<b>\$60.56</b>	<b>\$61.77</b>

### What if these increases are not approved?

Delaying the replacement of the White Rock wastewater treatment plant is not an option. Violating permits due to sewer backups and overflows is also not desirable and most likely would result in fines from the New Mexico Environment Department.

### How do these rates compare with other communities?

Community	Monthly Bill Based on	
	6000 gal	14000 gal
Los Alamos Current Rate	\$57.07	\$57.07
Los Alamos Proposed Rate FY23	\$58.21	\$58.21
Los Alamos Proposed Rate FY24	\$59.37	\$59.37
Los alamos Proposed Rate FY25	\$60.56	\$60.56
Los alamos Proposed Rate FY26	\$61.77	\$61.77
Silver City in town	\$25.76	\$51.44
Silver City out of town	\$32.52	\$58.20
Ruidoso	\$79.71	\$111.95
Angel Fire	\$113.29	\$206.01
Santa Fe City	\$44.56	\$90.72
Aztec	\$55.95	\$87.95

### Is there any assistance for individuals on fixed incomes?

DPU has a Utility Assistance Program to aid qualified low-income residential families. A copy of the UAP brochure can be downloaded at: <https://ladpu.com/UAPBrochure>.

Funded by DPU customer donations, the program is available to:

1. Qualifying low-income customers for the months of October through March
2. Qualifying low-income customers over age 65, year-round
3. Customers who demonstrate a financial hardship due to unforeseen circumstances may qualify for a single, lump sum credit.

Customers can contact the Customer Care Center to apply or to donate to the program – 505 662 8333 or [CustomerCare@lacnm.us](mailto:CustomerCare@lacnm.us).

Other programs available to assist customers' utility bills including water and sewer expenses are:  
LA Cares, 505 661 8105, or Self-help, Inc, 505 662 4666.

The State of New Mexico offers the NM Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist with energy bills, 505 753 2271.

**INCORPORATED COUNTY OF LOS ALAMOS CODE ORDINANCE 02-325**

**AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 40, ARTICLE III, SECTIONS 40-201  
AND 40-202 OF THE CODE OF THE INCORPORATED COUNTY OF  
LOS ALAMOS PERTAINING TO THE SEWAGE SERVICE RATE SCHEDULE  
AND DETERMINATION OF CHARGES**

**WHEREAS**, the Incorporated County of Los Alamos, New Mexico (“County”) operates a Department of Public Utilities to provide utility services to its citizens; and

**WHEREAS**, County utilizes a Board of Public Utilities (“BPU”) to oversee the Department of Public Utilities; and

**WHEREAS**, among the responsibilities of the BPU is ensuring that the proper utilization of existing operating funds, capital and personnel resources in order to maintain an acceptable level of service; and

**WHEREAS**, the BPU is also charged with identifying and planning any needed expansion and extensions of the existing utility system; and

**WHEREAS**, the BPU must further ensure the effective and harmonious operation of the Utilities Department using County resources; and

**WHEREAS**, it is the further duty of the BPU to prepare a plan for routine operations, capital expansion of the systems and replacement activities; and

**WHEREAS**, while engaging in this planning activity, the BPU has recognized routine operating cost increases resulting from inflationary pressures that must be covered through revenues in order to maintain appropriate levels of service to the citizens of the County; and

**WHEREAS**, while engaging in this planning activity, the BPU has also come to realize that County must engage in capital upgrades to the sanitary sewer system in order to maintain appropriate levels of service to the citizens of the County; and

**WHEREAS**, construction bids for the replacement of the White Rock Water Resource Reclamation Facility (WRRF) exceeded prior estimates and increases to debt service must be covered through revenues in order to maintain appropriate levels of service to the citizens of the County and meet discharge permit requirements.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE  
INCORPORATED COUNTY OF LOS ALAMOS, as follows:**

**Section 1.** Section 40-201 of the Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 40-201. - Sewage service rate schedules.

(a) Residential rate service schedule 6-A is applicable only for normal domestic sewer service for individual residences, dwelling units and apartments, where each unit is individually metered for water.

(b) Residential rate service schedule 6-G is applicable only for normal domestic sewer service for multi-family dwelling units, apartments, and subdivisions or residential complexes where each unit is not individually metered by the county for water.

(c) Commercial rate service schedule 6-K is applicable to all nonresidential sewer services.

(d) Customer charges. Each sewage customer account shall be billed a customer charge of ~~\$11.76~~ \$12.35 per ~~billing cycle~~ month per account for billings processed through ~~September 30, 2020~~; ~~\$12.11~~ per month per account for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2020~~; and ~~\$12.35~~ per month per account for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2021~~. September 30, 2022; \$12.60 per month per account for billings processed after September 30, 2022; \$12.85 per month per account for billings processed after September 30, 2023; \$13.11 per month per account for billings processed after September 30, 2024; and \$13.37 per month per account for billings processed after September 30, 2025.

(e) Fixed charges.

(1) To each customer billed under rate service schedule 6-A, ~~\$42.56~~ \$44.72 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed through ~~September 30, 2020~~; ~~\$43.84~~ per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2020~~; and ~~\$44.72~~ per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2021~~. September 30, 2022; \$45.61 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2022; \$46.52 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2023; \$47.45 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2024; and \$48.40 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2025.

(2) To each customer billed under rate service schedule 6-G ~~\$35.46~~ \$37.25 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed through ~~September 30, 2020~~; ~~\$36.52~~ per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2020~~; and ~~\$37.25~~ per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2021~~. September 30, 2022; \$38.00 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2022; \$38.76 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2023; \$39.54 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2024; and \$40.33 per month per dwelling unit for billings processed after September 30, 2025.

(3) ~~To each customer billed under rate service schedule 6-K:~~

<del>Water Meter Size</del>	<del>Service Charge Per Month</del>
<del>Under 2 inch</del>	<del>Reserved</del>
<del>2 inch</del>	<del>Reserved</del>
<del>3 inch</del>	<del>Reserved</del>
<del>4 inch</del>	<del>Reserved</del>
<del>6 inch</del>	<del>Reserved</del>

(f) Variable rate. The variable rate shall be applicable to customers billed under rate service schedule 6-K. The variable rate shall be ~~\$20.03~~ \$21.04 per 1,000 gallons of potable water for billings processed through ~~September 30, 2020~~; ~~\$20.63~~ per 1,000 gallons for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2020~~; and ~~\$21.04~~ per 1,000 gallons for billings processed after ~~September 30, 2021~~. September 30, 2022; \$21.46 per 1,000 gallons for billings processed after September 30, 2022; \$21.89 per 1,000 gallons for billings processed after September 30, 2023; \$22.33 per

1,000 gallons for billings processed after September 30, 2024; and \$22.78 per 1,000 gallons for billings processed after September 30, 2025.

**Section 2.** Section 40-202 of the Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 40-202. - Determination of charges.

(a) Residential customers ~~(6-A and 6-G)~~ will be billed for sewer service the customer charge pursuant to section 40-201 (d) plus the fixed charge applicable pursuant to section 40-201 (e), ~~plus, if applicable, charges under section 40-203. For calculation of charges under section 40-203 the volume measurement for residential customers will be 1,000 gallons multiplied by the number of occupants of the residence.~~

(b) Commercial customers ~~(6-K)~~ will be billed for sewer service the customer charge applicable pursuant to section 40-201 (d) plus the variable charge applicable pursuant to section 40-201 (f) if applicable, charges under section 40-203, plus an amount equal to the variable rate multiplied by the customer's adjusted winter average or monthly average usage of potable water, as metered during the previous winter measuring period or other measuring period as determined appropriate by the department of public utilities based on seasonal or other nontraditional water usage pattern. The minimum variable amount shall be 2,000 gallons. Plus, if applicable, charges under section 40-203.

~~(c) Reserved.~~

(dc) The winter measuring period is defined as the three consecutive billing periods beginning with the first billing period with a billing date in the month of December. The monthly average usage of potable water metered during the winter measuring period shall apply for a 12-month period beginning on the first day of the billing cycle that falls in the month of April of the year in which the winter measuring period ends.

(ed) In the event the customer's water usage was initiated after the commencement of the previous winter measuring period, the monthly average usage of potable water shall be deemed to be equal to the average monthly usage of potable water for other comparable customers within the same class in the county.

**Section 3. Effective Date.** This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption with the amended rates being applied at the next billing following the effective date of the ordinance.

**Section 4. Severability.** Should any section, paragraph, clause or provision of this ordinance, for any reason, be held to be invalid or unenforceable, the invalidity or unenforceability of such section, paragraph, clause or provision shall not affect any of the remaining provisions of this ordinance.



**Section 5. Repealer.** All ordinances or resolutions, or parts thereof, inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed only to the extent of such inconsistency. This repealer shall not be construed to revive any ordinance or resolution, or part thereof, heretofore repealed.

**ADOPTED** this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2022.

**COUNCIL OF THE INCORPORATED  
COUNTY OF LOS ALAMOS**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Council Chair**

**ATTEST: (SEAL)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Naomi D. Maestas  
Los Alamos County Clerk**