

WAUKESHA

Public Service Commission to host hearing on water rates

Residents encouraged to
make comments, explore
conservation options

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WAUKESHA — Following Waukesha Water Utility's announced increase in monthly water rates, a public hearing hosted by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission will be held July 19 at 3 p.m.

According to its website, the PSC is an independent regulatory agency that "ensures safe, reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible utility services and equitable access to telecommunications and broadband services."

At the hearing, the PSC will gather more information from Waukesha Water Utility and consider public comments; no decision regarding the approval of the proposed rates will be made at that time.

See **WATER**, PAGE 8A

Water

From Page 1A

Nevertheless, Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak says the hearing with the PSC is the next step toward having those rates approved.

"We apply for the rate increase through the Public Service Commission. And we're regulated by the Public Service Commission, so they have to review all of our financial records and determine what the rate increase is going to be," he said. "First, there's the hearing. They collect all the public comments. They have a chance to respond to all the public comments and then they go through and they make their final decision ... This is one of the steps in the process of us applying for rates and having those rates approved through the Public Service Commission."

Duchniak said the Waukesha Water Utility requested that the rate increase be completed in two steps over two years. The first

Projected schedule for rate increases (based on average customer using 4,000 gallons of water per month):

Current rate — \$102 per month
October 2023 — \$117 per month (+14.7%)
October 2024 — \$135 per month (+15.4%)
January 2026 — \$147 per month (+8.9%)
January 2027 — \$154 per month (+4.8%)

increase would come on Oct. 1 of this year, and the next would come on Oct. 1, 2024.

A typical resident who uses about 4,000 gallons of water monthly would see charges increase from \$102 per month to \$117 per month in October 2023. The rate would rise again to \$135 in October 2024. More increases would follow in January 2026 with rates hitting \$147 per month and once more in January 2027 with a monthly charge of \$154. Rates account for the water, return flow, and wastewater charges.

Duchniak notes that though the public isn't exactly thrilled to be spending more money, residents seem to acknowledge the necessity of finding a new water supply.

"I don't necessarily know that the public is going to be happy about any rate increase. However, I think that the residents of this city understand the project that we've been implementing to address the radium issue here in the city of Waukesha," he said.

Compared to other options, bringing in water from Lake Michigan was by far the best option for the city, he said. "Going to the Great Lakes water was shown to be the most cost-effective route for us to come into compliance with the radium standard and also provided us with the long-term sustainable supply we needed for our residents," Duchniak said. "So, while there is going to be a higher cost associated with the water and returning that water to the Great Lakes, this will be a water supply that will be in place for the long-term and our residents won't ever have to worry about water again."

Water conservation options

In order to help residents conserve water and minimize costs, Waukesha Water Utility has a number of programs in place. To learn about the rain barrel and high-efficiency toilet and shower head rebate programs, visit <https://waukesha-water.com/wtc.html>. Waukesha Water Utility also offers similar programs for businesses.

Duchniak also recommends eliminating or, at the very least, optimizing one's water softener once the transition to Great Lakes water has occurred.

"This water will be more than 60 percent softer than our current supply. Which means that (residents) may or may not need a water softener. That will be a personal choice," he said. "What we're recommending that people do is turn off their water softeners and bypass them once we have Great Lakes water. Then they can make that decision for themselves."

According to Duchniak, other communities with Great Lakes water don't often utilize water softeners. "Ninety-five percent of the people in the city of New Berlin, when they switched from groundwater to Lake Michigan water, eliminated their water softeners within three years. So, there is potential savings that people could have with eliminating their water softeners," he said. "At a minimum, they will want to have their water softeners optimized ... They'll want to optimize that for the best performance they can have, which means they'll use less salt, which also costs less money."

Accessing the hearing

The hearing will take place via Zoom. The public is encouraged to attend over the internet at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/psc-hearings> or connect via telephone by dialing 1-312-626-6799 and entering meeting ID 809 513 2930 #.

The PSC also plans on livestreaming the event. To access the livestream, visit <http://psc.wi.gov> and navigate to the "News & Events" dropdown menu. From there, select the item labeled "Broadcasts."

The public may testify in the hearing. A person may participate in one of three ways. To file a web comment, visit the PSC's website, navigate to the "Commission Action" dropdown menu and select the item labeled "File a Public Comment." Select the "File a comment" link that appears on the next page for docket number 6240-WR-111. Web comments will be accepted until July 21.

The public may also make a live comment at the hearing once party and commission staff testimony has concluded. The administrative law judge will receive live comments by stating the name of each member of the public connected to the hearing one at a time and ask if they would like to comment.

Comments may also be submitted by U.S. mail. Comments mailed to the PSC will be accepted until July 21. The following address should be used: Attn: Docket 6240-WR-111 Comments, Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 7854, Madison, WI 53707-7854.

Documents, schedules, and other information regarding the hearing can be accessed via the PSC's website. Select the "eServices" dropdown menu and select "Docket Search (CMS)." Enter 6240-WR-111 on the next page in the space labeled "Case #" then click "Search."

For more information about the upcoming switch to Great Lakes water visit <https://greatwateralliance.com/transition/> or call 262-521-5272.