Council Approves Sewer Rate Increase

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Sewer rates are set to rise this summer. During the City Council’s regular meeting on Thursday the council voted in favor of a 5 percent rate increase per year for five years.

The increase comes after the city contracted with CH2M Hill for a sewer rate study to consider the personnel, capital and other costs associated with operating the sewer system. The results of that study were presented during the council’s May 20 work session.

City Manager Aimee Kniaziowski said it is a very complex and aging sewer collection system, and the wastewater treatment plant is going to need significant repairs in the not so distant future.

“So we have to also anticipate those critical things that are coming down the road. The compost facility, which the design is being completed at this point, and we need to start looking at refurbishment of the wastewater treatment plant. We’ve got our NPDES permit – that’s our discharge permit into the waters of Kodiak from our wastewater treatment plant. Those regulations have changed substantially since ours were issued and we’re going to be requiring some changes, we don’t know what those look like.”

Kniaziowski said the sewer system doesn’t just serve city residents. She said there are more than 46 miles of sewer collection pipes, and many of them are quite old.

“We have sections we’ve been, Mark and his crew, we’ve developed a very methodical replacement plan for both water and sewer over the course of time and we’re making very good progress on that.”

Councilman Charlie Davidson said he supported the rate increase because much of the infrastructure in the city’s sewer and water system needs to be upgraded or replaced.

“You can see the extreme cost and complexity of what we have to deal with. Plus you know it’s dealing also with a lot of federal mandates on the clean water act and the state agencies.”

Councilman John Whiddon said he also supported the increase but cautioned the city about long-term cost hikes.

“We have a system that goes back, dates back to 1964, right after the earthquake. So we have a really ancient system in many cases and a very geographically unstable area. So we have a very, very difficult system to maintain and to replace – very costly. That said and noting that there’s a continual increase in rates over the next five years and potentially up to the next ten years, I am concerned that we always do our utmost, I know staff does, I know staff does their best to keep costs in line and that we have to be able to live and work in this environment, we have to accept that it does cost to provide those services. But again, I would just really encourage staff to do everything they can to keep those rates certainly within the line and scope of the rate study.”

The council passed the rate increase resolution in a 4-0 vote. Councilmen Terry Haines and Rich Walker were not present during Thursday’s meeting. The new rates go into effect July 1.