Smart Management for Small Water Systems

Utility Rate Setting & Financial Planning Training

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Macon, GA
March 10, 2016

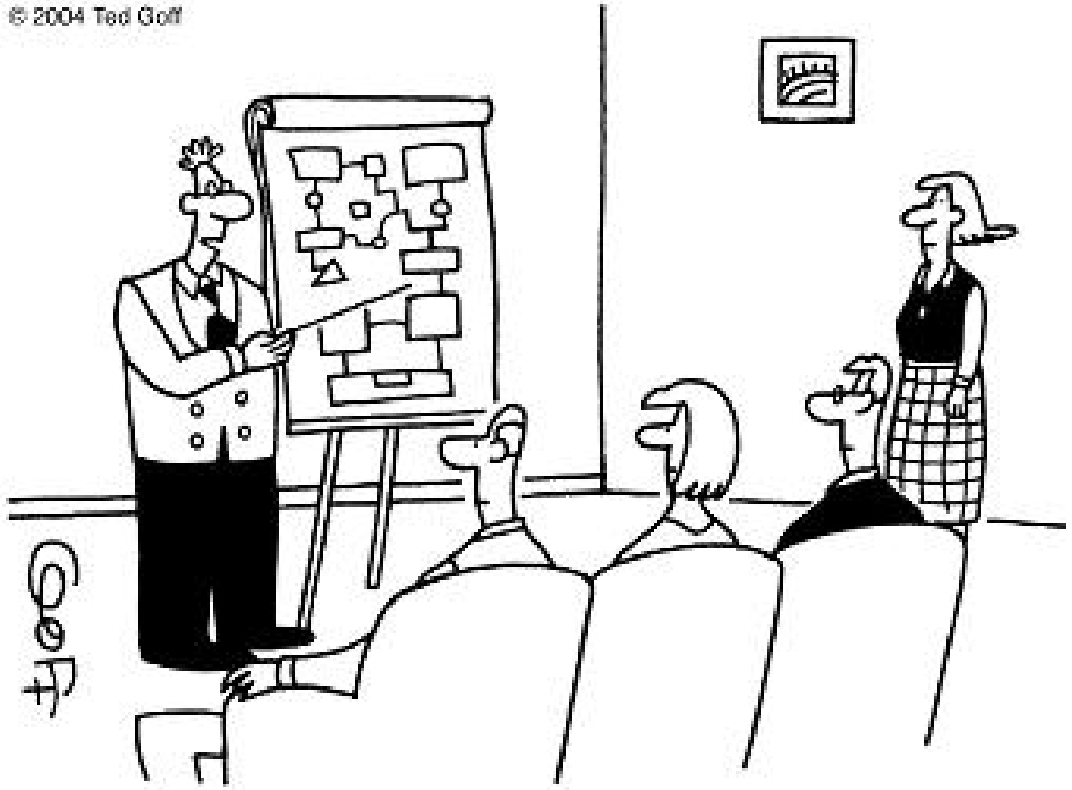
EFCN environmental finance center network

American Water Works Association

UNC ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER

This program is made possible under a cooperative agreement with EPA.

Water System Revenues



"This part of the plan will be funded with all the unused money we must have laying around someplace."

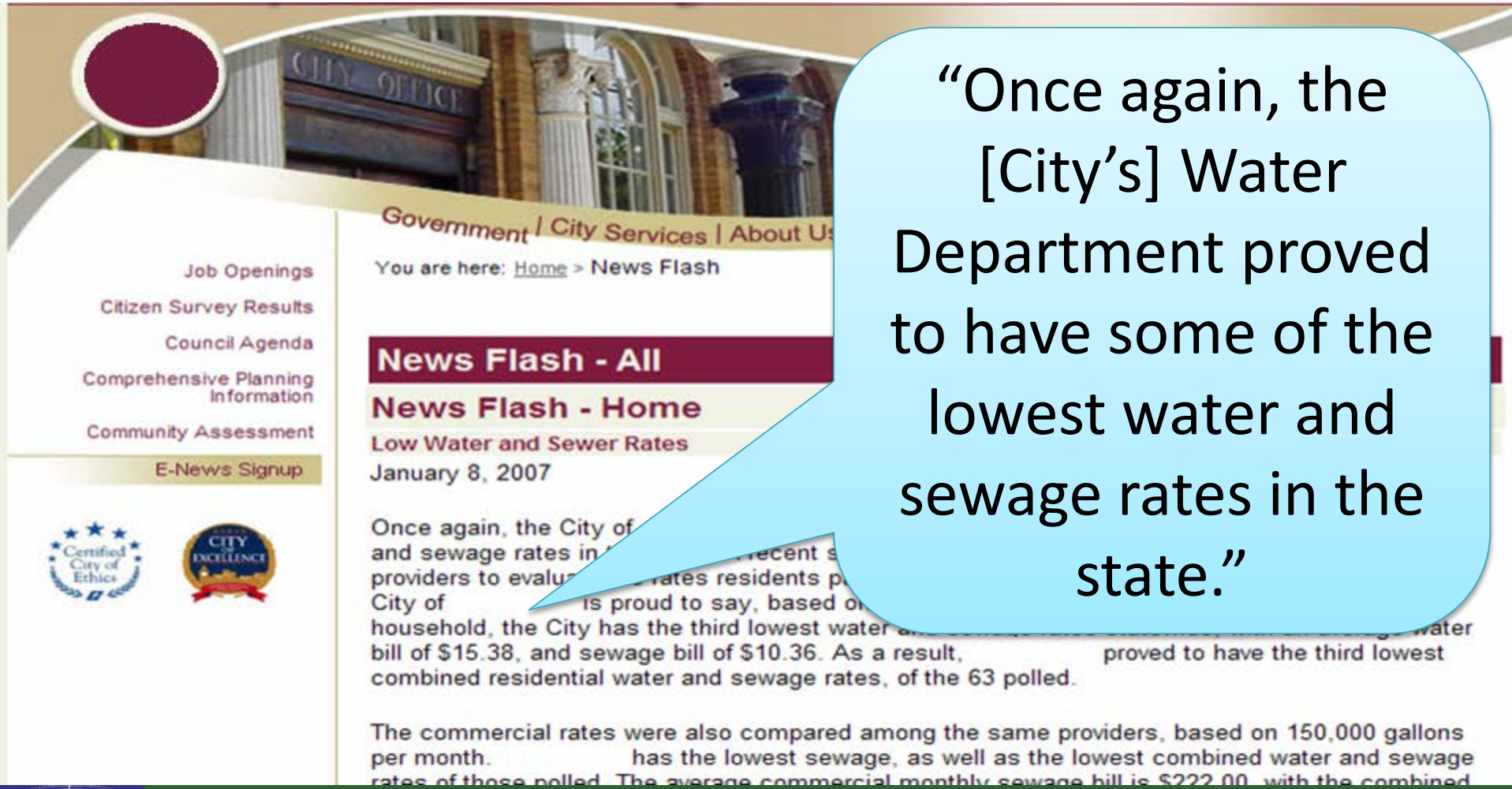
Session Objectives

- Understand how to pay for the costs of running your water system

- Look more closely at your rates

How much money do you need?

Systems Love Low Rates, but...



"Once again, the [City's] Water Department proved to have some of the lowest water and sewage rates in the state."

Will it provide sufficient cost recovery?

What exactly does this include?

Are we following the applicable laws?

Will revenues be resilient to changing water demands?

Are we allocating the costs to the right customers?

Do these rates send the right signals to our customers, based on our objectives?

Will our customers understand these rates?

Will our customers be able to pay these rates?

Learn essential background information about rates

Determine critical characteristics of your utility and community

Design the most appropriate rate structure

Cost-of-Service Study

Compute the rates using projected costs and revenues

Re-evaluate/adjust rate structure to fit primary objectives

The Process of Setting Rates

Basic Principles

- Aim at full cost pricing
- Set equitable rates
- Share rate structure with customers
- Rate should be easy to understand
- Rates should be examined annually
- Consider fixed costs vs. variable costs
- Allow for reserve account(s)
- *Promote water conservation?*
- *Promote economic development?*

“Full Cost Pricing”

- Operations & maintenance expenditures
- Taxes and accounting costs
- Contingencies for emergencies
- Principal and interest on long-term debt
- Reserves for capital improvement
- Source water protection

Ways To Pay

- Pay as you go (current receipts)
- Save in advance and pay
- Pay later (someone loans you money)
- Grants (let someone else pay)

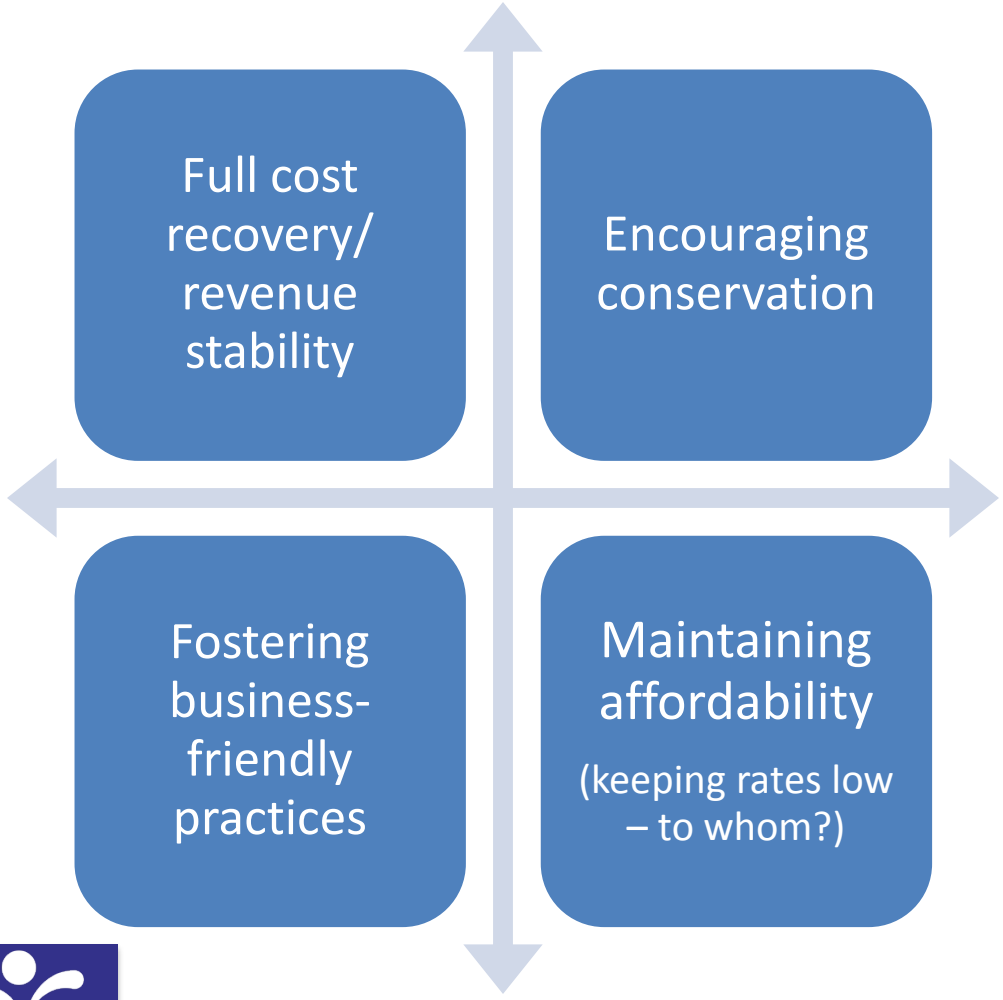
Grants Aren't Completely Free Money

- Application for the grant can be expensive – staff time and money
- Applications can take months to process
- Often lots of strings attached
- Often require a percentage match
- Lots of competition
- Difficult to sustain

Rates & Monthly Charges

- What type of rates and monthly charges do you levy?
  - Charges based on metered usage?
  - Flat monthly charges?
  - Something else?
  - Nothing?

Rank Your Rate Setting Objectives



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Refer to this list and focus on the highest ranked objectives when following the guidelines for selecting the appropriate rate structure design.

What are your rate setting objectives?

Elements of Rate Structure Designs

1. Customer classes/distinction
2. Billing period
3. Base charge
4. Consumption allowance included with base charge
5. Volumetric rate structure
6. (If applicable) Number of blocks, block sizes and rate differentials
7. (Optional) Drought Rates
8. Frequency of rate changes

Customer Classes/Distinctions

- One rate structure for all
- Target: All are equal

Customer Classes/Distinctions

- Separate rate structure for residential, irrigation, commercial, industrial, governmental, or wholesale customers

- Target: Specific type of customer

Customer Classes/Distinctions

- One rate structure, but with different base charges based on meter size

- Target: Non-residential or multi-family housing

Customer Classes/Distinctions

- One rate structure for all, but with blocks that implicitly only target non-residential use

- Target: Non-residential

Customer Classes/Distinctions

- Different rates for customers outside municipal limits/service area boundaries

- Target: “Outside” customers

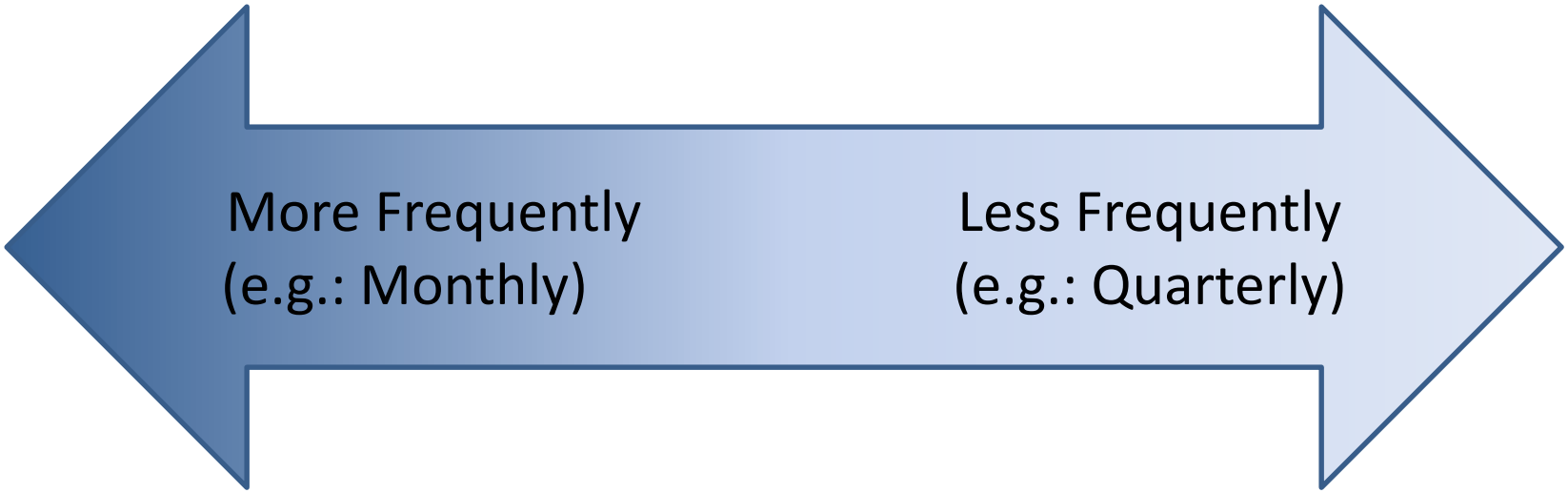
Customer Classes/Distinctions

- Negotiated rate structure with individual high-use customers (typically an industrial customer)

- Target: Only one customer

Mark your Customer Classes on your sheet

Billing Period

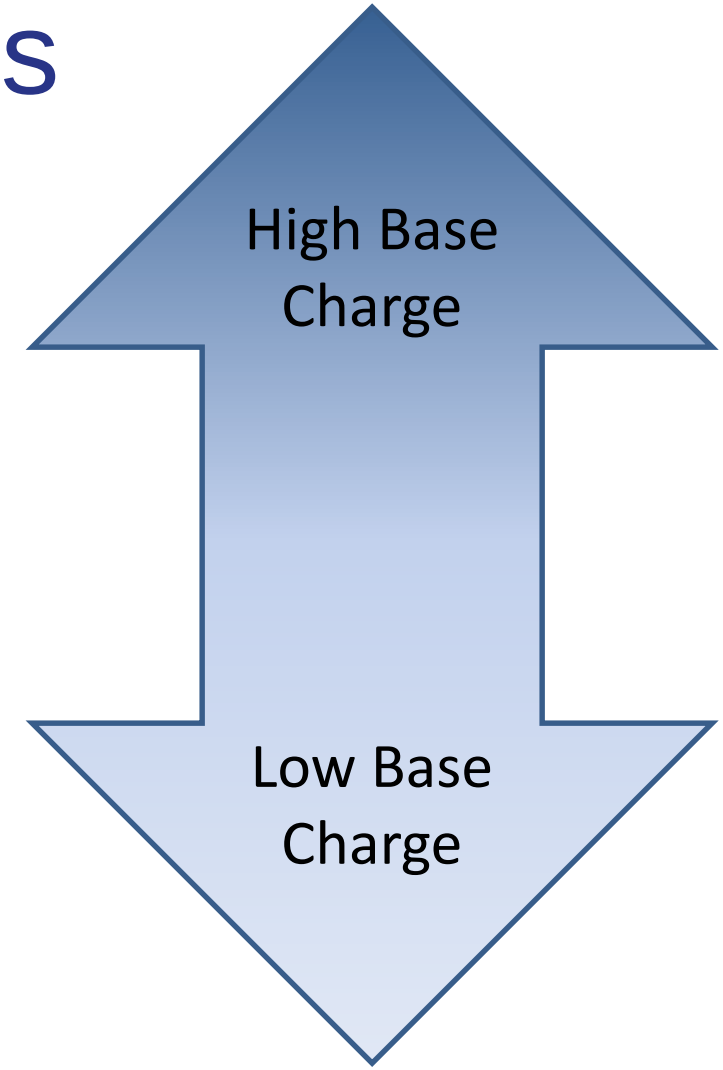


Suggestion: Use a monthly billing period if you can afford it

Mark your Billing Period on your sheet

Base Charges

Suggestion: Smaller utilities should lean towards higher base charges



Mark your Base Charge on your sheet

Consumption Allowance with Base Charge

Do not include any (0 gallons)	Include some amount (e.g. 1,000 gal/mo)	Include high amount (e.g. 3,000 gal/mo)

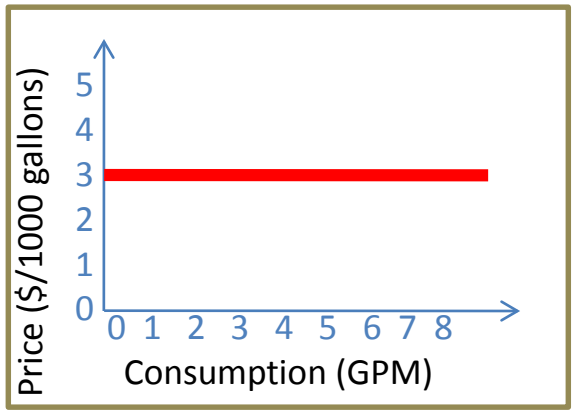
Suggestion: For systems with low base charges, do not include any consumption allowance. For systems with high base charges but wish to encourage conservation, keep consumption allowance low, if any.

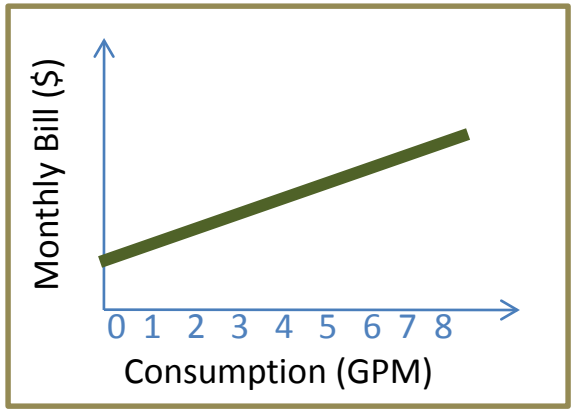
Mark your Consumption Included in the Base Charge on your sheet

Volumetric Rate Structure

Uniform ("Flat") Rates

- Fair and simple

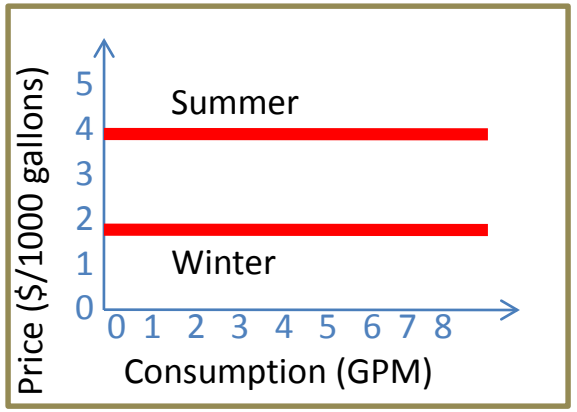


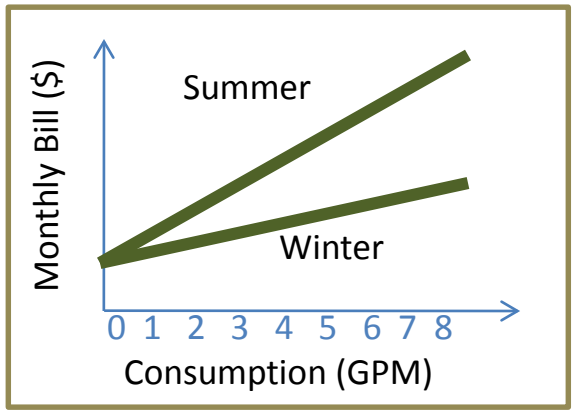


Volumetric Rate Structure

Seasonal (Uniform) Rates

- Conservation-oriented, good for seasonal communities

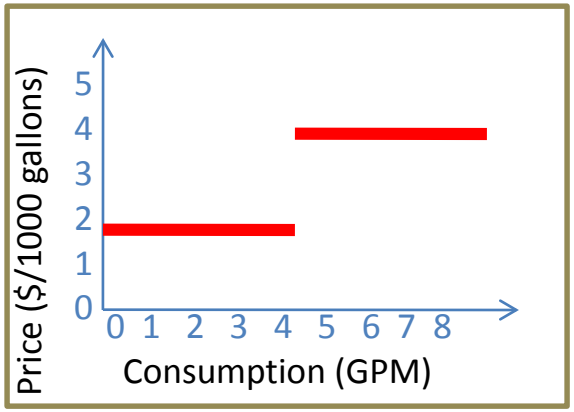


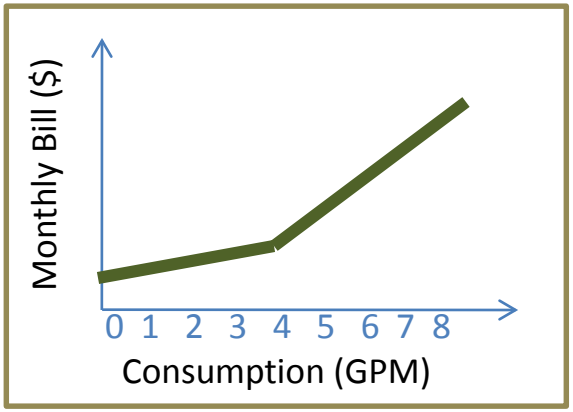


Volumetric Rate Structure

Increasing Block Rates

- Conservation-oriented
- Consider large families

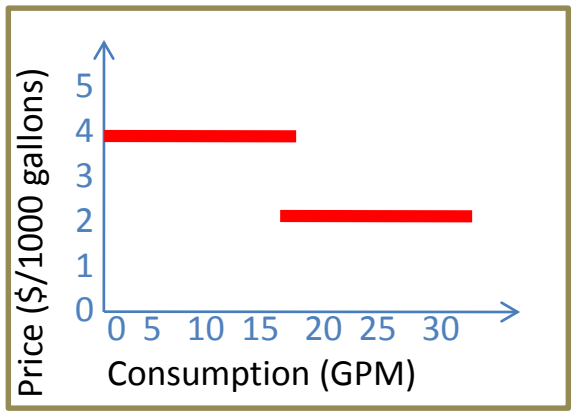


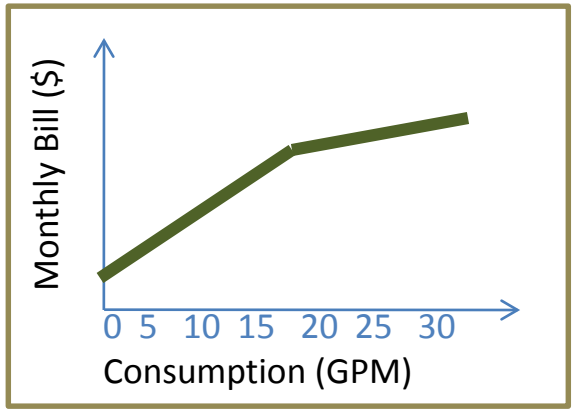


Volumetric Rate Structure

Decreasing Block Rates

- Provide price break for large users (e.g.: commercial)
- Do not use for residential





Mark your Rate Structure on your sheet

(If Applicable) Block Designs

For block rate structures to be effective:

- Decide on the correct number of blocks
- Decide on where the blocks should end/start
- Set significant rate differentials between blocks

(If Applicable) Block Designs

For block rate structures to be effective:

- Keep in mind your base charge and consumption allowance
- Meter reading must be punctual, and meters must be replaced frequently
- Think about large families

If you have block rates, mark your Number of Blocks on your sheet

(Optional) Drought Rates

- Prepare for drought in advance: create an ordinance *in advance* to give the utility the ability to raise rates temporarily during a water shortage scenario (sometimes called “drought surcharges”).

Mark whether your have Drought Rates on your sheet

How Rates and Usage Interact

Set rates based on projected water use

Raising rates lowers water use

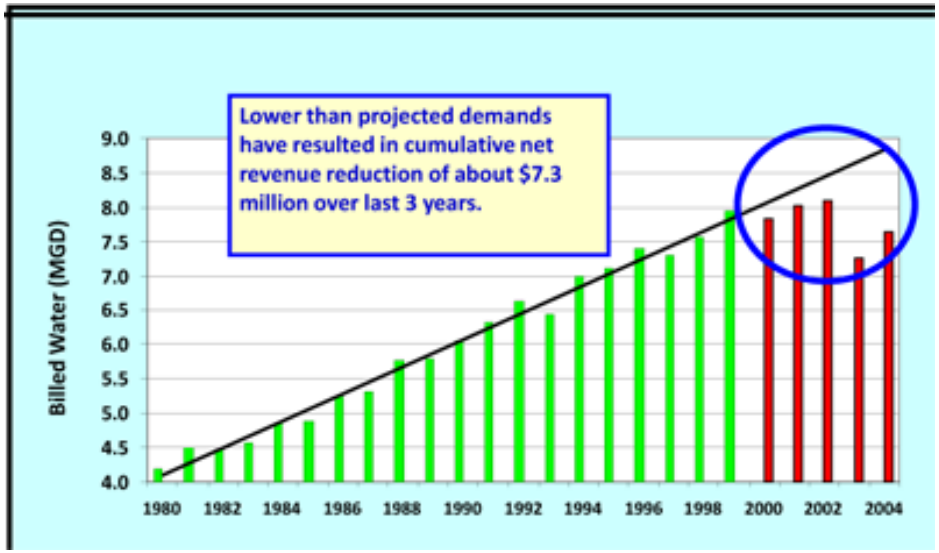
Rule of thumb: water use declines ~2-6% as rates increase 10%

Background Information:
How Rates and Usage Interact

Public Perception:

Source: Fayetteville Observer 2/6/2004

Utility Reality:

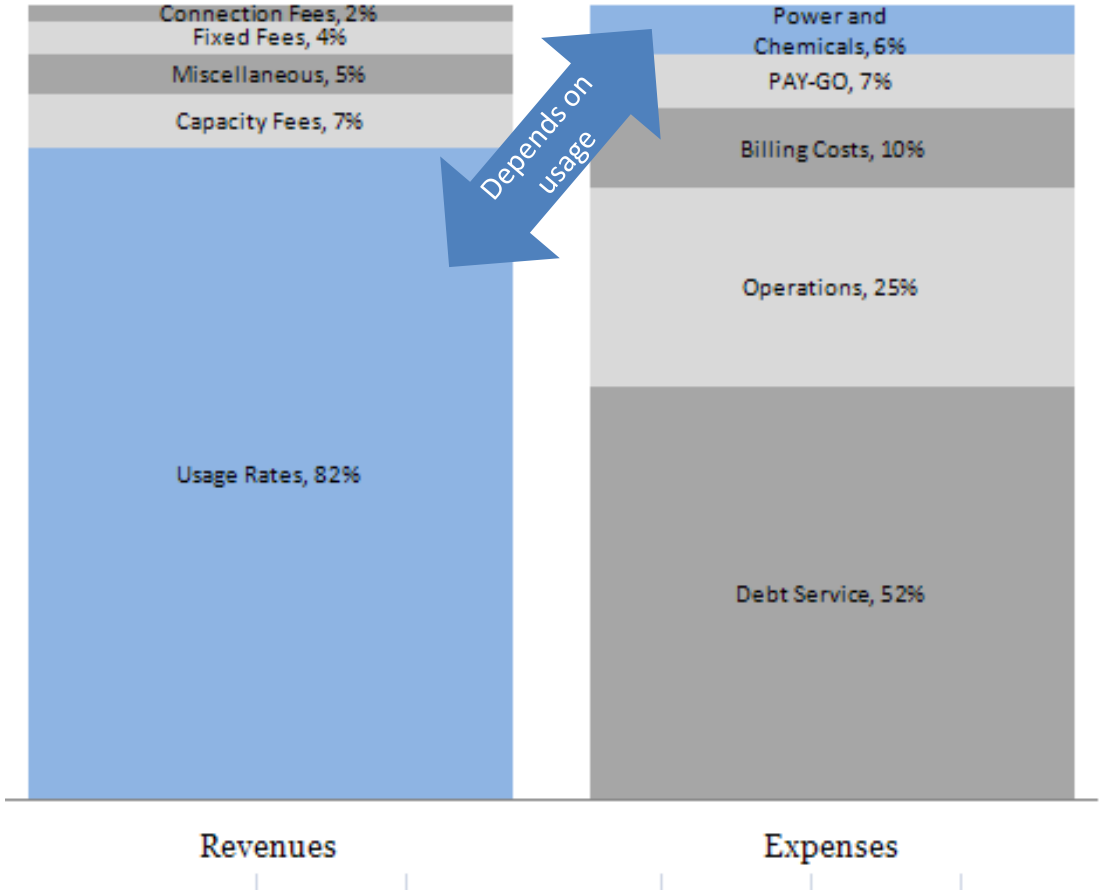


Source: Orange Water & Sewer Authority

Why Does this Happen?

Utilities' costs are mostly *fixed*, not dependent on the amount of water sold/used by the customers. But the majority of revenues come from the amount of water sold. If customers conserve, revenues drop significantly but not costs.

Revenue and Expenses for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities in a Given Year



Source: CMU Director Doug Bean's presentation to the Charlotte City Council on December 1, 2008.

Frequency of Rate Changes

- Always review your rates annually (recommended)
- Review your financial health indicators annually, and then review your rates if any of the indicators reflect poor financing
- Perhaps less politically charged option: Raise rates each year automatically based on inflation

Mark your Frequency of Rate Review on your sheet

Frequency of Rate Changes

- *Important: Avoid maintaining low rates at the expense of your utility's financial health. It will either lead to a sudden, massive rate increase in the future or to failing systems and endangering public health.*

Look at your rate setting objectives. Look at your rate structure. Do they line up? What changes do you want to consider?

Scenario: Rural Water Utility With Naturally High Costs and Excess Capacity, Wants to Maintain Affordability

1. Customer class: possibly create separate residential class.
2. Billing period: use monthly.
3. Base charge: if majority of customers use little water, charge fair base charge and include allowance. Otherwise, low base charge, and shift high rates to high volume users.
4. Consumption allowance: if including, set at a lifeline amount (~2,000 gallons/month).
5. Volumetric rate structure: probably use uniform
6. (If applicable) Block design: if using, first block at least 4,000 GPM, depending on your customers' consumption.
7. (Optional) Temporal adjustments: none.
8. Frequency of rate changes: annual.

Note: Set up a customer assistance program: http://efc.sog.unc.edu/reslib/item/customer-assistance-program-costing-tool-north-carolina.

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GA Water and Wastewater Rates Dashboard

Rates as of June 2015 (2015 Rates Survey)

Dashboard updated: August 11, 2015

GEFA

Abbeville

Rates Comparison | Characteristics | Links | Edit Data or Add Utility

Select residential bill and monthly consumption amount

Water Bill | Sewer Bill | Water + Sewer Bill

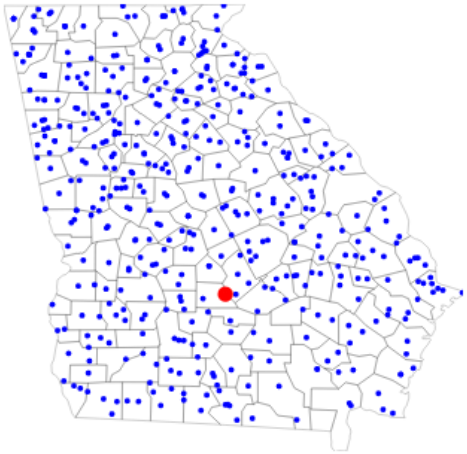
5,000 gallons
668 cubic feet

Monthly Water Bill: $8.00

Local price estimate Basic Cable Bill in 2012: $46.00

Select comparison group: All Utilities

Comparing to all utilities in survey

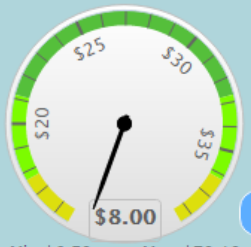


461 rate structures compared

Effects of raising rates by: 0%

Bill Comparison

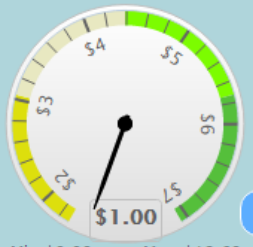
Water Bill at
5,000 gallons
Median: $25.25



Min $6.50 Max $70.10

Conservation Signal

Water Price/1,000 Gallons, after
10,000 Gallons
Median: $3.27



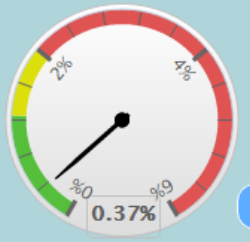
Min $0.00 Max $18.60

Cost Recovery

Operating
Ratio Incl. Deprec. 2013

Affordability

Water Bills as % MHI



Periodic Charges

- Deposits on new accounts
- Penalties for late payment

Water and Sewer Rates Analysis Model

Free, rate-setting tool using only MS Excel,
developed by the Environmental Finance Center at UNC.

Water and Sewer Rates Analysis Model

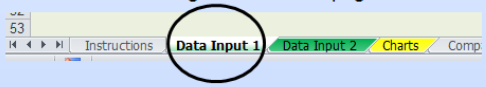
UNC ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER

Version 2.7 (updated March 24, 2014)

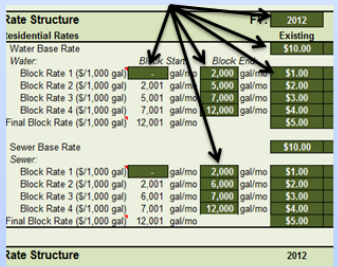
20-year fund balance estimates under proposed new rates vs. existing rates: compare side-by-side
Uniform or block rates *Residential and non-residential rates* *Changes to customers and demands*

INSTRUCTIONS

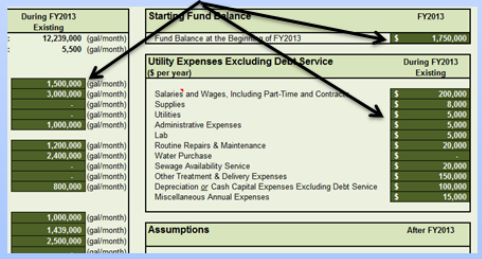
1) Click on tabs at bottom of screen to navigate to different pages.



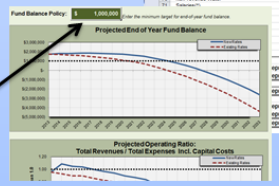
2) On the "Data Input 1" tab enter current and new rate details in the dark green cells.



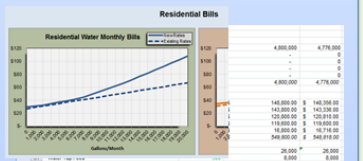
3) On the "Data Input 2" tab enter current consumption levels, utility finances, and other assumptions in the dark green cells.



4) On the "Charts" tab, see projections of the End of Year Fund Balance, and input a Fund Balance Policy in the dark green cell at the top of the page.



5) Compare new rates to existing rates in "Compare Monthly Bills" and their impacts on costs and revenues in "Existing Rates" or "New Rates".



Note: This tool models the impact on a utility's fund balance of a one-time increase in rates, rather than an ongoing series of rate increases.
*Update this tool **every year** and do not rely on analysis conducted more than one year ago.*

Funded by the Public Water Supply Section, Division of Water Resources at the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Download the latest tool at http://efc.sog.unc.edu. Find it in Resources / Tools.

Provide feedback or ask questions by emailing Shadi Eskaf at eskaf@sog.unc.edu

Download the latest version at http://efc.sog.unc.edu. Find it in Resources / Tools.

Tool development was funded by the Public Water Supply Section of DWR/ NCDENR and partly by the USEPA.

http://efc.sog.unc.edu/reslib/item/water-sewer-rates-analysis-model

Data Input 1

Rate_Analysis-version2 - Microsoft Excel

Water and Sewer Rates Analysis Model. Version 2.0

Inputs: Rates and Rate Structures

Input current rate and account information in the dark green cells to analyze projected cashflows from rate changes.

Data Input Color Explanation:

White:	Data to be entered, can be changed
Black:	Automatically calucated data; do not change!
Red:	Important Results

cubic feet to gallons converter

100 cubic feet = 748 gallons

$/ccf to $/1000 gallons converter

$ 1.00 /hundred cubic feet = $1.34 /1,000 gallons

Input block sizes (state and end) in gallons/month
Input rates in $/1000 gallons
Use the converters above for converting from cubic feet units

Rate Structure	FY: 2012 Existing	2013 New
Residential Rates		
Water Base Rate	$10.00	$12.00
Water:		*End:*
Block Rate 1 ($/1,000 gal)	$1.00	$1.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 2 ($/1,000 gal)	$2.00	$2.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 3 ($/1,000 gal)	$3.00	$3.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 4 ($/1,000 gal)	$4.00	$4.25 gal/mo
Final Block Rate ($/1,000 gal)	$5.00	$5.25
Sewer Base Rate	$10.00	$12.00
Sewer:		
Block Rate 1 ($/1,000 gal)	$1.00	$1.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 2 ($/1,000 gal)	$2.00	$2.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 3 ($/1,000 gal)	$3.00	$3.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 4 ($/1,000 gal)	$4.00	$4.25 gal/mo
Final Block Rate ($/1,000 gal)	$5.00	$5.25

EFC: If your utility has uniform rates, use the input box for "Block Rate 1"

EFC: Input Final Block Rate here regardless of the number of blocks your utility uses.

Rate Structure	2012 Existing	2013 New
Commercial Rates		
Water Base Rate	$10.00	$12.00
Water:		*End:*
Block Rate 1 ($/1,000 gal)	$1.00	$1.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 2 ($/1,000 gal)	$2.00	$2.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 3 ($/1,000 gal)	$3.00	$3.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 4 ($/1,000 gal)	$4.00	$4.25 gal/mo
Final Block Rate ($/1,000 gal)	$5.00	$5.25
Sewer Base Rate	$10.00	$12.00
Sewer:		
Block Rate 1 ($/1,000 gal)	$1.00	$1.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 2 ($/1,000 gal)	$2.00	$2.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 3 ($/1,000 gal)	$3.00	$3.25 gal/mo
Block Rate 4 ($/1,000 gal)	$4.00	$4.25 gal/mo
Final Block Rate ($/1,000 gal)	$5.00	$5.25

EFC: If your utility has uniform rates, use the input box for "Block Rate 1"

EFC: Input Final Block Rate here regardless of the number of blocks your utility uses.

Rate Structure	2012 Existing	2013 New
Irrigation Rates		
Irrigation Base Rate	$0.00	$0.00
Irrigation:		*End:*
Block Rate 1 ($/1,000 gal)	$3.50	$3.50 gal/mo
Block Rate 2 ($/1,000 gal)		gal/mo
Block Rate 3 ($/1,000 gal)		gal/mo
Block Rate 4 ($/1,000 gal)		gal/mo
Final Block Rate ($/1,000 gal)		

EFC: If your utility has uniform rates, use the input box for "Block Rate 1"

EFC: Input Final Block Rate here regardless of the number of blocks your utility uses.

Number of Accounts	2012 Existing	Growth Rate:
Residential Water	3000	0.50%
Residential Sewer	2500	0.50%
Commercial Water	200	0.50%
Commerical Sewer	80	0.50%
Irrigation Water	3000	0.50%

Tap Fees	2012 Existing	2013 New
Average Sewer Tap Fee	$2,000.00	$2,400.00
Average Water Tap Fee	$500.00	$600.00
Average Irrigation Tap Fee	$2,200.00	$2,500.00

Miscellaneous	2012 Existing
Uncollected Bills	8.0%
Non-revenue Water	15.0%

Funded by the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Instructions | Data Input 1 | Data Input 2 | Charts | Fund Balance - Existing Rates | Fund Balance - New Rates

Ready | Calculate | Scroll Lock

Water and Sewer Rates Analysis Model - Results

- Results are Excel Spreadsheet with:
  - The Fund Balance Under **Existing** Rates
  - The Fund Balance Under **Proposed** Rates

…Projected for the next 20 years