

Why did my sewer bill increase (AGAIN)?

The increase in the sewer rate is entirely driven by debt costs for capital projects at the two treatment plants where Bellingham sewer customers' wastewater is treated. The Charles River Pollution Control District Wastewater Treatment Plant in Medway and the Woonsocket Wastewater Treatment Plant are constructing massive treatment plant upgrades.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has set new nutrient (Nitrogen and Phosphorus) discharge limits that require treatment plants throughout the country to improve their processes and remove more of these and other contaminants before the effluent is discharged to the rivers of the US.

Bellingham owns a small portion of the treatment capacity at each of these plants; we have to pay our share of the debt cost based on the percentage of treatment capacity we own.

This year's increase should be the end of the sizable rate changes. The information we have received from both plants indicates that the long term finance will be fully in place for Fiscal Year 2017. That means that the borrowing costs will become stable much like a mortgage. It is a sizable part of the sewer budget but it should remain the same for the next twenty years.

If we had our own treatment plant the costs would be much higher.