

POLSON WATER AND SEWER RATES

“Why are my water rates so high and why do they keep going up?” This is a familiar refrain in our community, particularly after the hot, dry months of July and August. Why did your City Council vote to increase our water and sewer rates?

The state of Montana offers communities grants to improve water and sewer infrastructures. Polson currently has a grant request into our state administration for over \$800,000 for much needed system improvements. The grants only provide 50% of the cost of these projects, but it represents a lot of money for the community. It means a lot of money for the City of Polson.

One condition imposed by the state is that the community must charge its rate payers a specified amount for water and sewer services in order to qualify for these grants. The specific minimal amounts a community must charge are based on economic factors determined by the state, but average household income is a major element. In this regard, a community like Missoula or Billings might be required to charge their rate payers more than Polson, where the average household income is only 52% of the national average. (Based on the 2000 U.S. census) So the minimal rate imposed by the state of Montana to qualify for a Treasure State Endowment Program grant is less for Polson than many other communities in our state. In recent years our rate was below the minimal amount. This forced your City Council to raise the rate.

The Council also factored in the effect of rising costs for everything from salaries and health care to water and sewer mains and water treatment chemicals. We agreed to impose an increase each year equal to the national increase in inflation. By doing this we create small increases on an annual basis and hope to prevent a major increase in the years ahead caused by our requirement to meet state imposed minimums.

What can you do to reduce your irrigation costs? First, follow the city imposed requirements to water on every-other-day and for no more than three hours, starting in the early morning. Second, consider planting options other than grass/sod. And third, as you consider your options, remember that treated, potable water is a scarce and increasingly expensive resource. Do your best to conserve.