

Policy Briefing Summary

City Council



Regarding:	Ordinance to Amend and Reordain City Code Chapter 31 (Utilities) to Establish New Utility Rates and Service Fees for City Gas, Water, and Sanitary Sewer (2nd reading)
Staff Contact(s):	Lauren Hildebrand, Director of Utilities, Chris Cullinan, Director of Finance, Jason McIlwee, Deputy Director
Presenter:	Chris Cullinan, Director of Finance, Jason McIlwee, Deputy Director
Date of Proposed Action:	June 15, 2026

Issue

A Public Hearing is being held to establish the annual rates and service fees for City utility services (water, wastewater, natural gas, and stormwater). These rates would be effective as of July 1, 2026, if approved by City Council on June 15, 2026.

Background / Rule

The City of Charlottesville, Virginia ("City"), owns and operates public utilities for water, wastewater, natural gas and stormwater. Utility services are essential on a daily basis to both individuals and to the entire community. Thoughtful, deliberate planning and sufficient financial resources ensure safe, efficient, and orderly maintenance and operation of these systems. The need for investment in City utility systems is not without cost, but City utility rates must also be balanced with the need for continued affordability for our customers.

Each of the City's utilities is accounted for separately as Enterprise Funds. Enterprise Funds are operated on a self-supporting basis, meaning that each utility is required to cover the full costs of providing its service. City utilities are funded solely through their rates and related fees and charges and are not subsidized with general tax revenues. City utilities do not operate on a for-profit basis. As such, City utility rates are calculated annually to bring each fund to a break-even point. However, variable factors such as weather, usage, and number of customers may result in an unexpected operating surplus or deficit during any given year. If so, the surpluses or deficits are accounted for and remain within their respective utility fund.

Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority ("RWSA"), which provides City treatment services, is one of the largest fixed cost elements for the water and wastewater budgets. For FY27, RWSA's rates have increased, and they are incorporated in the City's proposed utility rates.

Analysis

The budgets for each of the utilities have been thoroughly examined for opportunities to minimize costs without sacrificing service. Based on the revenue requirements needed to operate and maintain each utility and the above recommendations, the City is proposing the following water, wastewater, and gas utility rates:

- \$98.22/1,000 cubic feet (cf) of water (average annual composite rate),
- \$99.20/1,000 cf of wastewater, and
- \$92.11/8,000 cf of natural gas.

In addition, the proposed Monthly Water and Wastewater Services Charges are as follows:

Monthly Water Service Charge

Meter Size	Current Monthly Service Charge	Proposed Monthly Service Charge	\$ Change
5/8"	\$10.00	\$12.50	\$2.50
1"	\$25.00	\$31.25	\$6.25
1 1/2"	\$50.00	\$62.50	\$12.50
2"	\$80.00	\$100.00	\$20.00
3"	\$160.00	\$200.00	\$40.00
4"	\$250.00	\$312.50	\$62.50
6"	\$500.00	\$625.00	\$125.00
14"	\$3,275.00	\$4,093.75	\$818.75

Monthly Wastewater Service Charge

Meter Size	Current Monthly Service Charge	Proposed Monthly Service Charge	\$ Change
5/8"	\$10.00	\$12.50	\$2.50
1"	\$25.00	\$31.25	\$6.25
1 1/2"	\$50.00	\$62.50	\$12.50
2"	\$80.00	\$100.00	\$20.00
3"	\$160.00	\$200.00	\$40.00
4"	\$250.00	\$312.50	\$62.50
6"	\$500.00	\$625.00	\$125.00
14"	\$3,275.00	\$4,093.75	\$818.75

For the City's stormwater utility, there are minimal changes to the budget and the stormwater fees are proposed to remain unchanged for the coming year at \$1.20 per 500 square feet of impervious surface.

Impact on Average Customer

Utility customers continue to conserve water and natural gas, which is both good for the environment and for their utility bill. The average residential water customer is using 400 cubic feet (cf) per month. Similarly, the average residential gas customer is using 4,600 cf. Based on these usage figures and the proposed utility rates, the average residential customer is projected to spend the following per month:

<u>Service</u>	<u>Current (based on rates adopted 7/1/25)</u>	<u>Proposed (Effective 7/1/26)</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Water ¹	\$44.80	\$51.79	\$6.99	15.61%
Wastewater ¹	\$48.12	\$52.18	\$4.06	8.45%

Natural Gas ¹	\$66.04	\$64.53	(1.51)	-2.29%
Stormwater ²	\$5.86	\$5.86	\$0	0%
TOTAL	\$164.82	\$174.36	\$9.54	5.79%

(1). Rates include monthly service charge.

(2). The budget impact shown reflects a residential monthly average fee and provides consistency with other utilities. Stormwater fees are rounded to the next whole billing unit and are billed to property owners biannually.

For City residential customers who receive water, wastewater, stormwater, and natural gas (80% of City residents), their total utility bill is projected to rise by \$9.54 per month, or 5.79%. For residential customers who receive just water, wastewater and stormwater service, their utility bill will increase by \$11.05 per month, or 11.19%. The proposed Rate Report can be found at <https://www.charlottesville.gov/602/Utility-Billing>.

Financial Impact

The City's Utility Funds (water, wastewater, and natural gas) are self-sustaining Enterprise Funds that are supported by the revenues from customers' usage. The stormwater fee is based on the impervious surface of the property. The approval of the utility rates has no impact on the City's General Fund.

Recommendation

City Staff recommends approval of the proposed rates, via adoption of the attached Ordinance.

As noted above, the City's utilities operate on a self-sustaining, break-even basis. If the proposed rates are not adopted, the City's utilities would not financially perform in this manner, which in turn, would impact the City's ability to efficiently and reliably operate these systems. The City's ability to invest in these critical infrastructure systems would be negatively impacted as well. Finally, the City would not meet its long-term financial policy by not having sufficient working capital for its utilities.

Recommended Motion (if Applicable)

"I Move approval of the Ordinance to Amend and Reordain City Code Chapter 31 (Utilities) to Establish New Utility Rates and Service Fees for City Gas, Water, and Sanitary Sewer."

Attachments

1. FY2027 Utility Rate Ordinance
2. FY2027 At A Glance
3. FY2027 Operations Overview