Faced with major water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure projects, the City Council tasked staff with ensuring the financial stability of all the utility funds. The outcome of that process ensures operational, maintenance and capital improvement needs can be met well into the future.

Much of the City’s infrastructure is over a half a century old, with many sections exceeding 70 and 80 years in age.

The City has created extensive master plans to examine the condition of its infrastructure and plan for current and future projects. These plans have identified numerous projects that are critical to the delivery of service to keep Grants Pass’ water, sewer and stormwater flowing.

Master Plans target replacement of 1% of the infrastructure every year. This would mean that a piece of pipe installed today would be replaced in 100 years. Some underground pipes will last longer than this, but others will fail earlier due to soil conditions, flaws in the materials or bad installation techniques. Staff has targeted a level of replacing less than 0.5% of the City’s underground pipes every year, which would mean that a buried pipe would need to last 200 years or more before it is replaced.

Wednesday, November 7, the City Council took a big step towards securing the future of the City’s water and stormwater infrastructure by passing two resolutions implementing rate adjustments for both utilities. Council had previously taken action on the sewer rates, increasing rates ahead of the Phase II rehabilitation and resiliency project at the Water Restoration Plant.

Resolution 18-3634 set an initial rate for the stormwater utility of $5.30/ESU. An ESU, or Equivalent Service Unit, is a standardized method of measuring impervious surface area and is the measurement of the average amount of impervious surface area on a single-family residential lot. Examples of impervious surface includes roofs, patios, driveways and paths. The funds collected will be used exclusively to operate, maintain, build and rebuild the City’s stormwater system. This will greatly improve the City’s ability to respond to, and prevent, localized flooding within the City of Grants Pass as well as replace, install and maintain the hundreds of miles of stormwater piping that the City relies on each rainy season.

Resolution 18-6735 increased water rates and created a Water Treatment Plant Replacement Fee to pay for Council’s number one goal: build a new Water Treatment Plant. The fee is determined by the size of your water meter’s impact on the Water Filtration Plant in July of 1931

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The start of a new year means it’s time for strategic planning. Our City Council will review the City’s long-term goals and how to achieve them during the annual Strategic Planning Session, January 17 - 19, 2019.

Strategic planning is a tool that helps us focus and analyze our financial prospects and make strategic decisions about City services and capital projects - particularly as they affect community goals and objectives.

Community participation is important, as Councilors want to make their strategic planning decisions with the confidence that they are responding to residents’ desires. The Council invited residents to a Strategic Planning Forum in November to ask about residents’ goals and dreams for Grants Pass. If you missed the Forum, you can still participate by emailing your suggestions to Karen Frerck, City Recorder, by December 21 (kfrerk@grantspassoregon.gov).

Community-suggested priorities and actions are placed into the strategic planning process for consideration. Those suggestions might be used by the Council to set budget and action priorities for the future. Think of the strategic plan as a road map to City priorities and actions, how resources will be used, and what can be done to move Grants Pass forward.

Please send us your thoughts by answering these questions:

- What do you want to accomplish or achieve?
- What do you want to happen that is not happening now?
- What do you like that is happening and would like it to occur more often, or to a greater degree?
- What is the most important issue facing our community.

Water Rates continued

Water Treatment Plant. For a standard 3/4 inch meter, the fee begins at $2.70 per month in January of 2019 and gradually increases to $13.20 per month by 2023.

The fee will be removed from the bills when the debt incurred for constructing the Water Treatment Plant is fully paid for.

Water rates, in general, will increase by 5.28% per year for the next five years. These increases however, have been paired with a new tiered water rate and the introduction of a new lifeline tier. This new tier is designed to help keep costs down for our low water use consumers. The new tier is reduced from $0.91 per unit to $0.59 per unit in January 2019. Other tiers will be slightly adjusted based on the City’s cost of service rate.

All of the City’s rates can be found on our website at www.grantspassoregon.gov as well as a new interactive stormwater utility map where residents can look up their property to determine their anticipated Stormwater Fee. Contact the Public Works office at 541-450-6110 or the Customer Service office at 541-450-6035 if you have questions.
Focus on Fire Prevention

For most of us, the holiday season represents a time for family festivities and good cheer. What few of us consider is that the holiday season is a time when there is an increased risk of home fires. With a little added awareness and some minor adjustments to holiday cooking and decorating, the season can be festive and safe.

Unattended cooking is the leading cause of U.S. home fires and home fire injuries.

- Stay in the kitchen while you're cooking. Never leave items on the stove unattended.
- Check your cooking frequently and use a timer as a reminder.
- Create a “kid-free zone” of at least three feet around the stove and areas where food and drinks are prepared.

December is the peak month for home candle fires. Consider using flameless candles, which look and smell like real candles. However, if you do use traditional candles, keep them at least 12" away from anything that will burn. Remember to blow them out when you leave the room or go to bed. Use candle holders that are sturdy, won’t tip over and are placed on uncluttered surfaces. Avoid using candles in the bedroom where two of five candle fires begin. Lastly, never leave a child alone in a room with a burning candle.

An average of 250 home fires caused by Christmas trees occur annually in the U.S. Nearly half of them are electrical issues and one in four resulted from a heat source being too close to the tree.

- Dried out Christmas trees are a fire hazard and great care should be taken in lighting it during the holiday season.
- If you choose an artificial tree, be sure it is fire-retardant.
- If you choose a fresh tree, be sure to add water to the stand daily. Don’t light tree if the needles are dry.

Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit and is at least three feet away from any heat source such as fireplaces, radiators, candles, space heaters and heating vents.

- Use lights that have been approved by an independent testing lab and that are for indoor use.
- Replace lights that have broken or frayed cords or loose bulb connections.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving the home or going to bed.

By following these fire prevention tips and measures, the Department of Public Safety Fire Prevention Bureau says you can greatly reduce the risk of fire in your home and enjoy a safe holiday season.

Visit www.nfpa.org/holiday for more information and safety tips.
Winter Tree Tips

Trees add value to your property, are beneficial to your health, cool down surface and air temperatures, save energy and provide oxygen. A little bit of maintenance to keep trees healthy goes a long way, especially in winter.

The following tips will help you keep your trees at their very best:

- At times during the winter, particularly for evergreens, drying out can be a real problem. Water trees only when air temperatures are above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Apply water at mid-day so it will have time to soak in before possible freezing at night. Monitor weather conditions and water during extended dry periods one to three times a month.

- Windy conditions can also worsen the problem of winter drought. To help control this problem, lay down a layer of organic mulch around the base of the tree. The mulch can help to slow moisture loss and runoff while acting as a temperature buffer for the roots. The mulch should be no more than two inches thick and take care that no mulch is placed directly against the tree trunk.

- From training young trees to managing mature ones, structural pruning to guide and manage tree architecture should be the primary goal each time a tree is pruned. Pruning during dormancy is the most common practice. It is usually best to wait until the coldest part of winter has passed. Some species, such as maple, walnuts, and birches may "bleed" when the sap begins to flow. This is not harmful and will cease when the tree leafs out.

- Fertilizing trees and shrubs bolsters their health so they are better prepared to fight off pests, disease, and environmental stresses. Fertilize trees when the soil is above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. At this temperature, the nutrients in fertilizer will be able to penetrate the soil and get down to the roots of your tree. For more information go to [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org).