

Sewer Customer Questions and Answers



A Clark Regional Wastewater District Primer for New Ridgefield Service Area Customers

May 2013

The City of Ridgefield (City) is preparing to transfer ownership of its municipal sewer collection system to the Clark Regional Wastewater District (District). This document outlines why and when this transfer is scheduled to take place, and attempts to answer questions new Ridgefield customers may have regarding District services and policies.

→ **Why is the City of Ridgefield transferring ownership of its sewer system?**

The short answer: to save Ridgefield sewer customers money. The projected cost to upgrade the City's existing wastewater collection, transfer and treatment system runs well into the millions. Initial expenditures would have to be repaid through steep increases in rates spread among Ridgefield's existing 1,800 customers. Financial modeling indicates that within a few years, an average Ridgefield household could be paying as much as \$100 per month for sewer service. The transfer solution will enable Ridgefield customers to maintain service at much lower rates. A more detailed explanation of the reasons behind the transfer decision is available at www.crwwd.com/ridgefield.

→ **What is the Clark Regional Wastewater District?**

The Clark Regional Wastewater District (District) is a single-purpose utility focusing exclusively on the collection and treatment of wastewater since 1958. The District serves 26,000 customers located in the central portion of Clark County (north of Vancouver and south of Ridgefield and Battle Ground).

The District is accredited by the American Public Works Association, meaning all District functions and services meet or exceed national best management practices. In addition, the District has maintained a thirty year track record of clean financial audits and is led by elected commissioners with a strong commitment to the success of our local community.

→ **Why is the District taking on Ridgefield's sewer system?**

District customers also stand to benefit as District rates are projected to increase within the rate of inflation with or without the District-Ridgefield merger. However, because the District is assuming a local system with significant growth potential, it is likely that future economic activity in Ridgefield would help lower District customer rates in the future.

→ **What does the transfer mean to me?**

The most noticeable difference for Ridgefield customers will be who sends bills and collects payment. For most Ridgefield customers, the transfer means low and stable sewer rates over the long-run. For businesses and developers, it means the cost of connecting to the system will be affordable and sufficient capacity will be available to accommodate growth. Other minor changes are detailed below.

→ When will the transfer take place?

The District is scheduled to take over maintenance of the Ridgefield system on January 1, 2014. Ridgefield customers can expect to receive their first bill from the District on or about February 3, 2014. That first bill will be due by February 28, 2014.

→ How much is my bill going to be?

○ Residential User Rates

Ridgefield residential customers can expect to pay approximately \$60.50 per month for District sewer service in 2014. This is lower than current rates and about \$5 to \$8 per month less than residents were projected to pay as Ridgefield customers in 2014.

The District's monthly base rate is very stable and will only increase \$1 per year over the next three years – meaning Ridgefield residential customers can expect to pay an estimated \$63.80 in 2017. Again, this is significantly less than the \$100/month rates forecast to occur within the next decade if Ridgefield had financed its own system upgrades.

What does my user rate pay for?

As new District customers, Ridgefield residents pay the same monthly base rate as all other district customers, plus a system integration charge which helps pay for the transmission line between Ridgefield and the District, and a City operations fee. The system integration charge is scheduled to be reduced over time as anticipated growth occurs and new Ridgefield customers connect to the system.

District customer base rate	\$36.00
System integration charge	\$19.00
<u>10% City operations fee</u>	<u>\$ 5.50</u>
	\$60.50

Does the District offer low income senior discounts?

The District offers two levels of low income senior discounts. A 35% monthly discount is available to seniors 62 years of age or older and household income equal to or less than 125% of federal poverty guidelines (\$18,913 as of 2013).

A 20% monthly discount is available to seniors 62 years of age or older with household income equal to or less than 200% of federal poverty guidelines (\$30,260 as of 2013).

○ Commercial and Industrial User Rates

The City of Ridgefield bills commercial and industrial customers based on consumption (water usage) added to a base rate according to meter size. The District's code allows for commercial and industrial billing based on water consumption data, if it is available. The City of Ridgefield has agreed to provide consumptive water data for its commercial and industrial customers to the District. The District plans to provide Ridgefield service area customers with bills which are comparable to current City bills based on a consumptive rate. The District will follow up with commercial and industrial customers as necessary to ensure future billing is clear and fair.

→ When do I receive my bill?

○ *Residential Users*

The District bills residential customers the 1st workday of every other month, with payment due the last day of the month you receive a statement. Residential customers will receive their first bill from the District on or about February 3, 2014 for the months of January and February. This bill will be due February 28, 2014.

○ *Commercial and Industrial Users*

The District bills commercial customers on the 1st workday of every month, with payment due the last day of the month you receive the statement. Commercial customers will receive their first bill from the District on or about February 3, 2014 for the month of January. This bill will be due February 28, 2014.

→ How do I pay my bill?

○ *All Customers:*

By Mail: Using the return envelope supplied with your invoice, to CRWWD; PO Box 8955; Vancouver, WA 98668-8955

Automatic Payment: Enroll in the District's direct debit automatic payment program by downloading and returning completed enrollment forms (call 360-750-5876 for assistance)

In-Person: Staff available 8-5 M-F; drop box for after hour payments with check;
Located at 8000 NE 52 Court, Vancouver, 98665

○ *Additional Residential Customer Options:*

Phone Self-Pay: (360-993-8800) Visa/Master Card credit/debit card or electronic check accepted 24/7

WebPay: (www.crwwd.com) Visa/Master Card credit/debit card or electronic check accepted 24/7

PhonePay: (360-750-5876) Representatives available 8-5 M-F; Pay by Visa/MasterCard credit/debit card

In-Person: Staff available 8-5 M-F; with Visa/MasterCard credit/debit card;
Located at 8000 NE 52 Court, Vancouver, 98665

○ *I make payments online. Will I get a new account number?*

Yes, the District has a different account numbering system than the City. Look for your new account number on your first invoice from the District.

- ***I have payments automatically deducted from my checking account. Will my banking information transfer to the District?***

You will need to create a new automatic deduction using the District's deduction program. If you currently have a combined deduction for water, storm water and sewer with the City, you will not need to make any changes to this account. The City will only bill you for any outstanding balance for water or storm water. Feel free to call 360-750-5876 for assistance.

- ***What happens if I don't pay my bill on time?***

Please pay your bill on time. The District uses a standard utility bill collection process, including multiple notifications, and associated late fees, lien filing fees and interest, and ultimately collection agency participation, if necessary. All costs to collect unpaid bills are added to the customer's bill. In an extreme case, the District has the right to foreclose on your property.

→ **How much will it cost to add a new connection to the system?**

New connections (known as System Development Charges, or SDCs) in the Ridgefield service area will be \$7,550 per home or equivalent residential unit (ERU). This is lower than the current \$7,700 City fee, and significantly lower than the proposed \$10,090 fee that would have been charged without the system transfer. The District maintains a balance between keeping new connection fees low to reduce barriers to economic development and ensuring that development pays its fair share.

- ***What happens to existing development agreements with the City?***

The District has agreed to honor existing land use, development and System Development Credit agreements legally entered into by the City of Ridgefield.

- ***What if I'm in the development process during the transfer?***

The City is coordinating closely with the District to ensure seamless handling of projects currently in the land use or engineering review process.

→ **Who do I contact for service questions?**

The District operates a central customer service line for any and all questions and sewer service requests. Please call (360) 750-5876 and we will route your question or request to the appropriate person. The service line is available twenty-four hours a day, every day.

For questions about how the system transfer will apply to you, please call Heidi Rosenberg, Collection System Transfer Project Manager at 993-8818. Or, visit us online at www.crwwd.com/ridgefield.