

Arlington County Water and Sewer Rate Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why has the water/sewer rate been increased?

A: The combined water/sewer rate increased by 3.4% effective May 1, 2012 to \$12.61 per thousand gallons of water consumed. This rate increase will fund an additional Water Maintenance crew and also a new Water Quality Engineer, positions necessary primarily to maintain safety, provide quality customer service, ensure compliance with existing and emerging regulations, and allow for a more proactive approach to managing water quality. They will also fund increases in supplies and services for the Water Pollution Control Bureau, and an increase in debt service for repayment of bonds for various Utilities capital projects.

Q: Why are sewer charges for water that is used for lawn irrigation included in my bill when that water does not go into the sewer collection system and to the wastewater treatment plant?

A: The County Board approved water/sewer rates that calculate the sewer charge based directly (one-for-one) on water consumption. The sewer charges for water used for irrigation therefore are based on County policy and local ordinance and cannot be removed from the utility bill.

Q. Can I get a water only account for irrigation?

A: Yes. While costly, the option exists – the Water-Only Account, which provides a second water service and meter exclusively for outdoor use separate from the existing domestic line. For more information on the current fees and process please visit <http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/EnvironmentalServices/cpe/permits/water/EnvironmentalServicesDfu.aspx>.

Q: What is the rate structure for Arlington County water and sewer services?

A: Arlington County's rate structure for water and sewer services is based directly on volume of water used. This basic system is one that was adopted by most municipalities when they first began offering water and sewer services.

Under Arlington's rate structure, the majority of the costs of municipal water services are charged to customers based on the number of gallons of water used. A smaller amount of the total cost is charged to developers and others for hooking into the system.

Q: How is my water and sewer usage determined?

A: Water usage is measured by a County water meter installed adjacent to each residence or business. The cost of sanitary sewer services is charged based on the amount of water used as determined by the water meter readings. Arlington does not measure sanitary sewer usage as sewer meters are costly and also prone to malfunctions and inaccurate readings.

For example, if a residential family used 20,000 gallons of water in a quarter (which is typical), they would be charged for 20,000 gallons at the current water rate plus 20,000 gallons at the current sewer rate. These charges are detailed on the billing statement.

Q: Has anyone ever re-examined the water/sewer rate structure since it was first established?

A: In 2003, County staff conducted a water/sewer rate study working with a nationally recognized consultant and a citizen task force appointed by the County Manager to review the study and make recommendations.

In January 2004, the citizen task force recommended retaining the current rate structure, which is based directly on water volume consumption. They recommended against giving relief on sewer charges for irrigation water for the following reasons:

- The current rate is easy to understand and easy to administer,
- Only a few very high-use residential customers would significantly benefit from a summer sewer rate that removes sewer charges for irrigation water,
- An alternative, while costly, exists – the Water-Only Account, which provides a second water service and meter exclusively for outdoor use separate from the existing domestic line. For more information on fees and process please visit <http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/EnvironmentalServices/cpe/permits/water/EnvironmentalServicesDfu.aspx>.
- Giving rate relief for irrigation is contrary to water conservation and promotes increased pollutants in local streams, the Potomac River, and Chesapeake Bay.

As a result, the County Manager did not recommend any changes in rate structure to the County Board.

Q. Who should I contact with questions or concerns related to the water/sewer rates?

A: Please call the Department of Environmental Services at 703-228-6570.