

1. I thought we have plenty of water, so why is the Task Force recommending significant conservation?

We are fortunate, thanks to the foresight of townspeople 100+ years ago, that our supply is relatively stable and meets our current demands. This puts us in a much better situation than our neighbors who rely on the Ipswich River Basin (or any other stressed water basin). But our plentiful supply is endangered by more-frequent droughts and by unsafe levels of PFAS, as is the case for many water systems. For instance, Cambridge MA had an excellent water supply via Fresh Pond, until suddenly increased PFAS levels shut down that local water supply. Cambridge shifted to the MWRA Quabbin Reservoir system, thanks to an existing connection to MWRA water. (We don't have the option of connecting to MWRA.) If PFAS levels exceed the new EPA standards (now under review), we may have to shut down Lincoln Street Well which supplies 40% of our drinking water. This would trigger an immediate water crisis, which could only be solved locally through increased treatment and/or conservation.

2. What is the water rate tier structure?

What is the water rate tier structure? (Here's a link to the [current Rates & Tiers.](#))

The tier structure is progressive and marginal, just like federal income tax. The more water you use, the more you pay. When your usage crosses certain thresholds, your marginal rate per gallon increases. However, you only pay the higher marginal rate on the amount of water you use above the prior tier.

Here's the Task Force's recommended new rates & tiers:

PROPOSED MBTS WATER RATES							
Approved by WRPTF, May 3 2023							
Presented to Select Bd, June 5 2023		Rates by Tier (based on quarterly usage)					
		Tier 1 (2023)	Tier 2 (2023)	Tier 3 (2023)	Tier 4 (2023)	Tier 5 (2023)	Tier 6 (2023)
CURRENT RATE	in \$/HCF	\$6.55	\$6.66	\$7.32	\$7.95	\$8.59	\$9.23
CURRENT TIERS	for CF/Q	<900 cf	<1700 cf	<5700 cf	<16,000 cf	<39,000 cf	>39,000 cf
PROPOSED FOR FY 2024		New TIER 1		New TIER 2	New TIER 3	New TIER 4	
FY '24 RATES	in \$/HCF	\$5.00		\$8.00	\$15.00	\$20.00	
FY '24 TIERS	for CF/Q	<1900 cf		<4000 cf	<16,000 cf	>16,000 cf	

3. Why did the Water Task Force recommend changing the Water Rates?

To promote needed water conservation (see #2), increasing the rates is one of several initiatives the Task Force recommended. We use a lot of water, at least 50% more than neighboring towns on a yearly per capita basis. Manchester averages 80 gallons per person per day. Boston is at 32, Cambridge at 42, Hamilton at 44, Essex at 45. Summer usage increase is twice that of neighboring towns. Many of our households are under 40 gallons per capita per day, however high outdoor water usage pushes our averages into a very high range.

4. How would the proposed rate changes affect me?

65% of users would see the same or lower water bills. One-third would see a 10% to 30% increase and some dozens of households using very large amounts of water will see a 50% increase or more if their water consumption does not change.

5. Won't the proposed water rates unfairly penalize large families?

NO. Large families will pay higher-tier rates only if they use a lot of water outdoors, just like smaller families. Larger families' indoor usage will almost never reach the proposed top 2 tiers, where rates are increased. In fact, based on their indoor (essential) water use, almost all families would pay less under the proposed water rates.

6. When could the Water Rates change?

The Select Board is expected to review the proposed rates in the fall. If approved, they might go into effect in Q4 2023 or later.

7. The Task Force recommended lowering the Tier 1 rate - isn't that an incentive to consume more and not to conserve?

Not really, since each additional gallon still costs something and a significant increase in usage would put you into a higher rate tier. The proposed reduced rates in Tier 1 are designed as a reward for the good behavior of households already conserving our Town's drinking water (by minimizing their outdoor water usage, in almost every case.)

8. Why not institute an increased rate structure for summer months only?

That was considered by the Task Force, but the real culprit is outside watering and not indoor "essential" usage in the summertime. So increased summer rates would penalize somewhat those households which limit themselves to "essential" indoor usage.

9. I hear that new digital "smart" water meters are being considered for all water users in town. When will they be installed?

25 households will be testing 2 varieties of smart water meters for the next year or so. They'll be chosen from over 100 water customers who've volunteered. Based on the study results, the Town will pick a vendor and new meters will be provided without charge to all Manchester households and businesses. You'll be able to track your own water usage in real time, right on your smartphone. (Our existing meters are beyond their 15-20 year expected lifespan and overdue for replacement.)

10. Would the proposed rates also affect my separate meter for irrigation?

Yes, all meters will be billed using the same rate structure.

11. Are the sewer rates also going up?

Sewer rates are not affected by the proposed new water rates. They were raised 2.5% for Fiscal Year 2024.

12. I have a tenant who's also on my water meter - how will that be handled?

Some meters serve multi-unit properties. The bills from such a meter will be divided by the number of units it services and then the tiered rate pricing structure will be applied to each unit's portion of usage.

13. Will everyone in the Top 20% see higher water bills under the recommended new rates?

That depends on how they respond to this conservation effort. If they reduce their water consumption by as little as 10%, many will not see an increase in their water costs.

14. I've heard that the State recommends 65 gallons/day per person. Is that a regulation?

No, it's not a law but a State targeted maximum which affects approval of grants and permits from the DEP. Reasonably conserving summer irrigation water will help us meet this metric while also saving money down the line, as we'll treat less water and be less likely to need an expensive third source of water (in addition to Gravelly Pond and Lincoln Street Well). With reasonable conservation, Manchester can continue to rely on voluntary cooperation with watering restrictions.

15. What is the quality and cost of Manchester's water?

Manchester's town drinking water is of equal quality to most bottled water. Our exemplary water treatment facilities can monitor and control most aspects of water quality (see the Annual Drinking Water Quality Reports). And town drinking water is much less expensive (at around 1 cent per gallon) than bottled water (which costs \$3-5 per gallon). Our water rates could go up in the next several years when we add very expensive PFAS remediation, but will never approach bottled water prices.

16. If enough households cut their summer water usage, wouldn't that bankrupt our Water Division?

The less water we treat and pump, the less cost the Water Division incurs. In practice, it will take some time and more than just higher rates to change our behaviors toward water conservation. The Task Force has a series of recommendations to encourage intelligent conservation and aims to implement these consistently over the coming years. The goal is to be revenue neutral - collecting the same amount of money while pumping less water, primarily to high volume users.

17. Do we really want to encourage high usage households to drill their own irrigation wells?

Some households in Manchester already have their own irrigation wells, many of which are more than adequate for their outside water needs. At least one private irrigation well serves several neighboring households. Irrigation wells don't require the expensive treatment we give to potable drinking water. And almost no high usage households are in the supply zones of the Lincoln Street Well and Gravelly Pond, so there shouldn't be any interference with public water supplies.

18. Isn't this just a disguised tax increase aimed at larger properties?

No, this is not a tax increase. First, payments for water go to an account which is separate and used exclusively to pay for providing safe drinking water. These payments cannot be mingled with taxes and general revenues. Second, Manchester's summer usage increase is more than twice that of neighboring towns. Larger properties have larger water bills because they use a lot of water for irrigation in the summer. We hope that the large property water users will reduce the amount of water that they use for irrigation. Then their water bills will not increase, or at least not much. The Task Force's intent is to be revenue neutral.

19. What if these new rates are enacted but don't encourage much water conservation?

In that event, we will continue to promote more conservation initiatives, including perhaps further water rate increases.