

WINTER 2026

Utility Update



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2026 Utility Rates Support Regional Growth and Infrastructure Needs



The central Ohio area has experienced rapid growth for many years, now being among the fastest growing areas in the state and Midwest. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission estimates that the Columbus metro area will reach a population of three million by 2050. Already, Columbus Water & Power currently serves over 1.4 million water consumers in Columbus and our contracting suburban communities. Utility agencies have a big responsibility to prepare for expected growth by ensuring that adequate water supplies are secured, along with drinking water and wastewater treatment capacity, and good stormwater management. Columbus has a long history of excellent planning for these needs, a tradition we are committed to continuing to ensure safe, reliable, and high-quality services for the customers we serve. While many areas struggle with water supply, Columbus is a national model due to our proactive planning.

Related to these needs, a long-planned fourth water plant -- the Home Road Water Plant -- is under design (see conceptual graphic above). The Division of Water expects to break ground on it later this year.

The cost for it is estimated to be over \$2 billion. Two additional upground reservoirs to supplement our John Doult Upground Reservoir in northwestern Delaware County will also be designed on land Columbus purchased years ago to secure additional water supplies. This need has been highlighted by droughts the past two summers, for which we were able to meet demand, but with more growth coming we have to be ready for additional demand. Increased capacity and treatment upgrades have also been a major focus at our three existing water plants: Dublin Road, Hap Cremean, and Parsons Avenue. Addressing the needs of other aging infrastructure, like water lines and storage tanks, must also be a priority, as is meeting the constantly-evolving regulatory requirements from the Ohio EPA like with our Lead Safe Columbus program.

Additional sewer collection and treatment capacity has long been a focus for our Division of Water Reclamation (DWR), particularly after two consent order agreements with the state of Ohio in the early 2000s. Those agreements prompted many wet weather management improvements and eventually also our Blue-

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print Columbus program to address sewer overflows to waterways and basement backups. Many improvements to capacity in our collection system and our two water reclamation plants, Jackson Pike and Southerly, have been completed since those days and continue. Examples to comply with these orders and better handle larger volume rain events include the Olentangy-Scioto-Interceptor-Sewer Augmentation Relief Sewer completed in 2017, the Chemically Enhanced Primary Treatment facility at Southerly, and the Lower Olentangy Tunnel (see photo) to be completed this year.

Meanwhile, sewer rehabilitation and replacement projects must also be done on existing infrastructure that is aging. The department maintains over 7,000 miles of water and sewer lines – enough to stretch from Columbus to the North Pole and then Paris. The DWR also continues with stormwater improvement projects citywide to improve drainage and reduce flooding, an increasing challenge with climate change bringing more severe weather events to our area.

These massive improvements of course come with high costs. Columbus Water & Power utilizes low interest loan funds through the state and local voted bond packages, and also a competitive bidding process to keep the costs and debt financing as low as possible. Building this kind of infrastructure is expensive but these investments in our service area must be made. Operational costs have risen as well, water treatment chemicals for example. After holding rate increases down as much as possible the past several years, we have reached a point where it is necessary to make further rate adjustments to fund the level of investment needed. A rate study was conducted to determine actual cost of service on various items and other adjustments were made, like to capacity (tap) fees for new build customers.

2026 Columbus utility rates increases approved by the Columbus Utility Advisory Board and City Council:

Water	18%
Sewer	8%
Stormwater (Columbus only):	2%

Smaller Columbus families/households will see an average increase of about \$10 a month, based on average water consumption. Increases will be higher for larger households that use more water and suburban contracted customers, depending on water consumption. Increases will be less for approved low-income discount program customers, again depending



on the amount of water used. The overall average \$ amount increase will be about 11.72%. Columbus' utility rates remain lower than many other regional utilities like Cleveland, Louisville and Pittsburgh.

If you are a Columbus power customer (non-AEP), rate increases were also approved, for only the second time in 19 years. Those rate changes vary among account category; please visit our website for details. The Division of Power is upgrading streetlights to LED citywide, planning additional lighting in unlit areas, addressing other infrastructure needs, and facing increased purchased power costs.

Our discount programs for income-qualified water, sewer and power customers will continue. A change was also approved for our income-qualifying water/sewer discount program for 2026. Those approved will now receive 30% off water/sewer usage charges (up from 25% in 2025). Qualified seniors age 60 and up may also receive an additional discount of daily water service fees being waived.

Income-qualified city power customers may receive 25% off power usage. Seniors age 60 and over are eligible for the additional discount of waived daily service charges.

Everyone can save money on their utility bills by limiting their water/power consumption, along with promptly fixing leaks and attending to other needed repairs.

To learn more about the 2026 utility rate structure and our discount programs, please visit columbus.gov/cwp or contact Customer Service: UtilityLeadRep@columbus.gov or 614-645-8276.