Why Is Your Water Bill Going Up?

A plain-English look at Portland Water District's proposed 2027 water rate increase

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PUBLIC HEARING: Monday, November 9, 2026 • 6:30 PM • Jeff P. Nixon Development Center, 225 Douglass St, Portland • In person or by Zoom. PWD's Board of Trustees is expected to vote on November 23, 2026.

THE CLAIM

Portland Water District (PWD) wants to raise water rates starting January 1, 2027. For a typical home, PWD says this adds **$3.12 a month** to the water bill. That number checks out — it matches PWD's own published rate filing almost exactly.

Important

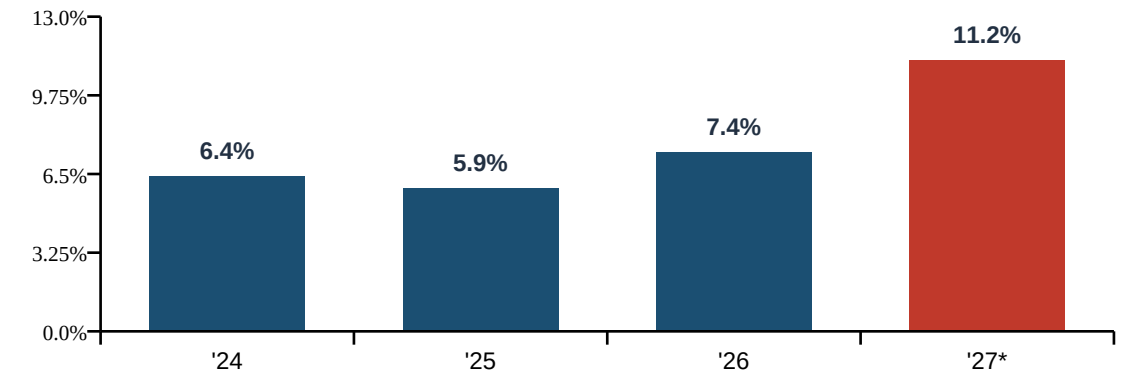
This is a **water-only** increase. It does not touch your sewer/wastewater charge, which your town — not PWD — sets separately.

WHAT THE NUMBER REALLY MEANS

PWD plans this as an average **10.4% increase for the residential class** (11.2% once you count businesses and other customer classes) — that's the figure PWD uses to plan how much total revenue it needs from residential customers as a group. A single typical household's own bill, calculated directly from the published tariff, actually rises closer to **9.7%**: the minimum charge everyone pays goes up 9.8%, the next tier up 9.7%, so most typical bills land close to that second number. The class-wide 10.4% blends in every account size and usage level across the whole residential class, not just one typical bill.

Compared with PWD's own recently confirmed average rate adjustments, this proposal is still clearly the biggest in years — well above 2026's 7.4% and more than any other confirmed year in this chart.

Four-Year History: Average Water Rate Adjustments



Figures are each year's PWD-published average/blended adjustment across all customer classes, the only basis consistently available for every year shown. For residential customers specifically, PWD's own board order put 2025's increase at 5.5%; the proposed 2027 residential increase is 10.4% (see above).

Dollar impact per year, for a typical 7-CCF residential bill: 2024 +$1.52/mo • 2025 +$1.49 • 2026 +$1.92 • **2027 (proposed) +$3.12**. We could not independently re-confirm residential-specific figures for 2022–2023 in this round of fact-checking, so those years aren't shown here.

Use less water than average? PWD's $3.12 figure is based on 7 CCF (hundred cubic feet) a month, close to PWD's own stated “typical” usage. A lower-usage household, around 5 CCF a month, would see about **$2.50** more; a 4-person household using closer to 10 CCF would see about **$4.05** more. All three work out to roughly the same ~9.7% increase — the percentage stays fairly steady across usage levels within this tier, even though the residential class-wide figure above is reported as 10.4%.

WHERE THE MONEY ACTUALLY GOES

PWD keeps a separate Water Fund from its wastewater funds — water customers' bills only pay for water-side costs, not wastewater projects like the new North Windham treatment plant (that cost is billed to municipalities through separate wastewater assessments, not to water ratepayers). For 2027, PWD's own Water Fund budget is up $4.4 million, or 12.0%, over 2026 — split roughly evenly between higher day-to-day operating costs (+9.8%, about $2.2 million) and higher capital financing costs (+15.5%, about $2.2 million, mostly debt service on new borrowing). Specific drivers PWD names in its own Water Fund budget:

- $11 million to replace aging water mains across the district
- $5.5 million to upgrade chemical storage facilities at the Sebago Lake Water Treatment Facility
- Debt service up 11.8% ($1.19 million) as new borrowing is issued — total Water Fund debt is projected to rise from $99.2 million at the end of 2026 to $122.7 million at the end of 2027
- Salaries and wages up 8.6% ($557,000) and employee benefits up 10.9% ($293,000)
- Treatment chemical costs up 17.3% ($122,000), mostly from a 15% rise in the unit cost of chemicals
- Purchased power up 17.4% ($138,000), largely a newly locked-in energy contract at the Sebago Lake plant with a 50% rate increase, partly offset by lower CMP transmission/delivery rates
- Contracted services up 10.7% ($275,000), mostly paving, contractor construction, and traffic control tied to water-main work

PWD's general manager, writing about the district's overall investment needs (water and wastewater combined, not water alone), put it plainly in the 2027 budget letter: “a higher level of investments in our infrastructure will cause rates to increase in 2027 and in the coming years.” The Water Fund's own numbers point the same direction — debt is climbing and main-replacement work is ongoing — so there's no specific PWD statement promising this is a one-time catch-up.

What Changes on Your Bill

Standard 5/8" residential meter, per month. Source: PWD's current and proposed tariffs.

Charge	2026 (current)	2027 (proposed)	Change
Minimum charge (incl. first 1 CCF)	**$12.86**	**$14.12**	**+9.8%**
Next 29 CCF, per CCF	**$3.21**	**$3.52**	**+9.7%**
Next 70 CCF, per CCF	**$3.13**	**$3.59**	**+14.7%**

By customer class, the proposed increase is 10.4% for residential, 12.9% commercial, 14.4% industrial, 13.7% government, 9.8% for fire-protection accounts, and 1.7% for the small “Other” class — residential is below the commercial/industrial/government classes but above fire-protection and “Other.” The blended average across every class is 11.2%.

THE LEGAL BACKDROP

PWD's water rates get **no Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC) review at all.** Under a 2014 state law ("An Act to Reform the Regulation of Consumer-Owned Water Utilities"), PWD requested and received an exemption — effective January 1, 2016 — from PUC review of its water rates, financing, and related service standards. Since then, water rates have been set entirely by PWD's own 11-member elected Board of Trustees, with no state regulator approving or reviewing them.

PWD's own process: its Finance Committee reviews the numbers, the full Board votes to move forward, supporting documents go public, customers get a mailed notice, the Board holds a public hearing (this year, November 9), then the Board casts a final vote (this year, November 23). PWD files the approved rate schedule with the PUC afterward, but only for the PUC's information — not for approval.

Where does the Public Advocate fit in? Because PWD is exempt from PUC review, the Maine Office of the Public Advocate — which formally represents customers before the PUC on rates like CMP's electricity — has no required role in this specific process. The November 9 public hearing in front of PWD's own Board is the actual point of public input and accountability for this increase; there's no separate state-level review step to watch for afterward.

You've now got the verified numbers: what PWD is proposing, what it means for a typical bill, where PWD itself says the money goes, how its rate-setting process actually works, and how this compares with recent years. Whether an increase of this size is the right call — and whether PWD's water-fund spending is being managed well — isn't something we're going to tell you. That's a judgment only you can make, and the November 9 hearing is the place to make it heard.

Sources

Every source below was checked directly against the official page or document on Oct 26–27, 2026. Rates are proposed, not yet approved — check the official source before relying on a figure.

1 Portland Water District — Water Rate Adjustment (2027 proposal overview, hearing details): pwd.org/water-rate-adjustment

2 Portland Water District — proposed 2027 water tariff: pwd.org (Water-Tariffs-2027-Proposed.pdf)

3 Portland Water District — current (effective 1/1/2026) billing rates: pwd.org/rates

4 Portland Water District — 2027 Proposed Budget: General Manager's letter (pp. 9–11), Regulatory Environment and Water Rate Case Process (pp. 18–20), and the Water Fund budget (pp. 46–48): pwd.org (2027-Proposed-Budget.pdf)

5 Portland Water District — 2027 Water Rate Adjustment Mailer (customer-class breakdown): pwd.org (PWD-Rate-adjustment-letter_web.pdf)

6 Portland Water District Board of Trustees — Order 25-020 (Sept. 29, 2025), proposing the 2026 adjustment and showing the rate-adjustment history since 2020: pwd.org (BOT-9.29.25-Website.pdf)

7 Portland Water District Board of Trustees — Order 24-029 (Nov. 25, 2024), final 2025 rate schedule with the residential/commercial/industrial split: pwd.org (bot_11.25.24_website.pdf)

8 Portland Water District — 2024 rate adjustment public hearing notice (average 6.4%, effective Jan. 1, 2024): pwd.org/news/water-rate-adjustment-and-public-hearing

9 Portland Water District — 2025 Budget Report, Regulatory Environment section (PUC exemption, pp. 18–19): pwd.org (2025_budget.pdf)

10 Maine Revised Statutes, Title 35-A §6114 (PUC exemptions for consumer-owned water utilities): legislature.maine.gov

11 Maine Office of the Public Advocate: maine.gov/meopa

12 Gerry's own PWD billing history, 2022–2026 (52 bills), used to independently check PWD's $3.12 figure.

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