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RATE HIKE–

In 2023, multiple local businesses in New Rockford averaged 22,500 or more gallons of water per month, including Rocket Wash, K&M Bison Lodge, West View Apartments and Lutheran Home of the Good Shephard.

All told, the city expects to collect \$85,500 more per year as a result of both rate increases, assuming every property owner pays their utility bills.

That should largely take care of the city’s water fund deficit, which has been a concern primarily due to a \$4.7 million loan and \$4.5 million grant they received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2020.

Those funds paid for much of the recent upgrades to New Rockford’s water treatment plant, but as a condition of receiving those funds the USDA requires the city to submit a balanced water budget every year.

Presnell said nearly \$90,000 had to be transferred from their general fund in order to balance their water budget in 2023, and at their December 2024 meeting they had to transfer approximately \$57,000.

Also provided as an explanation for increasing rates is significant inflation since 2018, when the City of New Rockford last increased their water rates.

According to Presnell, budgeted expenditures have increased by over \$88,000 since 2018.

“With costs going up all over, raising rates is the last thing we wanted to do ... but right now it is a must,” he said.

However, the rate hike approved last Monday is steeper than originally expected.

As recently as last month commissioners had signaled that they would be increasing rates more gradually over time, so as to mitigate the financial burden on residents and businesses.

In fact, Commission President Stu Richter seemed to still be expecting a more gradual rate increase when the discussion began last Monday.

“We’re trying to make a middle of the road decision to go up as slowly as we can, per USDA recommendations,” Richter said.

Additionally, a proposed plan for water rate increases presented to commissioners during Monday’s meeting depicted a yearly plan for gradual rate hikes until 2028. But by the end of Monday’s commission meeting that plan had been scrapped.

Their thinking began to shift when commissioner Jim Belquist asked why they don’t increase rates more significantly now, rather than wait several years to erase their water fund deficit.

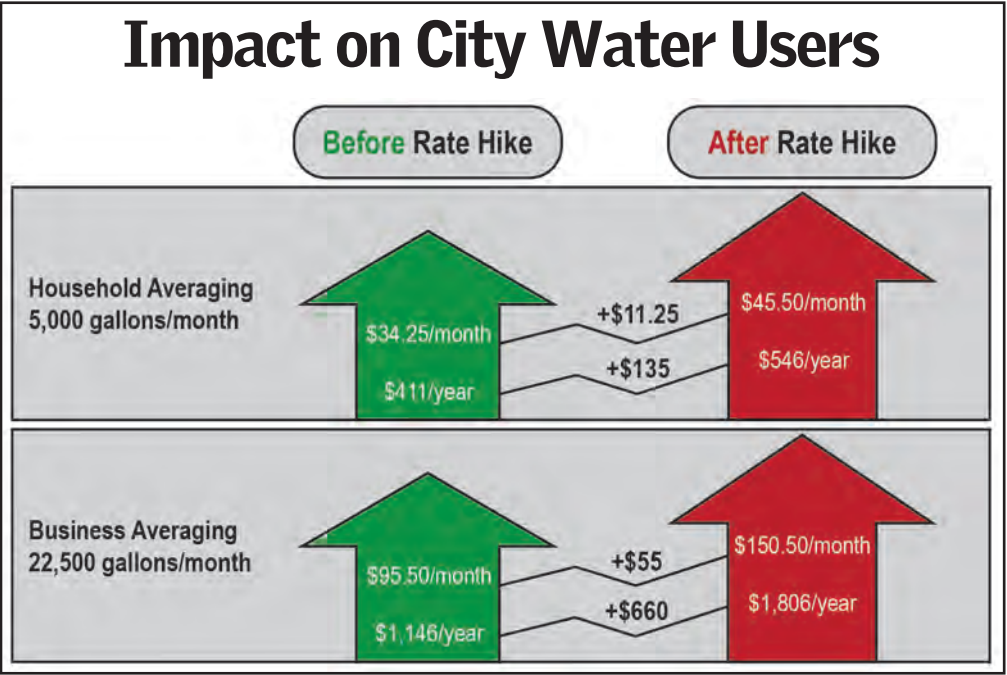
“Why do we have to wait three or four years before we’re even on this?” asked Belquist, referring to their water budget. “... I’m wondering why we should do it gradually, I don’t know why we wouldn’t want to make this whole right away.”

Looking at the proposed plan for gradual increases until 2028, Belquist suggested skipping the smaller rate hikes proposed for 2025 and 2026, and move straight to the proposed rates for 2027 – which were a base rate of \$21.50 and a usage rate of \$6.00 per 1,000 gallons.

Commissioners discussed whether they might see an increase in residents not paying their utility bills on time as a consequence, but ultimately concluded it wouldn’t be a problem and came to agree with Belquist’s suggestion of a larger increase.

A motion to increase rates to \$21.50 and \$6.00 per 1,000 gallons, effective June 1, was then carried unanimously by the commission.

The city’s decision marks the first water rate increase in New Rockford since 2018, and since then, rate increases



Graphic illustrating the impact New Rockford's rate hike will have on residents and businesses. Graphic by Winnie Weninger using data provided by New Rockford City Auditor Andrew Presnell.

by other comparable cities in the region meant New Rockford residents becoming among the least burdened by water rates in recent years.

Once the new rates take effect this June, New Rockford residents and businesses will be on par with nearby communities.

At just \$21.50, New Rockford will still have one of the lowest base rates among comparable nearby cities, but they’ll have one of the highest usage rates after going to \$6.00 per 1,000 gallons.

Cooperstown, for example, has a much higher base rate of \$29.75 and a lower usage rate of \$4.75 per 1,000 gallons.

Carrington, meanwhile, has a \$24 base rate and a similar usage rate of \$6.50 per 1,000 gallons, and in Langdon the base rate is \$27 while their usage rate is just \$3.81 per 1,000 gallons.

Several more cities are listed for comparison in a graphic on the front page.

Richter said commissioners held off increasing rates so long largely due to the problems experienced after the city’s water treatment plant was upgraded in 2022. Not to mention the numerous complaints they received from residents about brown and murky tap water.

However, those problems appear to have subsided in recent months, and Richter said on Monday that he believes they’re finally putting out a good product.

Before adjourning Monday’s meeting, commissioners also carried a motion to increase the monthly charge for mosquito spraying from \$0.75 to \$1.50, which will also go into effect on June 1. The rate for mosquito spraying in New Rockford had not been increased since 2007.

“We all know what costs have done since 2018,” said Richter during Monday’s meeting. “Everything is more expensive, even down to mosquito spraying.”

The city’s next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 7 at 9 a.m. in the New Rockford City Hall.

GREINER–

those 12 Greiner will be the trumpet section’s sixth chair.

The all-state band includes students from both Class A and Class B schools, and Greiner was one of only a handful of Class B students to be selected.

“I am looking forward to playing challenging pieces of music in a large band,” said Greiner about his upcoming concert. “I am also looking forward to meeting musicians from other schools.”

Greiner and his fellow all-state band members will be under the direction of Robert Herrings, who’s been teaching band for 21 years.

The event will begin on Friday, March 14, with Herrings and the students going through rehearsals and clinics, as well as a pizza party for dinner.

On Saturday, March 15 they’ll have one last rehearsal in the morning before the afternoon concert, which begins at 3 p.m. in the Mandan High School Auditorium.

CONFLICT–

and variances for county projects.

Fite suggested to commissioners that as a landowner in Grandfield Township, Richter could have a financial interest in the Flickertail Wind project, an expansive 43,000 acre wind farm scheduled for construction in Eddy and Wells Counties in 2027.

He also mentioned Richter’s position as President of the New Rockford Area Betterment Corporation (NRABC), President of the New Rockford City Commission, part owner of Cash & Carry Lumber and his seat on the Governance Board of W-E Wind, LLC.

W-E Wind is the local development company established in 2008 for the purpose of bringing a wind energy project to the area.

Lies issued her opinion on the matter hours before press time on Thursday, March 6. Her opinion is printed in its entirety on page 3.

North Dakota Century Code states that any voting member of a political subdivision has a conflict of interest if they have a “direct and substantial personal or pecuniary interest” in a matter before the commission.

“It is my opinion that Richter’s position on the [NRABC] Board, being Mayor of the City of New Rockford, being a part owner of Cash & Carry Lumber, and being on the Governance Board of W-E Wind are either not ‘direct and substantial’ or are not ‘personal and pecuniary,’” writes Lies.

However, Lies had a different take when it came to Richter’s ownership of land in Grandfield Township.

“If Richter’s land is in the Flickertail Wind project area of development and he would receive money from having a wind tower on his land, then I believe that would be a ‘direct and substantial’ and ‘personal and pecuniary’ interest,” she writes.

In other words, Richter would have a conflict of interest and be subject to North Dakota’s conflict of interest laws if any wind turbines are to be placed on his private property.

Richter told the Transcript on Thursday that, at this time, a wind turbine is not proposed for his property, meaning there is currently no conflict of interest as it relates to his land ownership in Grandfield Township.

However, the placement of wind turbines has not yet been finalized, and Richter said that if he learns of any turbines to be placed on his property, he will address the potential conflict of interest at that time in accordance with Lies’ opinion.

Lies wrote that Richter’s potential conflict of interest would not automatically disqualify him from voting on matters related to the Flickertail Wind Project, but would be at the discretion of the full zoning commission.

“Allowing Richter to vote on issues pertaining to Flickertail Wind would then come down to the consent of a majority of the rest of the Zoning Commission, assuming that his ownership of land in Grandfield Township would bring him a direct personal, pecuniary gain (i.e. by having a wind tower placed directly on his land),” writes Lies.

Permits for each individual turbine in Eddy County will need approval at meetings of the county’s zoning commission, which are open to the public. Advance notice of such meetings will be published in the Transcript.

Community Calendar

- EDDY COUNTY MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY** will meet on Monday, March 10 at noon. The meeting will be in the conference room of the Eddy-New Rockford Public Library.
- AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY** will meet on Tuesday, March 11 at the Raymond B. Thorn Post 30 Hall. Supper will be at 6 p.m., followed by the meeting.
- TORSK DINNER** on Sunday, March 16 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Sheyenne VFW Post 3696.
- TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP** on Tuesday, March 18. Join Joel Allen, the Community Forestry Specialist, for a workshop at 2 p.m. at First Lutheran Church in Sheyenne and 5 p.m. at the Extension office in New Rockford. The backup date is March 25 if weather forces a delay. For more information, call the Extension office at (701) 947-2454.
- STOP THE BLEED – EDDY COUNTY** on Monday, March 24 at 1 p.m. at the Eddy County Extension Office. Register by March 20. Sessions limited to 12 participants. Register at <https://forms.gle/M5UEof07TkXt2U548>.
- SAVE THE DATE** for a National Vietnam War Veterans Day event/brunch on Saturday, March 29. Time and location to be determined.
- HUNTERS EDUCATION AND GUN SAFETY COURSE** from 6-8:45 p.m. will be held on April 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, with the final exam on Monday, April 14 at the New Rockford Eagles Club. The in-class course is free of charge and the online course is approximately \$25. To register online, go <https://gf.nd.gov> and locate the Hunters Education tab.
- BINGO** at Ostby Hall in Sheyenne every Saturday at 7 p.m.
- MARCH ITEM OF THE MONTH** at the Eddy County Hunger Free Food Pantry is juice. Donations can be dropped off at First Lutheran Church, 436 1st Ave. N, New Rockford.
- TOPS 370** is a weight loss support group. Meetings are on Mondays at 5 p.m. at First Lutheran Church in New Rockford. For more information call (701) 947-2138.
- EDDY CO. VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER** is open in March from 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. on March 4, 14, 20 and 25. Same day appointments available. Please call (701) 302-8087.
- COMMUNITY AMBULANCE SERVICE BOARD** meets the second Monday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Ambulance Hall, New Rockford.
- VFW POST 3696** in Sheyenne meets the second Tuesday of each month. Supper at 7 p.m., meeting to follow.
- LAKE REGION SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE** support group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Community Room of North Star Community Credit Union, Devils Lake. For info call Theresa at (701) 662-4790.
- FOOT CARE CLINIC** every third Wednesday of the month at Eddy County Public Health. Call (701) 947-5311 for appointments. Cost is \$25.
- SAFE HARBOR – STAND FOR THE SILENT** meets the fourth Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m. at the Eagles Club, New Rockford.
- EDDY-NEW ROCKFORD LIBRARY BOARD** meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 5 p.m.
- NEW ROCKFORD POST OFFICE** has a new phone number. Call (701) 505-8842. The office is open 9-11 a.m. and 12:30-4 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- SHEYENNE POST OFFICE** also has a new phone number. Call (701) 404-1149. The office is open 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- Please contact the Transcript at nrtranscript@gmail.com or (701) 947-2417 to have your event notices listed.

CITY OF NEW ROCKFORD FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF ALL CITY FUNDS Period Ending December 31, 2024				
Name of Account	Receipts	Transfers In	Transfers Out	Disbursement
General Fund	554,399.65		\$ 93,200.00	\$ 613,447.05
Office Change	0.00			\$ -
Street Department Fund	172,810.90	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 199,228.05
Legacy Earnings Highway Fund	29,405.45			\$ 39,753.83
Spec. Ass'm'ts Def. Fund	8,421.95			\$ -
Emergency Fund	7,221.20			\$ -
Economic Development Fund	102,811.09			\$ 102,811.09
Airport Fund	50,544.61			\$ 99,932.99
Siren Fund	200.00	\$ 200.00		\$ -
Infras. Impr. Fund	150,420.40		\$ 75,000.00	\$ 86,923.84
Equipment Fund	3,292.19	\$ 33,000.00		\$ 39,358.27
Fire Dept Equip & Bldg Fund	13,151.74			\$ 161.45
Municipal Infrastructure Fund	325,000.00			\$ 200,000.00
Community Development Fund	0.00			\$ -
American Rescue Plan	0.00			\$ -
Street Project Fund	10.00			\$ -
Special Assessment Fund	819,704.25			\$ 627,206.86
Lodging Fund	2,026.66			\$ -
Swimming Pool Fund	62,192.11			\$ 60,482.50
Improvement Dist. 2019	424,444.85	\$ 75,000.00	\$ 61,359.00	\$ 358,258.00
Water Main Replacement	5.00			\$ -
Water Works Fund	364,532.30	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 409,657.75
Sewer Maintenance Fund	122,085.31		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 100,915.40
Sanitation Fund	311,059.38		\$ 13,000.00	\$ 305,947.56
Flood Fund	0.00			\$ -
Water Works Reserve Fund	0.00	\$ 15,826.00		\$ -
Water Works Short Lived Asset Fund	0.00	\$ 45,533.00		\$ -
TRUST FUNDS				
Eddy New Rockford Library	32,185.47	\$ 3,000.00		\$ 39,108.84
TOTAL				
	\$ 3,555,924.51	\$ 262,559.00	\$ 262,559.00	\$ 3,283,193.48