

**Fall/Winter 2023**

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# Water lines

News you can use from your Sunnyslope Water District

## Increased costs drive rate hikes

This is news we don't like to share, and nobody wants to hear: water rates are going up. Beginning in February, a rate increase will be necessary to cover the cost of inflation, and fund the Accelerated Drought Response Project (ADRoP).

"As anyone running a household knows, prices for essential goods and services have risen, and the same is true for water suppliers," said Sunnyslope Water General Manager Drew Lander. "Our costs have increased for just about everything: fuel, power, insurance, chemicals, supplies, and equipment parts. On the bright side, thanks to diverse money-saving strategies Sunnyslope has not increased water rates for five years, while other suppliers have raised rates repeatedly. Even with the rate increase, Sunnyslope customers will continue to have the lowest rates in our region thanks to prudent investments and ongoing efficiencies in all areas of operation."



### Paying our share for water delivery

While a portion of the increase is to cover Sunnyslope's increased operational costs, the lion's share is for pass-through charges from the other agencies who deliver raw water to our treatment plants: the San Benito County Water District (SBCWD—our surface water wholesale supplier), the Bureau of Reclamation, and the water authority that distributes our surface water from the San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos. All these agencies have to pass down their inflationary costs, and all water providers like Sunnyslope must pay their share of maintenance and operations for the canals and conduits, capital projects, and other infrastructure required to transport water to our treatment plants. In addition, with seven of the last 10 years being drought years, reservoir levels have been extremely low, producing little hydropower to offset electrical costs for water transport—so we are now paying for those higher power bills. (Cont. on page 3)

The rate increase will cover inflation costs and drought protection, including increased capacity at the West Hills Water Treatment Plant, shown here with Water Treatment Operator William Boltz.

**Win a \$100 gift card when you sign up for paperless billing or autopay!**



Get two chances to win when you sign up for both! Just click on the contest icon at [sunnyslopewater.org](http://sunnyslopewater.org) to enroll, and you'll be automatically entered to win a \$100 gift card to The Inn at Tres Pinos restaurant.

We congratulate our most recent winner, Jennifer Gomer, and thank our many conscientious customers who have already signed up to save time and money, and reduce their carbon footprint.

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Sunnyslope Water  
3570 Airline Hwy.  
Hollister, CA 95023



## Sunnyslope steps up to provide Gavilan college sewer service

We're happy to report that Sunnyslope Water and the City of Hollister have signed a contractual agreement that will provide municipal sewer services to the new Gavilan College San Benito County campus. When the college broke ground in June, construction plans included a septic system because the Hollister City Council was unable to reach consensus to offer city sewer services at that time. The college could not delay construction or it would lose funding from Measure X, approved by voters in 2018.

"We knew we had the expertise in place to step in and help move sewer connection services forward," said Sunnyslope Water General Manager Drew Lander. "With support from our board of directors, we were able to partner with the city so that the \$0.5 million the college would have spent on septic can now be used for classrooms and educational benefits for the community instead." (Cont. on next page)

Artist rendering shows the entrance to the Gavilan College San Benito County Campus now under construction. Sunnyslope sewer service will save the college \$0.5 million dollars in septic construction costs which can now be used for educational benefits in our community.



**Sunnyslope  
Water District**

*Providing reliable, high-quality,  
cost-effective water and sanitary services  
to our community, to protect human  
health and the environment*

3570 Airline Hwy, Hollister, CA 95023  
(831) 637-4670 • [sunnyslopewater.org](http://sunnyslopewater.org)  
Open Monday-Friday, 8 am to 5 pm

### Free 24-hour emergency service:

If you think your water meter is leaking, or you see water gushing in the street, it is an emergency. Do not hesitate to contact us at (831) 637-4670, day or night! Our on-call staff will return your call immediately.

The public is welcome to attend Sunnyslope Water District board meetings, held every third Tuesday of the month at 5:15 pm. To attend remotely via Zoom, please click the board meeting link at [sunnyslopewater.org](http://sunnyslopewater.org).

### Board of Directors

Dorothy (Dee) Brown President  
Ed Mauro, Vice-president  
Mike Alcorn  
Jerry Buzzetta  
James Parker

### General Manager

Drew Lander, P.E.

## Finding ways to stretch every dollar

At Sunnyslope Water we are always looking for ways to get the most out of every ratepayer dollar. Energy efficiency in all areas of operations provides ongoing cost savings, and robust preventative maintenance ensures that we get the longest life possible from equipment and infrastructure. Here are a just a few current programs, grants, and technologies we are implementing to keep fees as low as possible.

- The annexation of three small local water providers into the Sunnyslope system is bringing in new customers from nearby communities to share costs. Sunnyslope Water will be overseeing construction of new water delivery infrastructure to consolidate the Tres Pinos Water District, the Best Road Mutual Water Company, and the Stonegate and Harbern Way water systems, supported by two state grants totaling \$17 million. Over the next couple years we will have 300 new customers to share costs, with no expense to existing ratepayers, and without encouraging new development.
- By the end of the year our new 500 watt solar array will be reducing energy costs across all our operations. The solar system will reduce our power bill by 80 percent, or approximately \$240,375 per year. In addition, Sunnyslope is being reimbursed 30 percent of the total project cost under the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Sunnyslope recently purchased a remote-controlled mower which saves money and time by allowing staff members to maintain our numerous property easements in a more efficient manner. The mowers are twice as fast as conventional weed wackers or ride-on mowers, and are much safer on slopes and rough terrain, which has also lowered our workman's comp and liability insurance premiums.



**SUPER-CHARGED SKILLS** Sunnyslope technicians hold multiple certifications to perform job functions that would require several employees at larger districts. Here, Utility Maintenance Operator Dave Padilla, a 24-year Sunnyslope employee, checks flow volume at Well Number 2. Dave is cross-trained in drinking water treatment, water distribution, and wastewater treatment.

## How do Sunnyslope fees compare to other water providers?

Approximate monthly water bill comparison  
for average household

(500 gallons per day; 15,000-gallon monthly total)



| City of Santa Cruz | San Juan Bautista | San Jose Water | City of Hollister | Sunnyslope Water District |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| \$347              | \$210             | \$190          | \$129             | \$128                     |

Despite the February rate increase, Sunnyslope customers will continue to have the lowest water rates in our region. While other agencies have raised rates multiple times in the recent past, this is Sunnyslope's first rate hike in five years. Sunnyslope Water District is a local not-for-profit agency voted into existence by ratepayers, dedicated to matching revenue to expenses.



**OFFSETTING INCREASED CHEMICAL COSTS** Upgrading our sodium hydroxide tank from 3,500 to 6,650 gallons allows us to buy the chemical at a lower bulk rate, and save \$26,000 in freight charges annually.

## Fee increase *(Cont. from front page)*

### ADRoP: storing water for future droughts

To cover their increased costs and pay for ADRoP drought protection, SBCWD has raised the cost of raw surface water by \$200 per acre foot. About half this amount will fund ADRoP, which will more than double our local capacity to store water during wet years like 2023. As reported in our last issue, ADRoP will use injection wells to store treated surface water underground for use during dry years when our surface water allocation is cut off or reduced, as it was during the three previous years.

The \$40 million project will also upgrade the West Hills Water Treatment Plant, increasing water production from 4.5 to 6.7 million gallons per day. ADRoP will allow us to use less hard well water during dry years, which will conserve our groundwater basin and improve drinking water quality. SBCWD has received an \$11.5 million grant from the California Department of Water Resources to fund initial project phases, and they anticipate further grant funding of \$40 million.

## How much will my bill go up?

Sunnyslope's equitable rate structure will continue to have three tiers, with bigger water users paying more. The estimated 15 percent rate increase will bring the average \$111 monthly water bill up to \$127.65.

"As a nonprofit agency we aim to stretch every ratepayer dollar, and match revenue to expenses, leaving no profit," said Sunnyslope General Manager Drew Lander. "We will continue to leverage new technology, develop innovative programs, and work cooperatively in the community to deliver safe, clean water at the lowest cost possible."

## Gavilan sewer service *(Cont. from page 2)*

Under the agreement, Sunnyslope will provide sewer services for Gavilan College and the adjacent developments of Fairview Corners and Cielo Vista. We will oversee construction of the new sewer main lines—paid for in full by Fairview Corners developers—and contract with the city for wastewater treatment.

"We are gratified that our community's new college campus will have a safer, more reliable wastewater system," said Drew. "Hooking up to the city system will also increase recycled water output from the Hollister Domestic Water Reclamation Facility, which recharges local groundwater and provides irrigation for parks and agriculture."

**You ask;  
we answer!**

## "Is my water really safe?"

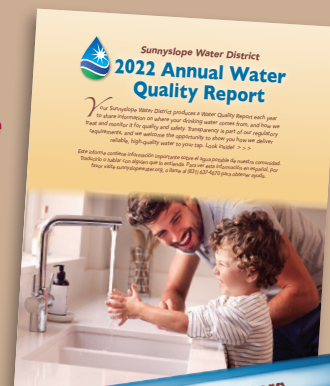
**Yes!** We continually monitor the Sunnyslope treatment and delivery systems so you can rest assured that you are receiving pure, safe, drinking water. Our professional employees are dedicated to protecting your health, and we're proud of the high-quality water we deliver. Throughout last fiscal year we performed 14,865 water quality tests from 114 locations throughout the district, with results verified by third party labs. All health-related contaminants were at trace levels, well below concentrations allowed by the US Environmental Protection Agency. In fact, Sunnyslope has had no water quality violations for the last 26 years. Please check out our annual water quality report below for details.

Questions about water quality surfaced this summer after a concerned customer posted on social media, citing an unofficial, non-regulatory website which claims that our local water contains chemicals that damage health. The website belongs to a fringe activist group that creates its own inflated parameters separate from government agencies. Largely funded by the organics industry, the group's alarmist warnings are widely criticized by toxicologists as "misleading" and "scaremongering."

To meet the website's unfounded benchmarks for purity, water providers would need to build expensive reverse osmosis systems that could raise water bills ten-fold—without providing any health benefits. Their unrealistic parameters explain why virtually all water suppliers reviewed on the website are called out for providing contaminated water. The truth is, all water contains contaminants—dissolved minerals and trace quantities of chemicals—whether it comes from the tap, remote underground springs, or the grocery store.

Have a question? Please email us at [billing@sunnyslopewater.org](mailto:billing@sunnyslopewater.org), or call (831) 637-4670.

**Get the  
facts  
on your  
drinking  
water  
quality**



[sunnyslopewater.org](http://sunnyslopewater.org)



# 4

## Four good reasons to retire your salt water softener —and get paid to do it!

### 1. You may not need it

Hard water used to be an issue in Hollister when our water came solely

from local wells, but that changed in 2014 when the Lessalt Water Treatment Plant began delivering mostly surface water imported from the San Luis Reservoir. The ratio of soft surface water to well water can fluctuate during times of drought and reduced water allocations, but in general Sunnyslope water exceeds standard dissolved mineral set points to prevent hard water issues such as scale inside pipes and appliances. Water is considered hard when dissolved calcium carbonate is above 130 parts per million (ppm), and our local drinking water ranges between 100-110 ppm—about the same hardness found in most California rivers and lakes. If you are still using a water softener, consider turning it off for a while to see if you notice a difference. The Water Resources Association of San Benito County (WRASBC) can adjust your water softener free of charge to ensure maximum efficiency.

### 2. Salt water softeners pollute our groundwater

Sodium is one of the biggest contaminants of the water supply in California, the nation, and the world. There are strict state and federal regulations on the concentrations that can be legally discharged into the environment. In Hollister the problem is exacerbated, because our local aquifer already has naturally occurring salt and minerals, and is essentially a closed loop basin which rarely gets flushed with outside water. That is why new installations of salt water softeners that empty into the sewage system have been banned inside the Sunnyslope Water District and the City of Hollister.

### 3. Salt water softeners are bad for local wastewater recycling

The discharge of brine from water softeners increases the cost of wastewater recycling at the Hollister Water Reclamation Facility, and can reduce beneficial use on high-value crops and landscaping. High salinity makes it difficult to comply with discharge regulations, which can result in significant fines that must be passed down to taxpayers.

### 4. Get paid to use a better alternative

WRASBC offers a \$300 rebate if you replace your old self-regulating water softener that uses salt/potassium with a water conditioner that crystallizes hard minerals without the use of salt. No-salt conditioners require no periodic flushing, take up less space, can reduce sodium intake in your diet, and usually do not require electricity to operate. They also offer the option to add filtration for chlorine, etc. You can also receive a \$300 rebate to demolish your water softener with no replacement.

If you must have a salt water softener, you can transition to off-site regeneration, a service that picks up the brine from your softener for processing outside San Benito County. WRASBC will provide a rebate of \$250 with proof of a one-year service contract.

For more information on water softener rebates and the negative impacts of sodium in our environment, please visit [wrasbc.org](http://wrasbc.org), or call Shawn at (831) 637-4378.



**An off-site regeneration service regularly exchanges your home water softener tank so that no salt discharges into the environment.**



### Reset your watering schedule for winter

As the days get shorter and temperatures cool, your landscape needs less water. Save money and conserve water by resetting your irrigation controller for winter, and turning it off when storms are frequent. A friendly representative from our local Water Resources Association San Benito County can help you program your irrigation controller for maximum benefit, and check for leaks and inefficiencies. For assistance, please contact Program Manager Shawn Novack at (831) 637-4378 or [snovack@sbcwd.com](mailto:snovack@sbcwd.com).

### It's planting time: get paid to replace your lawn!

Don't miss out! If you have a water-guzzling lawn, now is the perfect time to replace it with beautiful native and drought tolerant plants. Winter rains will establish the plants' root systems for blooms and healthy growth in spring and summer. The Water Resources Association San Benito County is offering rebates



**Chaparral clematis, a flowering vine native to Hollister.**

to homeowners who replace water-intensive lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping. Through the Turf Removal Program, residents can convert from 100 to 1,000 square feet of irrigated lawn and receive a two dollar per square foot rebate (\$200-\$2,000).

To get started, please contact Program Manager Shawn Novack at (831) 637-4378 or [snovack@sbcwd.com](mailto:snovack@sbcwd.com) to schedule an inspection to see if your yard qualifies. You can also visit [wrasbc.org](http://wrasbc.org) for details and application form, as well as free, downloadable garden plans featuring native and drought-tolerant plants.



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