

## **ATTACHMENT 8**

### **WRITTEN RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS**

#### **05-13-2025 10:05 A.M. SEWER RATES AND WRITTEN REPORT OF CHARGES**

To ensure that any legal challenge to sewer service charges is not based on contentions or evidence that were not before the Board of Directors, California law requires Sonoma Water and the Districts and Zones to follow a series of steps. These include providing a 45-day comment period, and providing the Boards of Directors and public with a response in writing to timely legal objections. In the interests of explaining the sewer service charges and the reasons for them, Sonoma Water staff have included not just legal arguments, but also all written communications that go beyond a protest to be tabulated in the majority protest hearing.

The comment period began when Proposition 218 notices were sent to customer on March 7, 2025, and concluded on April 22, 2025. Responses to the timely objections are below. In considering the comments and the responses, as always, the Boards of Directors have discretion to clarify, reduce, continue to review, or adopt the proposed sewer service rates in light of the objections and the responses.

Overall, staff notes that no objections raise legal concerns about the legality of the proposed rates, but one objection correctly stated that a parcel had been assigned an incorrect number of Equivalent Single Family Dwellings. Staff thank the commenter for bringing this to staff's attention, and the error has been corrected.

Several objections express concerns about the hardships of sewer service charges. Responding to these concerns, Staff acknowledges that some customers face hardships and encourage eligible customers to take part in the Sanitation Rate Relief Program. Additional information about that program is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/srrp>

Several objections express concerns that sewer service charges are generally too high. While staff recognize that sewer service charges are high for some Districts and Zones, the budgets relate to the conditions found in each system. For example, the Occidental County Sanitation District is currently forced to truck out sewage. Each District and Zone is in a structural deficit, and most of the Districts and Zones receive considerable subsidies. The subsidies for the Occidental County Sanitation District and the Russian River County Sanitation District are particularly high due to the nature of the infrastructure challenges that District faces. In the Russian River County Sanitation District, the Sonoma Water General Fund's subsidies to the District over the past five years have been more than \$7.5 million, and \$5.9 million is projected for the next three years making up 10% to 25% of the total estimated revenue for the District.

The subsidies for each District and Zone are discussed in the Written Basis of Sewer Service Charge for each District and Zone, which are available at this website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget>

The objections for each District and Zone are listed and numbered below, and the numbered responses then follow.

#### **Sonoma County Water Agency**

- Airport-Larkfield-Wikiup Sanitation Zone

## OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

### 1. Bernard O'Brien

objection  
The COCA for 2025  
is 2.2%!! I say  
No To your 8.41%

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The implied meaning of the objection is unclear, but does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law. Rates are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget>

### 2. Carolina Rozo

NOTE: IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED, ANY PROTEST OR OBJECTION MUST USE THIS FORM

*charge them, not me!* **WRITTEN PROTEST** *I protest*

I am the parcel owner of the property located at the address on the back of this form, or a tenant that is directly liable for paying the Sewer Charge for the property. I am submitting this form to protest the proposed Sewer Charge increase. *I should not have to pay for rate increase due to new house developments.*

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

*this increase / all new housing development in this area should be the responsibility of developers, not mine!*

Signature of Property Owner Required \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Fold Here First



charge + rate increase to new  
housing developments in Larkfield  
Wickiup areas.

Why should I have to pay for  
them! I am burden already by all  
utility/sanitary rate increases yearly!

The Zone does charge one-time capacity charges to new development, and based on the Bartle Wells Associates study, staff are proposing to increase these charges in this Zone from \$15,051 per ESD to \$19,308 per ESD. It is not the case that new development is the only reason for sewer service charge increases, or that the increases can be solely placed on new development.

3. Conchetta Fleming and Samuel Fleming

15%<sup>+</sup> rate increase over 2 Annum  
is too much. Do better at  
calculating housing PUD/HUD.  
Thank you for your hard work.

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The meaning of the objection is unclear, but does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

4. Darlene Sallady

I am the only person living at  
this address so I protest this  
rate increase!

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The Zones sewer service charges are not based on the number of people living at an address. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

5. Lorraine Brendlinger and Robert Brendlinger

March 5, 2025

## OBJECTION

I am the parcel owner of

Santa Rosa, CA 95405  
APN: ...

I protest the rate at which my  
property is assessed for (ESD)  
Equivalent Single Family Dwelling  
of 2.00.

This is one single family home with  
2 residents, my husband and myself.  
It should not be rated at 2.00.  
Please correct to 1.0 ESD.

Thank you

The erroneous assessment of 2 ESDs for this parcel has been corrected. Staff appreciates that the error has been brought to the Zone's attention. Staff apologizes for the error, which has been corrected in separate correspondence.

6. Amalia Ramirez

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

**objection**  
 I think we are already being charged more than enough, we pay over 80.00 dollars for a household of 2 people, with no water being used for plants in winter, very little washing of clothes, one load a week and no car washing at home

Signature of Property Owner Required \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Fold Here First

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The sewer service charge is not based on the factors raised in this objection. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget>

7. Denise Gill

Operations and Maintenance  
 \$5.44 million is outrageous!

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget>

- Geyserville Sanitation Zone

#### OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. Rochelle Berizzi

**jot it down**

**Objection:**  
 THESE FEE'S HAVE  
 GONE UP  
 EVERY YEAR  
 SINCE THE ZONE  
 BEGAN OPERATION!

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The implied meaning of the objection is unclear, but does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.



- **Penngrove Sanitation Zone**

NO TIMELY OBJECTIONS WERE RECEIVED

- **Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone**

NO TIMELY OBJECTIONS WERE RECEIVED

**Russian River County Sanitation District**

**OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES**

1. Helen Isaeff

I already pay too  
much and my place is  
only 525 sq. ft. I am 94  
and can not afford this.  
Fold Here First

Please do not raise our rates.  
We struggle so much already  
and on a fixed income.  
Thank you.

Staff have verified that this comment concerns a single-family dwelling. Additional information about the Sanitation Rate Relief Program is available at the following website:

<https://www.sonomawater.org/srrp>

2. Lawrence Wilcox

Fold Here Second

OBJECTION: maybe we should  
hire the 1<sup>st</sup> lady Elvira Truong to  
reign in the expenditures of  
this out of control Agency!!

Fold Here Second

You would think someone  
making 300k per year could  
manage a budget / make sure  
necessary repairs were made / avoid  
costly spills esp with ~~sp~~ to increase  
over 10 years — 17.7 over past  
2 years

**RUSSIAN RIVER COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT**

**OBJECTION**

**Protest letter from Lawrence A. Wilcox**

**OBJECTION TO ANOTHER RATE INCREASE**

**Maybe you should hire the 1<sup>st</sup> lady Elonia musky Trump**

**To reign in the expenditures of this out of control agency.**

**One would think that someone who earns a salary of 300K per year could manage a budget, balance a budget, and make the necessary repairs with a 83.97%! increase in rates over a 12 year period.**

**Since there were so many discrepancies in the count of protest votes for sewer fee increases last year, I propose and independent auditor to count the votes this year.**

**Someone from Occidental carried in he 19 protests last year and when we got to the meeting somehow there were only a total of 17 votes registered from Occidental according to the count by RRCSD.**

**So for transparency let's have an independent auditor or a citizen count of the protest votes.**

**Kudos: most people to whom I have spoken have received their rate protest form this year without violation of prop 218 which was the case last year**



2025 Proposed Sanitation (Sewer) Rate Increase of \$194.00 to \$2,486.00. The Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD) has mailed their annual report which include the required Prop 218 Rate Increase notice for the upcoming Protest Hearing. The Prop 218 required notice is at the very end of the newsletter. A copy of the notice is available on their website

at [https://www.sonomawater.org/media/PDF/Water%20Resources/Sanitation/newsletters/Spring2025/SWC102-Russian-River-County-Sanitation-District\\_ADA\\_KH.pdf](https://www.sonomawater.org/media/PDF/Water%20Resources/Sanitation/newsletters/Spring2025/SWC102-Russian-River-County-Sanitation-District_ADA_KH.pdf) Ratepayers (and tenants if YOU pay the fee) have the option to Protest the proposed fee increase in person or by mail. This is the 4th proposed rate hike of near 9% and will raise the annual cost to \$2,486.00. While this cost is levied on the property owner, if you are a renter within the district, this increase could increase your rent if the landlord chooses to pass it on. Either way, it does increase the cost to operate a household. The RRCSD has warned us to expect near 9% increases annually.

The sanitation system needs over 47 million dollars in repairs (which could never be generated from ratepayers). On March 2nd, 2024, the system spilled 277,000 gallons of partially treated sewage which reached the Russian River. Since 2013, RRCSD has illegally discharged almost 2.5 million gallons of raw sewage and partially treated sewage into the Russian River!! This latest increase, compounded upon previous increases, results in an over 83% increase in sewer rates over the past 12 years.

Year	Rate	Percent Diff from Prior Year	Percent Diff from 2013
2013	\$1,253.00		
2014	\$1,297.00	3.51%	3.51%
2015	\$1,355.00	4.47%	8.14%
2016	\$1,416.00	4.50%	11.01%
2017	\$1,480.00	4.80%	18.44%
2018	\$1,555.00	4.78%	24.10%
2019	\$1,625.00	4.50%	29.69%
2020	\$1,700.00	4.98%	36.15%
2021	\$1,774.00	4.99%	41.58%
2022	\$1,832.00	3.9%	44.19%
2023	\$2,101.00	8.90%	62.22%
2024	\$2,292.00	8.94%	76.68%
2025	\$2,486.00	8.46%	83.97%
83.97% increase in 12 years			

83.97% increase in 12 years

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Proposition 218 notices both last year and this year have been sent out in compliance with Government Code requirements. Rates

are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget>

The objection discusses spills. Part of the need for increased rates arises out of compliance obligations, and the need to ensure that infrastructure does not spill. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

3. Charlene Cannon

### Objection:

My property taxes have doubled mainly because the sewer rate has increased so much that I pay more for the sewer service than my actual property tax. I've investigated into reducing the sewer charge only to discover I do not qualify for the low income reduction credit due to my income is 1200/yr above the limit, I find that threshold too low for most people to qualify.

My only recourse is to protest anymore future rate increases.

Also, when this sewer system was available, in this area, I doubt that we did not agree to be held in a financial hostage situation to live here.

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Rates are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget> The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

4. Carol Rhodes

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

*This agency is completely mismanaged!*

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

Fold Here First

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. The objection is noted.

5. Denise Camanaro

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

*\* Make ↑ revenue  
From AirBnB/vacation rentals!*

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

While the proposal is not clear, the District does not have the ability to impose the proposed taxes. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

6. Roy B. Henrichs:

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

*I object - rate hike  
is not justified. This  
is poor planning.*

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

Fold Here First

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Rates are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget> The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

7. Lowell Carpenter



Fold Here Second

I don't think the current rate changes are fair!  
Why a small cabin with one Bed Room is charged the same  
amount of money as a 3 or 4 bed room house! It should  
predicated on water usage and family size.

Sincerely  
[Redacted Signature]

The ESD methodology is not exactly precise, but exacting precision is not required for legally compliant rates. Because the District is extremely rural, water use is often not susceptible to reliable metering, and billing based on family size would be intrusive to the District's customers. Using the number of bedrooms as a proxy for family size also is not reliable without verification, and meter readings and the verification of family size would be quite costly. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law. However, staff note that a study to revise the existing rate structure is in process.

**Occidental County Sanitation District**

NO TIMELY OBJECTIONS WERE RECEIVED

**South Park County Sanitation District**

NO TIMELY OBJECTIONS WERE RECEIVED

**Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District**

OBJECTION

1. Pam Hellen

Objection !!

The customer makes the same objection for 3 parcels. The objection is noted.

**2. Mitzi Kuwatani**

You've recently got an increase  
due to water shortage which  
did not last and which you  
are profiting from instead of giving  
that money back

Fold Here First

The customer references wholesale water rates and not sewer service charges, which involve separate funds. The District is not a for profit agency. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

**3. Jacqueline Ealum**

you should charge  
per bathroom ~~in each~~  
on the property that  
would be better for the  
middle class & poor

Fold Here First

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Staff recognize the concern and the Board of Directors has established a Sanitation Rate Relief Program. Additional information about that program is available at the following website:

<https://www.sonomawater.org/srrp>

The ESD methodology is not exactly precise, but exacting precision is not required for legally compliant rates. Billing based on family size would be intrusive to the District's customers. Using the number of bedrooms as a proxy for family size also is not reliable without verification, and meter readings and the verification of family size would be quite costly. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

**4. Debra Friedman**

## **OBJECTION**

Hello,

I am apposed of your proposed **Rate Hikes** as I feel it is unjustified in every way. We have had limited new builds and in our General Plan we have limited any new builds also we have a system that needs no more upkeep than usual.

To raise the cost, I pay is unacceptable currently.

Why not reconsider and look at where you may save money in your admin costs? This is what I do in my household to save money and look where I might save.

Thank you

Debra Friedman

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Increasing costs are not solely related to new construction, and new construction is assessed capacity charges. The District's system is very old in many locations, which triggers significant expenses.

Rates are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget> The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

### **5. Raye Carpa**



*Sonoma, CA 95476*

**Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District**

c/o Sonoma Water

404 Aviation Blvd

Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Monday, March 10, 2025

**"Objection"**

Dear Sanitation District Service,

Thank you for this opportunity to object to the rate increases you are proposing. Rate increases have been consistently increasing to public utilities for quite some time. These rate increases are difficult with a fixed income. My income has not increased substantially, so what you are proposing is definitely a hardship.

Please re-evaluate your proposal for the people of Sonoma Valley. We love our valley, but not all are financially able. Some of us live paycheck to paycheck.

Sincerely yours,

Raye Capra

Staff recognize the concern and the Board of Directors has established a Sanitation Rate Relief Program. Additional information about that program is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/srrp>. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

**6. Jose Carvalho**

If, in addition to your protest, you have a substantive objection, attach it to this form and use the heading **Objection**.

Enough is enough!  
My income stays the  
same why should I keep  
paying more annually?

Fold Here First

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

Staff appreciate receiving both positive and negative feedback. Rates are by no means set arbitrarily. Information concerning the Zone's budgeting and rate setting is available at the following website: <https://www.sonomawater.org/current-budget> The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.

**7. Debra L. Surkin**

objection

We only live in Sonoma part time and pay the monthly fees to be attached to Sewer Services and use it maybe 2 days a month - it is too much now and an increase ~~that~~ would be much too much.

You should only raise (if you must) fees on properties who use the service over the lowest tier of usage.

In Sonoma Valley, rates are partially based on volumetric use of water. However, the District still faces significant costs for properties that do not use the sewer at all, but who are connected and can do so at any time. The ESD methodology is not exactly precise, but exacting precision is not required for legally compliant rates. The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law. However, staff note that a study to revise the existing rate structure is in process.

8. Bonnie Parks

AS a Sr. on a fixed income, I have turned my heat off use my microwave as often as possible. Both PG&E + Water have increased their rates as well as HOA and medical property taxes are taking 10K a yr from my small HOA. We should be exempt from utility increases. We will be forced to sell our homes + move out of state or become a street person. Save us!

Note: The commenter provided her PG&E utility bill, which is not reproduced here.

Staff recognize the concern and the Board of Directors has established a Sanitation Rate Relief Program. Additional information about that program is available at the following website:

<https://www.sonomawater.org/srrp> The objection does not state any issue of non-compliance with applicable law.