

Utility Rate Survey → Results

What We Heard

From August 23 to September 23, 2024, the Town of Hinton conducted a Utility Rate Change Survey to collect feedback and gain understanding of residents' thoughts about the proposed utility rate changes.

The survey asked questions about:

- Preferred payment structures for utility bills
- Implementation timeframe for utility rate increases
- Awareness of wastewater treatment practices
- Concerns about potential environmental impacts of wastewater

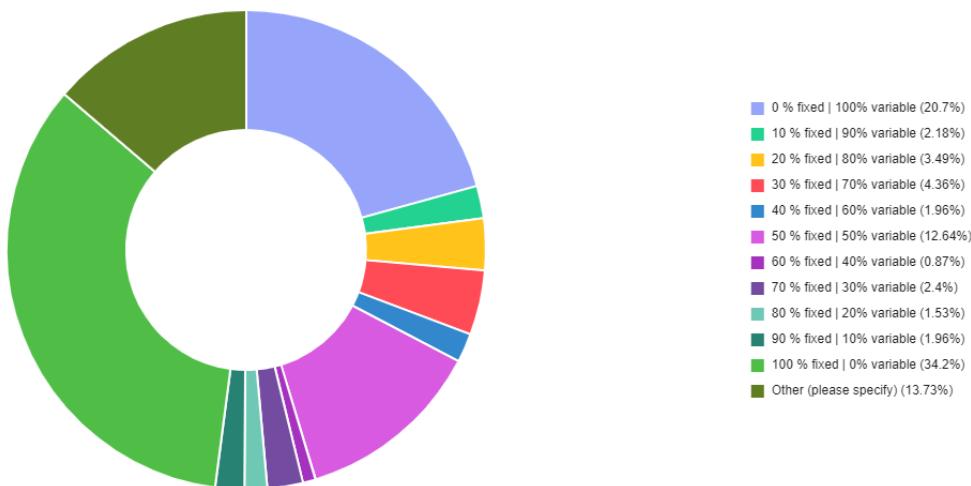
- Over 700 respondents participated in the survey.
- Over 90% of respondents own the property where they live and are connected to Town water and sewer.
- More than 85% of respondents had read the Town FAQs prior to completing the survey.
- One-third of respondents commented about proposed rates, the cost of living, community impacts, and the roll-out of water meters.
- Respondents supported water meter installation and a pay-for-use model, understanding that individual households with water meters can choose to pay less by conserving water.

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Water Meters and Billing Rates

Water meters allow billing rates which reflect water use. Variable rates fluctuate according to water use, allowing those who choose to use less water to pay less and take control of the amount they pay. A fixed rate is a consistent charge every month regardless of water used. It's simpler for budgeting but doesn't reward reduced water consumption.

How would you like your water/wastewater bill to be structured between a fixed base fee and a variable consumption fee based on your water usage?



- Over one-third of respondents preferred a 100% fixed rate.
- 20% preferred a 100% variable rate. Another 13% preferred a bill that is 50% fixed and 50% variable.
- Respondents who had read the FAQs were more likely to prefer variable fees.

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How would you prefer the utility rate changes to be implemented?

→ Over 85% of respondents would like fees to be increased over a longer period of time.



- All at once, with a single rate increase when the new bylaw is enacted. (14.16%)
- In a few increments over a shorter period (1 to 4 years). (22.66%)
- In multiple increments over a longer period (up to 5 years). (63.18%)

How aware are you of the Town's current wastewater treatment practices?

Future utility rates will pay for a system that screens out solids including untreatable items such as baby diapers, plastic toys, rags, or other flotsam.

Screening prevents damage to wastewater treatment equipment and prevents solids from flowing into the Athabasca River.



- Very aware (35.25%)
- Somewhat aware (52.11%)
- Not aware (12.64%)

→ Almost 90% of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or very aware of the Town's current wastewater treatment practices.



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How concerned are you about the potential environmental impacts of untreated or inadequately treated wastewater on local ecosystems?



- Over three-quarters of respondents were somewhat or very concerned about the potential environmental impacts of untreated or inadequately treated wastewater on local ecosystems.
- Respondents support more effective wastewater treatment processes that will reduce impacts on the Athabasca River and downstream water users.

On a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is the most important, how important is it to you that the Town returns cleaner water after wastewater treatment, to the Athabasca River?

- Two-thirds of respondents rated the importance of returning post-treatment water to the Athabasca River as 7.3 or more out of 10.
- Approximately one-fifth of respondents were willing to financially support greater wastewater treatment to ensure increased environmental protection. Another third were unsure.

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What are your thoughts on the cost of adding water meter installation as an additional flat monthly fee on residential bills?

- More than half of respondents were opposed to adding a flat fee cost of a water meter onto utility bills.
- 40% of respondents were supportive, unsure or had questions about installation methods and requested additional information.

Should residential developments be required to have water meters installed?

If water cannot be metered, then a household may be billed at a higher flat rate and would be unable to reduce their water and wastewater bill by reducing the water they use.



- Over 44% of respondents felt that water meters should be required for residential properties or that installing a water meter should be optional, understanding that not having a meter may result in higher utility costs.

Next steps

Council has received the results and will utilize this feedback to inform the proposed utility rate payment structure, implementation timeframe, and potential water meter installation.