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## Utility approves capital proposal to fund upgrades

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Eugene Water & Electric Board commissioners have approved a 10-year water capital plan that will push up water rates by about 20 percent next year, followed by single-digit rate increases in each of the next nine years.

The capital plan calls for spending almost \$130 million over the next decade to address what EWEB officials call an aging water system in need of new pipes, upgraded reservoirs and expansion of the Hayden Bridge water treatment plant.

EWEB commissioners, who expressed initial support in July, formally approved the plan and rate schedule at a meeting on Tuesday on a 4-0 vote. Commissioner Patrick Lanning was absent.

The 20 percent rate increase next year will add about \$3 to an average residential customer's monthly bill. A residential customer using 9,000 gallons per month currently pays \$16.54.

EWEB officials stressed that, even with the increases, customers will see some of the lowest water costs in the state. For example, residential customers using about 9,000 gallons per month in Salem and Portland pay nearly \$26 and more than \$30, respectively.

EWEB is facing an infrastructure problem plaguing utilities across the country, EWEB officials added. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that water utilities nationwide need to spend almost \$300 billion to bring water systems up to date.

Customers' rate increases will finance about \$103 million of EWEB's \$130 million capital plan, with system development charges paid by developers covering the remaining \$27 million.

About 32 percent of the capital plan money will be used to replace aging water mains, utility spokesman Lance Robertson said. Another 27 percent will go toward seeking a second water source, 20 percent toward expansion of EWEB's treatment plant at Hayden Bridge, and 10 percent to add and rebuild water reservoirs.

Specific projects will be included in each year's EWEB budget, requiring public hearings in November and December and separate votes by EWEB commissioners.

- *Jeff Wright*