

May 2003

Skykomish Update



Karl Dieter Benz - Councilmember - Position # 1

Inside this issue:

Understanding Your Water Bill	1
What if My Water Bill is High?	2
Questions, Concerns, Issues?	2
BNSF Railway - Contamination	2

Understanding Your Water Bill



Karl Dieter Benz
POB 380
Skykomish WA 98288
Cell: 206.353.1948
Email: benz@qwest.net



The cost of providing trash collection service is almost 100% **variable**...it directly correlates to the volume of refuse collected. If demand decreases, trucks, dumpsters, transfer stations, etc can be sold. Administrative staff and drivers can be reduced until costs are virtually zero.

Providing water service to Skykomish Water Department customers is a completely different animal. Costs are virtually 100% **fixed**...they remain constant whether a thousand, a million or ten million gallons are delivered.

Cost of system operation is completely dependent upon infrastructure such as wells, pumps, mains, valves, state mandated compliance/testing, maintenance, repairs, debt service and administration. Minimal variable costs include pump maintenance and electric power needed to turn the pumps. If less water is needed, less pump maintenance will be needed and less electricity will be consumed.

In the past, Skykomish Water Department customers did not pay the true cost of water service in two important ways:

1) System maintenance was seriously neglected. As a result,

mains are in disrepair and leaking. Damage to the water storage tank following the 2001 earthquake has yet to be repaired. We were also out of compliance with State mandated water quality testing. Practices, such as these, meant current users were pushing the full cost of system operation forward to our children.

2) The old water rate structure allowed some customers to receive service at below cost while other customers made up the difference by paying unnecessarily high rates for water they didn't actually consume.

Water rate Ordinance # 318 which took effect January 1, 2003 added both responsibility and fairness to customer billing. It did so by:

- 1) Charging all customers the same rate, based solely upon the number of gallons consumed as determined by reading water meters.
- 2) By establishing a capital reserve fund to ensure repairs, upgrades and even emergencies can be systematically addressed in the future.
- 3) By establishing a \$22 minimum monthly charge to ensure week-

enders as well as full time residents pay their fair share of the base load.

While no politician likes raising rates, they had to increase in order to fund the capital reserve account. Council members found the courage to do what was right and necessary for their community.

Water customers continue to pay low rates. 46% of residential customers didn't even consume enough water in April to fully utilize their \$22 minimum. Had this minimum not been in place, many would have paid water bills of \$10 or less.

Some customers however have been extremely hard hit. This is almost exclusively due to leaking customer service lines between the meter and the house, as well as leaking toilets, faucets, hot water heaters, etc.

The average residential user charge of \$36.23 in April would have been below \$25 had those with the most severe leakage problems been eliminated from the average.

Rates remain low while the new ordinance provides fair and equitable service to all customers.

Councilmember - Position # 1
Karl Dieter Benz
PO Box 380
Skykomish WA 98288-0380

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What if My Water Bill

1. Repair leaking faucets, toilets, hot water heaters, etc.
2. Check for a leaking Service Line by turning off all water consumers and observing if water meter dial continues to rotate. If it does, you have a Service Line leak. Contact the Water Department at 677.2388 for Free assistance. Cost of actual Service Line repairs are a customer responsibility.
3. Monitor family water consumption habits. Leaving water running while washing the car, dishes, brushing teeth or shaving is but one example of how to increase your water bill.

Questions, Concerns, Issues, Thoughts?

Constituents are often shy about contacting those who represent them in government.

Make sure your voice is heard.

Do not hesitate to contact me regarding questions, issues, concerns, clarifications, requests for assistance or intervention on your behalf.

Your Skykomish government exists to serve you.

I also look forward to seeing and talking with you at 2nd & 4th Monday 7PM Council Meetings.

BNSF Railway Contamination Update

I aggressively represent property owner and town interests before the Town Council, Department of Ecology and BNSF Railway.

The BNSF Railway wants to remain a good neighbour, but needs our help and guidance. We must never forget their first responsibility is to represent shareholder interests by minimizing contamination cleanup costs.

Our role is to formulate, present and aggressively pursue a clear and realistic plan before WSDOE and BNSF that allows resolution

without sacrificing or impairing private property rights.



Attempts to impose any plan that incorporates 'Institutional Controls' without adequate compensation for lost value or impaired use will be met with stiff resistance by me.

Large corporations and powerful government bureaucracies must understand the 'free ride'

is over in Skykomish.

All are expected to do not only what is required by law but also that which is expected of good neighbours and friends.

There will be no substitute for hard work, perseverance and courage on the part of our citizens, business leaders and elected representatives.

Our town is fortunate to have competent, experienced, aggressive legal representation by Harry Grant and Megan McCloskey of Riddell Williams P.S. to assist and guide us on this mission.