

*The*  
**LINKING**  
**LETTER**

**By Anne Scheck**

Sept 14, 2017

Coverage: City Council

Tuesday, 9/12/2017

- ▶ *City Council: Water Rates*
- ▶ *City Council: Land-use Fees*
- ▶ *PIN Report: Imani Hall !!*
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## **Proposed Rate Increase**

Proposed increases in monthly water-and-sewer fees -- 5.5% annually for sewer and 2.5% for water -- could pay for immediate, necessary water-treatment upgrades over the next five years, a water-resources analyst told the Independence City Council Tuesday night.

The \$9.7 million price tag for the full project – which would include a membrane bioreactor filtration system – won't be part of the first phase. Instead, some of the requirements for water-quality maintenance in Independence will be undertaken during an initial 5-year period. These first-phase steps will allow the city to address some of the regulations imposed by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, explained Steve Donovan, the municipal-water expert hired by the city.

Like other cities, Independence's water-sewer fees can be expected to rise on "the rate escalator" for the foreseeable future, Mr. Donovan said. If adopted, the increases would mean that a fairly typical wastewater bill would increase from about \$46 in 2018 to \$57 in 2022 and, over the same period, the bill for water would rise from \$63.80 to \$70.43.

Some of the current billing services city debt, too. About \$6.50 of an average bill goes to pay debt on the Independence Civic Center, which replaced the former city hall; About \$14.50 goes to pay debt from MINET, the broadband company co-founded by the city with Monmouth, Mr. Donovan noted. The monthly billing also includes franchise charges, which are fees paid to the city for the use of the public right-of-way to deliver services.

The proposed rate schedule currently is under review. No action on it was taken by councilors.

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## **Building Fees Increase**

The expense of reviewing applications and plans for new construction doesn't cover current staff costs, necessitating a 7.5% increase in these fees, according to Independence Finance Director Gloria Butsch, who reported on the shortfall to councilors Tuesday night.

Technically called the "land use fee schedule," the fees that are currently collected for land development within the city simply don't cover the staff time associated with processing, Ms. Butsch explained. A resolution to approve the percentage increase was approved by the city council.

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### **PIN REPORT** **Public Interest News**

Imani Hall, the intern who assisted the Independence Downtown Association this year, received thanks and praise for his efforts Tuesday night – and was credited with the idea of the inaugural *Murder Mystery Dinner*, to be held Monday, Sept. 25. Tickets for this first-time event, which will be at Independence Grill & Bar, are selling briskly.

Mr. Hall, a graduate of Ithaca College in upstate New York, served the city in a program called RARE, an acronym for Resource Assistance for Rural Environments, which is part of AmeriCorps. Mr. Hall now works for a Salem-based non-profit organization.

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**DATE-TO-NOTE: September 18, 2017**

**Planning Commission meets to discuss a new agenda, at 7 pm, 9/18, at the Independence Civic Center, in city council chambers.**

**Editorial NOTE by Anne Scheck, publisher of *The Linking Letter***

During time allotted for public testimony at the recent city council meeting, resident Harry Bladow inquired about the need for such an expansive city hall, now known as the *Independence Civic Center*. Mr. Bladow asked about the cost, which was said to be \$12 million. So far, there has been no information with which to compare the building size and debt for the Civic Center in Independence with others in comparably populated cities. Such a comparison will appear in the next issue of *The Independent*, in the column titled "The Civics Lesson." Look for it in the October issue.

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**September: PICK UP AN ISSUE OF THE INDEPENDENT**

**featuring coverage of the eclipse and the people who came to see it. Issues are available at The Golden Horse Restaurant, Elite Cleaners, The Ovenbird Bakery, Brew and Tap House – all downtown. And at The Starduster Restaurant at Independence State Airport.**

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**FINALE:** Matthew Lind doubled his deposit offer of \$50,000 to \$100,000 to persuade Independence to allow him keep *Mecanico*, an outdoor eatery and tavern north of the *Riverview Park* pavilion. The city councilors reportedly are poised to approve the new offer. In another, unrelated development, City Manager David Clyne reiterated that the former Independence City Hall -- now vacant – is tentatively designated as a possible new home for *The Heritage Museum*.

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***The Linking Letter* is a publication of Trammart News Inc., mailing address 3760 Market St., #409, Salem, Oregon 97301. Phone 503 409 9204**