



BAKERSFIELD

THE SOUND OF *Something Better*

August 20, 2026

Nancy Anderson, County Administrative Officer
County of Kern
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th floor
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Re: City Sewer Rates

Ms. Anderson,

This letter is in response to your letter dated August 12, 2026, relating to City Sewer Rates. The City will not be scheduling an agenda item for an upcoming meeting of the City Council to discuss a reduced rate for property tax billing for sewer and stormwater rates.

The City stands behind our process and decision. The City Council answered the question of rates through our Proposition 218 process. We are not backing away from the responsibility of maintaining a safe, reliable sewer system. This was not a rushed decision. The City first brought forward a sewer rate proposal in early 2025. The community expressed significant concerns. We reconsidered the approach and substantially changed the original proposal. We conducted and documented deep analysis with two expert consulting firms. The City held two town halls in every City Council ward, in addition to a recorded virtual meeting, to give residents multiple opportunities to learn about the proposal and provide feedback. Our outreach went well beyond public meetings. We created a dedicated webpage, developed frequently asked questions and participated in numerous media interviews to explain the need, answer questions and make information accessible.

Rather than implementing the original proposal to increase to \$950 annually, the City adopted a five-year rate structure and phased out capital projects. The five-year plan includes the use of revenue bonds to lower our rates. The final proposal was different because we heard concerns about affordability and the pace of the increase. We also heard something else very clearly: residents expect their sewer system to work. Maintaining essential infrastructure is not optional, and delaying necessary investment does not make those needs disappear. The many residents who engaged in our outreach understood the trade-offs between delay, debt, and how they affected our rates. They did not want to delay. They did not want excessive long-term debt.

The results of our outreach: a well-informed community that supported the decision of the City Council. We did not experience the email, phone and in-person complaints and concerns raised in 2025. Less than 1% of rate payers protested the rate increase. The three Proposition 218 protests received by the County for CSA-71 areas represented 0.5% of that community.

The City is well informed of the County's proposal to bond more than \$700 million, including an initial bonding phase to pay for operating expenses in the next two years. It is bad fiscal practice to bond for operating expenses. The City Council already considered the recommendation and chose a more balanced approach that leverages modest bonds to lower rates without creating a massive debt burden to ratepayers over the next 30 years. Excessive bonding and its interest costs would not spread capital expenses equitably over time, it would shift the debt burden to future generations.

It is never easy to raise rates. It is especially difficult when ratepayers have enjoyed discounted rates for two decades; rates that failed to account for known long-term capital replacement needs. The City has taken on that difficult correction and adopted a balanced plan that has community support. That is why it is so baffling that the County would not only file a lawsuit but go to great lengths by creating an information campaign with a webpage, newspaper articles and multiple social media posts inviting residents to join the lawsuit. This approach is disproportionate to the issue. It is excessive and unprofessional. I find it particularly ironic that the County has opposed the City rates at such great lengths after the Board of Supervisors approved rates for the North of the River Sanitation District of CSA 71.3 at \$441.97 per year without any complaint.

The City remains willing to have productive conversations with the County. But collaboration cannot mean abandoning a decision simply because another governmental agency disagrees with our policy choice. The County can make legal claims, but it is transparent that the key issue is about a policy choice that is the purview of the City Council. Cities and counties should be partners, not adversaries. We serve the same community, and disagreements over policy should not become an opportunity to undermine one another.

What is next? Litigation with another City? Litigation over the County's flawed Proposition 218 for landfill fees? Litigation over the inability to provide adequate jail beds to maintain the public safety of our community? None of that moves us forward with our most pressing needs.

Instead of wasting City and County resources over sewer rates, we should be working together to address the most imminent issue of our community: public safety. I urge the County to dedicate your time to addressing mental health, substance use, homelessness and accountability of our criminal justice system. Let's allocate resources for jail beds. Let's spend our time coordinating responses for chronic homeless with mental health and substance use treatment needs. Let's address gaps in our social services safety net. When asked by our community stakeholders how the City is going to respond to this lawsuit, I just tell them we are going to continue to spend our time working to address public safety.

The City also prefers to resolve the sewer rate matter amicably and without judicial intervention; we didn't file a lawsuit. As communicated by phone and email, I will facilitate staff-level conversation related to operations of CSA-71. Fair and objective conversations about CSA-71 are on the table. Conversations about our rates are not.

Respectfully,



Christian Clegg
City Manager