



RCW Rate Restructure Feedback

As reclaimed water demand has grown, sometimes outpacing supply in dry seasons, heavy use by some customers has reduced availability for others. In response, Pinellas County Utilities developed four rate-structure options, presented them to the public and gathered customer feedback to ensure the final approach reflects customer input.

Feedback At-A-Glance

- **Engaged but frustrated customers.** Most respondents are paying close attention to reclaimed water costs and usage, and many have already changed behavior because of price; however, they are frustrated by service reliability, perceived inequities, and the current rate structure.
- **Clear preference for usage-based, conservation-minded rates.** The majority favors a new structure (Option 2) that better protects low-use customers and encourages conservation over the current flat-style structure.
- **Service reliability is a major pain point.** A strong majority report concerns about low pressure or lack of water, and many say they have personally experienced outages or very low pressure on their watering days.
- **Equity concerns.** Multiple comments highlight perceived unfairness in access, watering days, and system performance for North County customers versus other areas.

Survey Responses

Preferences for Future Rate Structure

When asked: *"What type of rate structure do you think is most effective for improving reclaimed water access to all Pinellas County reclaimed water customers?"*:

- **Option 1 – Current structure → 34% support**
Relies heavily on fixed charges with no usage cost up to 30,000 gallons; least incentive for conservation.
- **Option 2 – Conservation + low-use protection → 40% support**
Incentivizes conservation with lowest cost burden to low-usage customers.
- **Option 3 – Balance of conservation and affordability → 16% support**
Moderate fixed charges and lower usage costs for low-volume users.
- **Option 4 – Maximum bill stability → 10% support**
Second-highest fixed charge and lowest usage rates; moderates bills for higher-volume users.

What Matters Most About Rates

Top Priorities When Thinking About Reclaimed Water Rates

When asked *“What matters most to you when thinking about reclaimed water rates?”*:

- **58%: Rates are based on the amount of water used**
- **10%:** A base rate that maximizes bill predictability
- **10%:** Rates structured to encourage conservation
- **21%:** “Other,” with most comments reflecting a desire to:
 - Keep costs as low as possible
 - Be able to opt out or avoid paying a base charge when not using reclaimed water
 - Align charges with lot size, property characteristics, or actual capacity to water

Decision Drivers For How Much/How Often To Water

- Residents repeatedly mention **keeping their yard/landscape alive and attractive** and controlling their bill as primary drivers.
- HOA rules and formal conservation messaging are less frequently mentioned as the main driver, though some respondents emphasize water conservation and Florida-friendly landscaping.

Who Responded & How They Use Reclaimed Water

Customer Type

- **87%** Residential
- 1% Commercial
- 2% HOA/Property manager
- 4% Connected but do not use reclaimed water
- 4% Line in front of house but not connected
- 2% Not a customer / reclaimed water not available

Awareness Of Costs And Usage

- **93%** say they **pay attention to what they pay for reclaimed water**
- 71% say they know approximately how much reclaimed water they use every two months
 - 22% use 1–20,000 gallons
 - **37%** use 21,000–40,000 gallons
 - 21% use more than 40,000 gallons
 - 10% do not use reclaimed water
 - 10% do not know their usage

Watering Rules

- **89%** know their County-assigned watering day(s)
- 60% say they have **decreased reclaimed water use in the past because of cost**

Service Reliability & Pressure

Concern About Availability/Pressure During High Demand

- **57%** are *very concerned* reclaimed water may not be available or may have low pressure
- 26% are *somewhat concerned*
- 16% are *not concerned*

Actual Experiences

- **72%** report having experienced reclaimed water **not being available or having low pressure on their assigned watering day**
- 28% say they have not had this experience

Public Engagement: Meetings & Understanding

- **46%** of respondents report attending a public meeting on this topic
- Among meeting attendees:
 - **69%** say they **better understand** the topic following the meeting
 - 31% say they do not

Themes from Open-Ended Feedback

Cost, Fairness and the Base Rate

- Strong frustration with **paying a base “access” fee even when using little or no reclaimed water** (e.g., disconnected systems, post-storm periods with no watering).
- Multiple requests to **eliminate the base rate for zero usage** or allow customers to **opt out** of reclaimed water service entirely.
- Perception that reclaimed water, originally framed as a conservation and cost-saving measure, is now “too expensive for what it is.”
- Concern that costs “always go up” even as more customers connect and infrastructure seems unchanged.

Equity Across the County

- Repeated comments that **North County customers pay the same rates** as Mid and South County but:
 - Receive fewer watering days, and/or

- Experience more frequent outages and low pressure.
- Calls to **upgrade North County infrastructure** and reevaluate how watering days are allocated.
- Questions about large users (e.g., golf courses) and their impact on available supply.

Reliability, Pressure, and Water Quality

- Numerous reports of **low pressure**, especially during early morning watering windows, making irrigation ineffective.
- Accounts of **frequent service interruptions**, sometimes described as multi-week periods without reliable reclaimed water.
- Some concerns about **water quality**, including debris or material that clogs filters and requires frequent cleaning.

Rate Design & Conservation Incentives

- Many residents say rates **should be primarily usage-based**, similar to potable water, to feel fair.
- Several point out that high flat fees create a **“use it or lose it” mentality** – they water more on their assigned day to “get their money’s worth,” which discourages conservation.
- Some suggest:
 - Adjusting tiers upward (e.g., raising the 30,000-gallon threshold to 45,000)
 - Aligning rates with **lot size**, since larger properties may inherently require more water.
- A subset of respondents emphasize **Florida-friendly landscaping** and are supportive of **rate structures and outreach that encourage conservation**.

Rules, Enforcement, and Off-Schedule Use

- Some customers want **stronger penalties for watering on non-assigned days**, arguing that off-schedule use worsens supply and pressure issues.
- Others feel constrained by current watering rules, especially when rain patterns don’t align with assigned days.

Communication, Transparency, and Trust

- Confusion and frustration about discrepancies or questions about **meter readings**
- Requests for clearer explanation of:
 - **How rates are set, what the base fee covers, and how revenue is being used**
 - What specific **infrastructure projects** are underway or planned to improve reliability.
- Some respondents express **distrust**, questioning whether current revenues are being used effectively, and feel promises made when they signed up for reclaimed water (especially about low costs) have not been kept.

