

Gulf Power rate hikes go into effect Jan. 1

STAFF REPORTS

Gulf Breeze News
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Rising national fuel prices - primarily for coal - are causing an increase in electricity prices for Gulf Power Company customers. The Florida Public Service Commission has approved a 10 percent price increase for residents to go into effect Jan. 1.

The PSC adjusts utility prices each January to reflect the cost of the fuels used to make electricity. Fuel costs are charged directly to customers, with Gulf Power retaining none of the increase.

The impact on the residential customer will be an increase in the price of 1,000 kilowatt-hours from \$92.34 to

\$101.87.

"Just like many other businesses, our prices have been impacted by rising fuel costs," John Hutchinson, Gulf Power spokesman said. "The good news is our customers will still pay the lowest electricity prices of all the major utilities in Florida."

The annual January price adjustment takes into account what Gulf Power paid for fuel - coal and natural gas - the previous year and the projected costs for the coming year. Because of sharp increases in coal prices in 2006, Gulf Power is paying \$40 million more for coal than the company will recover from customers in 2006.

"As demand for electricity continues to rise we constantly look for ways to diversify our

fuel mix and keep fuel costs as low as possible," Hutchinson said. "Being tied into the Southern Company electrical grid allows us to deliver the lowest cost generation, whether that's coal, natural gas, hydro or nuclear power."

As Northwest Florida grows, the total demand for electricity from Gulf Power has increased more than 80 percent in the last 20 years from 6 billion kilowatt-hours to more than 11 billion. Even without the growth, Hutchinson said existing Gulf Power customers are buying more and more electricity each year. In-home electricity consumption has grown more than 24 percent in the last 20 years.

"As demand continues to go up it impacts fuel supplies and that can contribute to higher

fuel prices," Hutchinson said. "Our prices are still below the national average, but rising fuel costs will continue to be a challenge for all utilities."

Gulf Power offers free energy audits to identify energy efficiency measures that can be taken to save homeowners and businesses money on their electricity bills. The company also offers a number of payment options and programs to help customers smooth out payments during high-bill months. Plan details and energy-saving tips are available at www.gulfpower.com.

"No one likes a price increase, including us," Hutchinson said. "But it's simply a matter of fuel prices being higher during 2006 and 2007 than what our prices were set at last January."

PROJECT: Ganges Trail residents experiencing reprieve

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oughly impressed with the improvements they made.

"I'd complained about [flooding here] for about 15 years," Simmons said. "I just so appreciate what they've done. The job is fantastic and I don't brag on [the county] very much."

County Public Works Director Avis Whitfield said the replaced pipeline starts close to the intersection of Ganges Trail and Tiger Point Boulevard. The drainage pipe follows Ganges trail for approximately 400 feet before turning south, crossing the 14th fairway of the Tiger Point Golf Course and divulging its contents into a lake.

County officials say the improvements on Ganges Trail would not be a complete solution for the Tiger Point area, but are expecting to address immediate concerns about excess rainwater runoff.

"[On Sept. 1 2] we experienced a front moving through our area and the associated winds and high tides created an event very similar to, but on a smaller scale, than storm surge associated with tropical storms and hurricanes," Whitfield wrote in an email dated Nov. 7. "The storm tides reached a level



Franklin Hayes/Gulf Breeze News

New drain pipes carry water from Ganges Trail, underneath the 14th fairway and divulge their contents into one of several water hazards along the golf course.

that over-topped the eastern end of Madura Road... The pumps are more than adequate to remove storm water that is the result of rainfall. However, the pumps cannot possibly remove water from the roadway when high tides over-top the road. It's simply not practical to expect any pumping or drainage system to function at a capacity that can pump out Santa Rosa Sound."

Whitfield added that the county is currently working on several projects in the area, including:

A recently completed drainage project that consisted of raising the roadway on the eastern segment of West Madura to prevent water from ponding in the roadway after heavy rains.

A drainage project that is near completion on the southwestern end of Ceylon Drive that consisted of obtaining drainage easements and constructing underdrains and swales to enhance and control removing storm water from the roadway.

A recently completed

drainage project the consisted of repairing and cleaning out curb inlet structures on Tiger Point Boulevard at the intersection of Madura Road.

A drainage project that will be soon underway to divert storm water from Pennsylvania Avenue to prevent the storm water from impacting Tiger Point Boulevard and Ceylon Drive

Pursuit of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) grants that will include Engineering, Permitting, and Construction for major drainage improvements in the Sabertooth Circle, Ganges Trail, and West Madura Road areas. Phase One funding, which is for permitting and engineering, has been approved for those areas.

Whitfield added that county planners are not looking at major projects because it may jeopardize HMGP funding.

Sharon Marsh with the county's grant department said the county expects to receive approximately \$13 million in funding through HMGP to pay for Hurricane Ivan repairs and mitigation projects. Out of that funding, approximately \$1 million will be appropriated to address flooding in the Ganges Trail area.

SEWER: Studies show possible pollution in waterways

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used 60 percent as a threshold as whether or not to proceed with this type of project," said City Manager Edwin "Buz" Eddy.

The total Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) the city applied for and received after Hurricane Ivan allocated \$1 million to be used to mitigate the impact of future storms. The city spent \$371,000 on fuel storage facilities at its water plant, making it sustainable for 7-10 days; portable generators were also purchased to operate wastewater lift stations; and the remaining grant money will offset the cost of resident sewer hook-up in waterfront and low-lying areas.

"The remaining \$629,000 is earmarked for septic tank abatement in areas where septic tank operation can be a problem during and after a storm, such as those septic tanks that service waterfront locations," Eddy said in a memorandum to the council.

The total construction cost of the sewer for 13 homes on North Sunset and 27 homes on Highpoint is \$1,033,118, including a cost of \$4,500 for each of the 40 taps. The CDBG grant money and a city contribution of \$100,000 leaves an approximate cost of \$10,600 per resident, including a \$3,000 allowance for connection.

According to area officials, there are health concerns as a result of fecal matter polluting

area waterways, including Woodlawn Bayou where these homes are located.

"We have parallel studies going on in Escambia County Department of Health. Even areas where there's relatively high elevation, there's a chronic contamination of the waterways with fecal matter," said Dick Smith, chair of the South Santa Rosa Utility Service advisory board.

According to city codes, every homeowner whose property line is within 100 feet of city sewer is required to connect to it at the homeowner's cost whether they elect to have the septic tank abated or not. The city officials said that the CDBG greatly reduced the cost of that connection providing a better opportunity for the resi-

dents.

"This project is around \$10,000 due to the narrow scope - 40 houses - and the large CDB Grant," said Eddy. "Highpoint and North Sunset residents have had a continued interest in abating their septic tanks for years and didn't back away when they heard about the cost."

A main question of these interested residents was when would the project begin and be completed. City officials said they would begin as soon as possible and speculate work completion sometime in the middle of next year. "It will be after the first of the year, I'm sure, before we start construction," said Eddy. "We'll get it done as fast as we can."

FUTURE: Gulf Breeze moving into new year with number of projects

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Shell Collections, which will be home to a 90,000 square foot Publix Supermarket with additional 40,000 square feet in retail space.

"We are on target for a December 2007 or a January 2008 opening," says Mary Moulton, Moulton Properties. "We are continue to lease space, and have heard a lot of positive comments about our current lessors, including Panera Bread."

The past few years have seen a focus on the city's infrastructure and beautification by both residents and city leaders. Active hurricane seasons and unprecedented floods have forced the city to reevaluate things such as a stormwater and reforestation. One project underway is the establishment of a stormwater utility. As per a State of Florida mandate, the City of Gulf

Breeze was required to capture and treat stormwater to protect area waters.

The city received a \$1.5 million grant to install and upgrade stormwater infrastructure in sections of the city. The current project affecting the

Bay Cliffs subdivision will be completed early in 2007. Other projects will follow.

"The installation of the first of 14 projects is underway now and will be soon," said Gilchrist. He added that a small charge of \$4 per household per month was implemented for stormwater facilities and maintenance late in 2006.

Hurricanes Ivan in 2004 and Dennis in 2005 proved detrimental to the lush vegetation along Gulf Breeze's coastline as well as throughout the city.

With the help of reforestation grants, the residents will soon be able to experience once again why Gulf Breeze has, for many years, been considered a "tree city."

"Reforestation is important for two reasons. One, the City of Gulf Breeze has always been known for its small town appeal. To me, that appeal comes from the cozy feeling you get from seeing lots of trees and wildlife. The cement wonderlands have

not made it here yet," said former city employee Jessica James. James was responsible for penning a grant that provided nearly 3,000 trees to be given away free to city residents. She added that the trees are not just for aesthetics.

"Protection from future storms is the other reason reforestation is important. The trees protect all the new and newly renovated infrastructures that were damaged from the previous storms," she said.

Another sign of recovery and progress is the renovations of the major parks throughout the city. Wayside Parks East and West are nearly completed with new gazebos, landscaping, lighting and boat ramp. Work at Shoreline Park

South includes restrooms, gazebos, boat ramp and boardwalk. Dog owners now have the opportunity to utilize the city's new "bark park" which came to fruition by the work of the newly formed "Gulf Breeze Dog Lovers, Inc.," Eagle Scout Daniel Hatcher and the City of Gulf Breeze. Work for the newly renovated Shoreline Park North football and softball fields is also on schedule.

"We hope to have everything done by March 1," said City Manager Edwin "Buz" Eddy.

City Council agreed to award two bids for completion of Shoreline Park North. Panhandle Paving and Grading was awarded a bid in the amount of \$372,925 for asphalt and other related paving work and J.B. Coxwell was awarded a bid for \$1,823,089 for the remaining project elements. City council also awarded Musco Lighting the bid of \$355,000 for lighting.

"Musco [Lighting] is providing the current lighting system [at the park] and we're very happy with it, and they provide the best warranty in the business," said Gilchrist.

Some continuing concerns with the region's economy include business and home windstorm insurance, inflated property assessments, taxation and transportation.

FLU: Officials say it's not too late for shot

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cough or sneeze. People may become infected by touching something with the influenza virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Healthy adults may be able to infect others one day before getting symptoms and up to five days after getting sick. Therefore, it is possible to give someone the flu before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick.

"It's definitely not too late to get a shot," Terry said, referring to the vaccines.

Vaccinations are available at the South Santa Rosa County Health Department at 5840 Gulf

Breeze Parkway on Tuesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to noon and 1:30 to 4 p.m. Cost for adults is \$20 or Medicare Part B. To get more information, call the South Santa Rosa Health Department at (850) 934-4074.

"We've got an abundance of the adult vaccine," Terry said. Adult vaccinations are also available at Midway Fire Department at 1322 College Parkway and Station 2 at 1801 Abercrombie Rd. Cost is \$20 per person for adults over 18.

Terry said parents should make every effort to get their children vaccinated now while school is out and most extra-curricular activities are on hiatus.

AWARD: Winner a 25-year city resident

Partnership for a Healthy Community.

She has served actively on such committees and boards as FLC Transportation and Urban Administration Committee, the FTP 2025 Steering Committee, Gulf Breeze Traffic Task Force

and the South End Tomorrow Advisory Group.

Zimmern was named 2000-2001 Volunteer of the Year for Gulf Breeze High School. She has been a Gulf Breeze resident for over 25 years. She is married to William A. Zimmern, Jr,

M.D. and has two grown sons, Benjamin and Joshua.

Zimmern received her B.S., Health Education/Community Health, from the University of West Florida and is a Licensed Practical Nurse actively working in the community.

Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Report

Information provided by the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office.

FELONIES

12/19/06
Veiram, Ryan Victor, 21, W/M, 1900 block of Diplomat Street, Gulf Breeze, violation of probation

12/20/06

Weeks, Candy Jean, 36, W/F, 8900 block of Deer Lane, Navarre, violation of probation

12/21/06
Humphreys Jr., Carl Joseph, 21 W/M, Prichard Point, Navarre, sex offense

DUI

12/19/06
Brewer, Jeremy Dewayne, 23, W/M, 5600 block of East Bay Boulevard, DUI

Calendar of Events

<p>Thursday, Dec. 28 No meetings scheduled as of press time</p> <p>Friday, Dec. 29 No meetings scheduled as of press time</p> <p>Saturday, Dec. 30 No meetings scheduled as of press time</p> <p>Sunday, Dec. 31 No meetings scheduled as of press time</p> <p>Monday, Jan. 1 No meetings scheduled as of press time</p> <p>Tuesday, Jan. 2 Development Review Board, 6:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze</p> <p>Wednesday, Jan. 3</p>	<p>City Council Meeting, 6:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze</p> <p>Thursday, Jan. 4 Santa Rosa County Zoning Board of Adjustments, 5:30 p.m., Commissioner's Board Room, 6495 Caroline Street, Milton</p> <p>To submit an event for publication in the calendar, email news@gulfbreezenews.com with the subject "Calendar."</p> <p>Items must be received one week prior to publication.</p>
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