



City of Berkeley Proposition 218 Streetlight Frequently Asked Questions

Q. We already have streetlights. Why do we need a fee increase?

A. The cost to maintain streetlights includes PGE, repairs of lights, maintenance and replacement of poles, and adding new streetlights. The program was started in 1982 and the fees have never been increased. There is currently not enough revenue to properly maintain the lights, replace badly damaged poles, and add new lights in dark areas.

Q. Who gets to vote for this?

A. Property owners in the City of Berkeley.

Q. I got a notice for stormwater but not for streetlight. What is this for? I didn't get a ballot

A. Because of how the State law is written, the Stormwater and Streetlight programs have two different processes. Stormwater requires a protest hearing before property owners can vote. The protest hearing for the stormwater process is on April 3, 2018 at City Hall. Property owners can mail or bring their written protests to the hearing. If the City receives written protest hearings from at least 51% of property owners, the City cannot increase the fees and property owners will not receive a ballot. If there is not a majority protest, property owners will receive a ballot in the mail. Since the City is proposing fee increases for both the stormwater and streetlight programs at the same time, the ballots will have a place to vote for both programs. Each owner will vote separately for each program. In other words, an owner can vote yes for one and no for another, yes for both, or no for both.

Q. When do we vote?

A. Property owners will receive ballots in mid-April, and have until the end of the Proposition 218 public comment period on May 29, 2018 at 6:00pm to mail or bring their ballot to the public hearing at the City Council meeting. The ballots will be counted after the public comment period ends.

Q. How much will this cost me?

A. Streetlight fees are based on the amount of benefit you receive from the lights. In general commercial properties on busy streets pay higher fees for streetlights because of the benefit to their customers and employees. Residential areas generally pay lower costs. Single-family homeowners will pay \$11.17 per year from this new fee. The amount that multi-family and non-residential property owner will pay will vary. The exact amount of the increase for each property will be on the ballot.

Q. Will this replace my current fee?

A. No. You will continue to pay your current fee. This fee will be in addition to what you are currently paying.

Q. You put in LED lights. I thought the maintenance costs were supposed to go down?

A. The City replaced 3200 lights with LED lights. The LED lights are more energy efficient and require less maintenance. The City is currently saving around \$370,000 per year in PGE costs from the lights. The City took out a loan to do the LED conversion so the PGE savings are being used to pay back the loan. Once the loan is paid off, if the program does not need the funds, the rates will be lowered to account for the reduction in program costs.

Although the LED lights save in PGE costs, the poles still require maintenance and new lights are needed. Based on a December 2017 Condition Assessment, there are currently 150 poles that are badly damaged and must be replaced for safety reasons. In addition, the City must regularly maintain poles to reduce larger costs that result from long-term deferred maintenance. New lights are needed in areas where it is very dark, particularly in intersections to minimize traffic accidents involving pedestrian and bicyclists.

Q. Will this have an escalator?

A. Yes, the fee can be increased by the Consumer Price Index, but no more than 3% per year. This is to keep up with the cost of inflation.

Q. Will you come back and ask for more money later?

A. The City doesn't plan to ask for another streetlight program increase in the future. The City has thought carefully about its short and long-term strategy to manage the program, and believes the fee increase is sufficient to address the current and future needs facing.

Q. Why aren't you using the General Fund?

A. The streetlight program received a subsidy from the general fund in fiscal years 2006 to 2017. General Fund money was taken away from the program in budget-balancing measures. Because of the many other demands on the General Funds, the General Fund can no longer support the program. Unlike other services such as public safety, the streetlight program has a dedicated source of funds through the streetlight fees paid by property owners. The streetlight fees can only be used to pay for streetlight costs and is supposed to be self-reliant, fully covering the streetlight program needs.

Q. What happens if you don't get the money?

A. This fee increase is needed to sustain basic operations and address critical capital needs. If property owners don't pass the fee increase, the program will experience a reduction in streetlight services including not replacing damaged poles and not adding new lights. Due to reduced lighting, there could be impacts on safety related to traffic accidents, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Q. Why did you wait this long to increase the rates?

A. We are proposing this fee increase now because the demands and costs of the streetlight program have increased over time. By subsidizing the program with General Funds, the City has avoided increases rates. However, the program is now at a critical point and can no longer rely on a General Fund subsidy.