

City Manager and Members of the City Council,

*Below is an overview of the plan that Calistoga's consultant Raftelis and staff are putting together for the upcoming Utility Services Open House, scheduled for **Thursday, Jan. 15.***

Certified in stakeholder engagement by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), Raftelis works with utilities just like ours nationwide. In addition to conducting rate studies, their strategic communications and stakeholder engagement group help clients host outreach events with tailored messaging campaigns that inform stakeholders on the issues facing public utilities.

IAP2 best practices are being used to design our Open House, which moves away from a traditional lecture format. Research confirms that interactive stations, which allow for direct 1-on-1 dialogue, are far less contentious and more satisfying to the public than traditional presentations with Q&A. It is also more accessible, as participants can arrive and leave the event when convenient for their schedule.

Event Goals

- **Awareness:** Illustrate how rates support reliable, safe services amid rising costs.
- **Trust:** Directly address community concerns regarding high bills and enterprise fund spending.
- **Dialogue:** Demonstrate the City's commitment to transparency.
- **Feedback:** Gather real-time input to inform City staff and Council.

Timeline

- **4:00 PM – 5:30 PM:** Final Setup (some setup will happen the day before)
- **5:30 PM – 5:45 PM:** Pre-meeting walk-through for City staff and Elected Officials
- **6:00 PM – 7:30 PM:** Information stations open to the public
- **7:30 PM – 8:00 PM:** Clean-up

Council Role:

The Council's primary role is to be visible, approachable, and focused on active listening rather than technical explanation. Members should set a welcoming tone, acknowledge concerns, and reinforce City values regarding transparency and stewardship. If questions become detailed, please escort residents to the appropriate staff-led station. This allows the Council to focus on absorbing community sentiment while subject-matter experts lead the more technical discussions.

Stations Overview

Attendees will navigate through "Topic-Specific Information Stations." Each station is staffed by subject matter experts equipped with visuals (boards, handouts, and physical samples) to demystify complex topics and facilitate real communication.



Station 1: Your Voice Matters - Welcome Table & Sign In

- **Staffing:** Open House Facilitator Raftelis, City Management, and Elected Officials (Near Front Entrance)
- **Focus:**
 - Sign In Form with Map and list of stations
 - Raftelis will be at this station for the entire event - welcoming, requesting participants sign-in, providing event handouts (event flyer, event map, FAQ handouts), explaining the event's format, etc.
 - The more that City Management and Elected Officials can position themselves here, the better. It is a high-visibility location to show your commitment to the event and constituents.
 - Purpose of this station is to listen to understand residents' motivations for attending, then guiding them to the appropriate station for specific answers

Station 2: Water Quality

- **Staffing:** Chief Water and Wastewater Plant Operator (Grade IV, Treatment IV Certified)
- **Focus:** Explaining the treatment process, addressing taste/odor challenges (natural minerals/sulfur), sample/testing & increase regulations, and highlighting our record of meeting or exceeding all state water quality standards. Will have lab equipment on table and poster boards with sample locations and pictures of sample stations with discussions on how often drinking water is tested throughout our treatment and distribution system.

Station 3: Your Bill Basics

- **Staffing:** Finance Department Staff - Utility Billing & Customer Care
- **Focus:** Breaking down sample bills (fixed vs. usage fees), explaining billing cycles, and discussing how small changes in usage can lower total costs.

Station 4: Why the Increases?

- **Staffing:** Raftelis staff

- **Focus:** Detailing cost drivers (inflation, chemicals, mandates), outlining small-town economic challenges (few customers sharing costs), and explaining California legal protections and Prop 218 process. Be able to respond to questions like: Are new rates going as projected in the study?

Station 5: What have Your Rates Paid For So Far?

- **Staffing:** Public Works Department Staff
- **Focus:** Lists of Projects that have been accomplished and future necessary mandated and aging infrastructure projects still to complete. Reviewing Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) necessary for system resilience. This station will feature before/after photos and physical samples of aging infrastructure (e.g., corroded pipes, videos of camera'ing the inside of a live aging water pipe, etc...).

Station 6: Finances and Responsible Reserves

- **Staffing:** Finance Department Staff
- **Focus:** Showing Current Status Of Revenue and Expenses (how are new rates helping/improving compared to the old rates and deficits). Discuss financial facts of how new rates have pulled us out of deficit spending (paying back some general fund previous loans \$2.16M and forgiven amounts \$1.6M) are we keeping up with debt and capital expenditures, are we building reserves, grant \$. Explaining the "safety net" purpose of reserves (droughts, emergencies) and verifying that utility funds are audited and legally restricted to utility use only.

Station 7: Video Presentation – "The Value of Water"

- **Format:** Educational Video of Calistoga Water/Wastewater/Recycle water systems
- **Focus:** This video (played on loop) explores the water and wastewater challenges facing Calistoga and communities across the country. It underscores the importance of Calistoga's Infrastructure for a successful community and the importance of Capital Investments to sustain the community—a strategic investment ensuring reliable service for years to come.

Station 8: Kid's Corner

- **Staffing:** Parks & Recreation Staff
- **Focus:** To ensure the event is accessible to families, we are providing a dedicated space with supervised activities and coloring for children, allowing parents to fully engage in conversations at the information stations.

Refreshment Table Station – Water/Snacks

We look forward to a productive evening of engagement with the community. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding these materials or the run of show.