

City Water or a Well? Where Grants Pass Utilities End

A local guide for buyers, sellers and anyone moving to Grants Pass and Josephine County

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Two homes a mile apart in Grants Pass can run on completely different systems. One pays a city water and sewer bill; the other draws from its own well and drains to a septic tank in the yard. The line between them follows the city's urban growth boundary, and it decides your monthly bills, your inspections, your loan paperwork and what you can build. Here is where the line runs on every main road out of town, and the costs and upkeep on each side of the line.

THE LINE THAT DECIDES IT

Grants Pass supplies water and sewer inside its urban growth boundary, the line the city and state draw around land planned for city growth. Oregon's land use rules keep city sewer from spreading onto rural land, and the city's water plan serves customers inside the boundary. Outside it, homes run on private wells and septic systems.

The one exception sits five miles north: the city pipes water to a small area between Merlin and I-5, including the North Valley Industrial Area and Paradise Ranch.

WHERE EACH MAIN ROAD LEAVES THE CITY SERVICE AREA

From the state's urban growth boundary map, checked against road lines in October 2026. Past these points, expect a well and septic.

Direction	Road	Service area ends near
West	Redwood Highway (US 199)	Southgate Way, just past College Drive and Rogue Community College
West	Lower River Road	Schaefers Lane and Roguelea Lane
West	Upper River Road	Rogue River Loop Road
West	Leonard Road	S River Road
South	Williams Highway (Hwy 238)	Fairway Drive and Espey Road
South	New Hope Road	Allen Lee Road, near Allen Creek Road
East	Rogue River Highway (Hwy 99)	Fruitdale Drive
Northeast	Foothill Boulevard	Ament Road, by I-5
North	Highway 99 and I-5	Monument Drive and Highland Avenue
North	NW Scenic Drive	Vine Street

Homes in Merlin, Wilderville, Murphy, Williams and New Hope run on wells and septic, apart from the small North Valley area the city serves. The city is reviewing its boundary for expansion, so the line can move.

SOME HOMES IN TOWN STILL RUN ON WELLS

A home inside the boundary, or even inside city limits, can still run on its own well. Much of the Fruitdale area in southeast Grants Pass was built before city mains reached it and still draws from private wells, and the Rogue Community College campus on Redwood Highway runs on its own wells (City of Grants Pass Water Master Plan, 2016). Harbeck-Fruitdale has its own sanitary district, which contracts with the city to treat its sewer.

For any specific address, three sources settle it: the listing's water and sewer fields, the seller's disclosure statement, and a call to Grants Pass Community Development at (541) 450-6060.

HOOKING UP TO CITY SERVICE

A home inside the boundary but outside city limits can connect to city water when a main already runs along its frontage. The owner pays the connection charges and signs a Service and Annexation Agreement, which consents to future annexation by the city. Without a signed agreement, a water customer outside city limits pays a 60% surcharge on every water bill.

New connections pay system development charges, the city's one-time fee for capacity in its water and sewer plants. The 2026 rates for a single-family home with a standard 3/4-inch meter:

Home size	Water	Sewer	Both
1,700 sq ft or less	\$3,423	\$3,144	\$6,567
1,701 to 2,900 sq ft	\$5,036	\$4,625	\$9,661
Over 2,900 sq ft	\$6,898	\$6,336	\$13,234

The physical water hookup costs extra: \$3,185 for a 1-inch service line from a paved road, plus street restoration where the city cuts the pavement, a plumbing permit, and a small river crossing fee for homes south of the Rogue. When a main doesn't reach the property yet, the owner pays to extend it. The city's online fee estimator prices a specific project before you commit.

LIVING ON A WELL

- **Testing at sale is state law.** Once a seller accepts an offer on a home with a domestic well, Oregon requires a lab test for arsenic, nitrate and total coliform bacteria, with results sent to the buyer and the Oregon Health Authority (ORS 448.271). A buyer can't waive the test, and results stay valid for one year from the sale.
- **The flow test is the buyer's call.** The state test checks water quality, not quantity. A flow test during the inspection period shows how many gallons a minute the well delivers, and a well that ran strong in April can slow by September.

- **Most wells have a drilling log.** The Oregon Water Resources Department keeps one on file, with the date, depth and flow when drilled. Josephine County wells run a median depth of about 126 feet.
- **Household use needs no water right.** A domestic well covers household use up to 15,000 gallons a day and a lawn or noncommercial garden up to half an acre. Irrigating pasture, filling a pond or farming takes a recorded water right.
- **A new well** runs about \$25 to \$60 a foot to drill in the Grants Pass area (2026 local estimates), before the pump, pressure tank and hookup, and rocky ground raises the price.

LIVING ON SEPTIC

- **The state permits septic here.** Oregon DEQ's Medford office permits septic systems for Josephine and Jackson County, from site evaluation to repair: (541) 776-6010.
- **The ground sets the system.** A site that can't support a standard gravity drain field, because of a high water table, poor soil or a nearby waterway, needs an aerated treatment unit or an engineered system. Installed, those run \$20,000 to \$40,000, and an aerated unit needs power, an alarm panel and a yearly maintenance contract of about \$250 to \$450.
- **Loans can require an inspection.** USDA loans require a septic inspection before closing, and a buyer on any loan can order one. A documented, recently serviced system passes cleanly; one of unknown age can need records or repairs before closing.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT ANY HOME

- Is the water city service, a private well or a shared well?
- Is the sewer city service, a sanitary district or septic?
- For a well: when was it drilled, how deep is it, and what did the last flow test show?
- For a shared well: is there a recorded well-sharing agreement?
- For septic: what type is it, when was it last pumped, and is there a maintenance contract?
- Inside the boundary: is there a city main along the frontage, and has a Service and Annexation Agreement been signed?

BEFORE YOU BUY

- [] Water and sewer source confirmed for the address
- [] State well test results received (arsenic, nitrate, coliform)
- [] Well flow test completed in the inspection period
- [] Well log pulled from the Oregon Water Resources Department
- [] Shared well agreement read, if the well serves more than one home
- [] Septic inspection completed and pumping records reviewed
- [] Septic type confirmed, with any maintenance contract in hand
- [] Connection costs priced, if you plan to hook up to city service

Looking at a home or land outside town?

My free Parcel Report pulls the public facts on any piece of property in the Rogue Valley: zoning, water, septic, access and hazards. Call or text me at (971) 303-2253.

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The City of Grants Pass, Oregon DEQ, the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Water Resources Department set the rules and fees described here, and they change; figures were checked in October 2026. Confirm current details for any address with the city or agency listed before you decide. This guide is general information, not legal, tax or financial advice.