

CITY OF WATKINS UTILITY BILLING POLICY

I. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this internal policy, the following words and phrases shall have the meaning as defined by this section.

- a. *Bill* – means the statement of account for utility services rendered by the city to a customer and due and payable to the city by the customer.
- b. *City* – means the municipal corporation known as the City of Watkins, Minnesota, and any designated agent authorized to act on behalf of the city.
- c. *Customer* – means any person, firm, corporation or entity to which the utility services are rendered.
- d. *Delinquent Customer* – means any person, firm, corporation or entity who fails to pay any current charges or portion thereof for any utility by the due date of the bill.
- e. *Utilities* – means the water and sewer services, departments or systems of the City of Watkins, Minnesota, or any combination thereof.
- f. *Past Due Amount* – means any current charges or portion thereof for any utility which remains unpaid past the due date of the bill on which such current charges first appear.
- g. *Disconnect* – means the water and sewer service shall not be made available to any person, firm, corporation or entity due to non-payment.
- h. *Promissory Agreement* – means a contract between the customer and the city allowing the customer to make payments to the city to pay any current charges or portion thereof for any utility by a determined date.

II. UTILITY BILLING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The following policies and procedures shall govern the provision of utilities of the City of Watkins, Minnesota.

III. UTILITY BILLING

There is hereby created a utility billing section within such department(s) as may be designated by the City Council. The billing section shall be responsible for the calculation and rendering of all utility bills. The utility billing section shall maintain account records for each customer that includes the customer's name, billing address, service address, current charges and account history including past due charges, penalties and fees.

IV. RATE ORDINANCE

All utility charges shall be calculated in accordance with the specific rate ordinance applicable to each utility or service rendered to a customer.

V. MONTHLY UTILITY BILL

The utility billing section shall provide each utility customer a combined monthly utility bill which shall include the charges incurred by the customer for regular monthly water and sewer, plus any fees, penalties or previous balances. Each utility shall be designated as a separate entry on the billing statement. Bills for utility services provided shall be rendered and paid monthly.

VI. BILLING CYCLE

- a. *Meter Reading Date* – Meters shall be read between the 26th day of the month and the 28th day of the month.
- b. *Billing Period* – Monthly billings shall be rendered within one week following the period in which utility service is provided. The total bill shall be due and payable by the close of business no later than the 25th day of the following month after which services are billed for. If the due date falls on a holiday, Saturday or Sunday, the due date shall be at 8:00 a.m. on the first business day following the holiday or weekend; payments can be deposited 24 hours a day in our payment drop box at City Hall to ensure they meet the 8:00 a.m. deadline.
- c. *Delinquent Date* – If a bill is not paid on or before the close of business of the due date, a late charge equal to \$5.00 or 1.5% of the past due balance per month, whichever is greater shall be added to the charges. The first (1st) business day following the due date shall be known as the delinquent date. If the delinquent date falls on a holiday, Saturday or Sunday, the bill shall then become delinquent at 8:00 a.m. on the first business day following the holiday or weekend.

VI. BILLING CYCLE (contd.)

- d. Disconnect Notification Date – If a bill is not paid on or before the close of business on the due date, the city will send a disconnection notice to the customer. The disconnection notice will state the past due amount on the customer's account plus applicable reconnection fees if not paid by the disconnect date.
- e. Disconnection Date – If a bill is not paid before the close of business by the 20th of the following month in which the bill is due, the City Council will order a disconnection of the customer's utility services and a reconnection charge equal to \$200.00 shall be added to the charges.

VII. DELINQUENT CUSTOMERS

Any customer whose bill remains unpaid at 4:30 p.m. on the 25th day of the month following after which services are billed for shall be considered delinquent. Any customer who is delinquent on any one utility (water or sewer) may be disconnected from the utility system and once disconnected shall not be reconnected or reinstated until payment of all charges, fees and penalties necessary to bring the account(s) to a current status. Delinquent utilities may also be certified to Meeker County property taxes to be collected in the same manner as special assessments and other taxes.

VIII. UTILITY SERVICE APPLICATION

Any person, firm or corporation desiring to establish any utility or combination thereof shall make application for said service(s). The application shall be on such form(s) as may now or hereinafter be prescribed by the appropriate utility. The application may include the applicant's name, spouse or additional responsible party, property address, mailing address, home and cell phone numbers, and signature of the party responsible for payment. If applicant is renting the property, the owner's name and address must be included. Persons applying on behalf of others or acting as an agent for others may provide the required information provided such agent agrees to assume responsibility for the person, firm or corporation upon whose behalf they are applying. Each service location shall be considered a separate account.

IX. UTILITY BILL ADJUSTMENT

- a. Policy and Purpose – It is the policy of the City of Watkins to make adjustments to customer utility bills where said adjustment is necessary to correct billing errors, to correct errors due to equipment failure, or in certain circumstances to make adjustments due to customer-owned plumbing or equipment malfunction.
- b. Responsibility – The city shall determine the amount, if any, of the adjustment to be made in the City's sole discretion. Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to obligate the city to grant an adjustment. The city Clerk/Treasurer or designee shall receive requests and notify the customer of the determination.
- c. Staff Adjustments Allowed – Staff is authorized to make adjustments to utility bills, without City Council action, in the following cases:
 - 1. **Billing Errors.** Where an error has occurred that results in an inaccurate utility bill being sent to a customer, staff shall correct the error as soon as discovered, whether by the customer or by staff. These adjustments include data recording and entry errors as well as meter failures if tested and found to be inaccurate.
 - 2. **Sanitary Sewer.** Where a customer experiences extraordinary water consumption during a billing period due to a break in customer-owned plumbing, equipment malfunction, etc., and said water did not enter the sanitary sewer system; staff may adjust the sanitary sewer charge to an amount that is more typical of that customer's normal usage. Staff retains the right to have the request reviewed by City Council if they feel it is necessary.
 - 3. **Limitation on Adjustments.** Adjustments shall only be considered in those situations where the customer's monthly bill exceeds that customer's average usage by at least 5,000 gallons. In evaluating this usage, the city reserves the right to adjust the customer's average usage for the time of year.
 - 4. **Proof of Repair.** The customer shall provide proof to the city that the increased water usage was due to a plumbing or equipment malfunction and that the malfunction has been repaired. Proof may consist of a plumber or contractor's bill, or documentation of repair parts purchased by the customer.
 - 5. **Timely Notification and Repair.** The customer shall notify the city of a leak as soon as practical following discovery of the leak, and shall accomplish a repair of the leak in a timely fashion. Failure of the customer to timely notify the city and repair of the leak may result in denial of the customer's request to adjust the water bill.

- d. Procedure – When an adjustment is made, a credit for the amount of the adjustment shall be made to the customer’s account. When a customer makes a written request for an adjustment, the amount under consideration for adjustment shall not be payable until a determination on the adjustment is made. All other amounts not in dispute shall be due according to utility rules. When a customer pays an amount that is later adjusted, the credit shall remain on the account. No cash refunds shall be made for adjustments unless the account has been or is subsequently closed and a credit balance remains.
- e. Adjustments Not Allowed – Except as expressly set forth above, no adjustments shall be allowed to city water or sewer bills. Specifically, adjustments to sanitary sewer charges for customers who claim outdoor water usage (i.e. lawn or garden sprinkling, car washing, filling swimming pools, etc.) where the water used did not enter the sanitary sewer system shall not be allowed.
- f. Requests for Adjustments – The City Clerk/Treasurer or designee may require the request to be in writing. Written requests shall state the name of the account holder, service address, contact information and the reason for the requested adjustment. The customer shall provide all information requested by the city and deemed necessary to make a determination on the request.
- g. Response – The City Clerk/Treasurer shall respond to the written request for adjustment within fourteen (14) business days after receiving from the customer all the information necessary to make a determination on the request, except in those situations where the request must be reviewed by the City Council.
- h. Reporting – The City Clerk/Treasurer shall provide a report to the City Council on adjustments made under this policy exceeding one hundred dollars (\$100.00).
- i. Appeals – Customers who disagree with the determination of staff regarding their requested adjustments may appeal to the City Council. Said appeal must be in writing and shall be scheduled to be heard at the meeting immediately after receipt of the written appeal.

X. PROMISSORY AGREEMENT

The City Clerk/Treasurer or designee is hereby authorized to enter into a written promissory agreement for only the current month’s utility bill on a case-by-case basis for utility customers. Verbal agreements will not be accepted. If a customer fails to make good on any term and/or condition contained within the promissory agreement, the customer’s utility services may be disconnected immediately.

XI. SERVICE CHARGES

The following additional fees shall be charged for services provided by the utility:

- a. Reconnection of service due to non-payment of bill:
- \$200.00 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. – Monday to Friday (excluding holidays)
 - \$75.00 additional if after hours
- b. Returned check fees:
- \$30.00 for all checks and ACH payments
 - Returned checks, the customer shall pay, by cash or money order, the amount of the returned check(s) plus the corresponding returned check fee
 - After a returned check, the customer shall pay all current and future payments by cash or money order

XII. METER OBSTRUCTION

It shall be prohibited for any person to obstruct access to a utility water meter whether in a public right-of-way or on private property. Should any person, in violation of this section, refuse to remove an obstruction within 24 hours after notification to do so, the city shall cause such obstruction to be removed at the customer’s expense.

XIII. METERS REQUIRED; UNAUTHORIZED HANDLING PROHIBITED

No person not authorized by the City Clerk or City Council shall connect, disconnect, take apart, or in any manner change or interfere with any such meter or its use.

XIV. APPROVAL OF POLICY

This policy shall be formally approved and adopted by the City Council.

This policy was adopted on July 12, 2012 and amended June 13, 2013 and September 12, 2024.