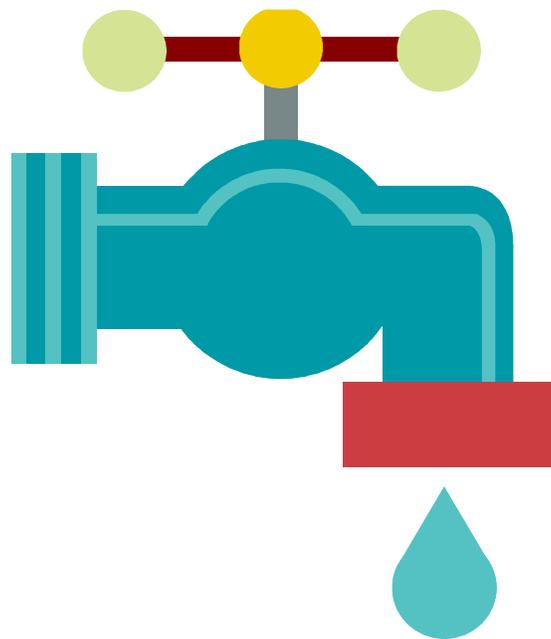


# CITY OF HILLSBORO



## ***POLICY AND PROCEDURES*** **WATER/SEWER UTILITY**

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*May 2010*

## **I. APPLICATION FOR SERVICE**

- A. The City of Hillsboro requires all new and relocating customers to complete a written application for utility service in person at City Hall located at 123 Mechanic Street, Hillsboro, WI between the hours of 8:30 A.M. and 4:30 P.M.
- B. Each customer shall provide a contact for the party responsible for bill payment; address where service is to be provided; mailing address, if different from service address; and an address of residence prior to application. You may also be asked to provide employer information, credit references, and social security and driver's license numbers to help prevent identity theft.
- C. Under certain circumstances an application may be mailed, e-mailed or faxed to the customer and returned to City Hall in the same manner. The Utility Clerk shall determine when this may be appropriate.
- D. Each new customer shall receive the Public Service Commission's Bill of Rights upon completion of the written application for service.

## **II. UTILITY METER READING PROCEDURE**

- A. The first step in the automatic utility meter reading process is for the Utility Clerk to download the utility route to the FC200 handheld device. The meters are read monthly, typically on the 18<sup>th</sup>. If the 18<sup>th</sup> falls on the weekend, the meters will be read on the Friday before or the Monday after at the Water/Sewer Superintendent's discretion.
- B. The meters are read via a remote module placed on the water meter and uploaded to the FC200 when the utility department drives the route on or around the 18<sup>th</sup> of every month. All readings are actual readings, unless circumstances dictate otherwise.
- C. Once the route is completed, the portable handheld device is returned to the Utility Clerk and the meter readings are imported into the utility billing system. Various reports are printed as follows:
  - 1. Meter Proof Report;
  - 2. Meter Reading Exception Report;
  - 3. Skipped Reads Report;
  - 4. Trouble Message Report;
  - 5. Special Message Report; and
  - 6. Detailed Route Report
- D. The Utility Clerk will provide copies of the reports to the Water/Sewer Superintendent.
- E. The Utility Clerk will review the reports, and if any discrepancies are found the clerk will report them to the Water/Sewer Superintendent. In the event of a discrepancy, the department will re-read the meter to make sure the meter is working correctly

and if not, will ensure the problem gets resolved. If unable to get in contact with the customer to repair the meter; the Utility Clerk will issue an estimated billing for that month with a notation on the billing stating that this is an estimated reading.

- F. Once all meters have been read and all discrepancies are corrected, the billings are ready to be calculated.

### **III. UTILITY BILLING PROCEDURE**

- A. The billing process begins on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> of the month following the reading. Reports are printed, reviewed, and corrections are made if needed.
- B. Utility bills are generally sent out on the 5<sup>th</sup> of every month. If the 5<sup>th</sup> falls on the weekend, then they are sent out the Friday before.
- C. Water/Sewer Utility Bill Payments are due the 25<sup>th</sup> of every month.
- D. The next business day following the 25<sup>th</sup>, a utility deposit is performed and a 1% late payment penalty is applied to the delinquent accounts.

### **IV. UTILITY BILLING DISPUTES:**

- A. As soon as a utility customer believes there is a discrepancy, the customer should first contact the City Clerk to try to resolve the problem.
- B. If the disputed issue cannot be resolved, the Clerk shall inform the customer of the right to appeal to the Public Service Commission.
- C. You may contact the Public Service Commission Consumer Affairs Unit at 1-800-225-7729 or (608) 266-2001. While the PSC reviews your dispute, your service will not be disconnected. However, you must still promptly pay any charges not in dispute in order to maintain service. After the PSC completes its review, a staff member will contact the customer and the utility to discuss the resolution.

### **V. DISCONNECTION PROCEDURE**

- A. Five days after the payment due date (25<sup>th</sup> of every month), a Shutoff Account List is printed and Disconnection Notices are sent via first class mail to any utility customer whose account is delinquent. The notice will be sent out at least 10 calendar days prior to the first date of the proposed disconnection, but no sooner than 20 days after the date of issuance of the bill.
- B. Once the notice is sent the customer has an additional 10 days to pay the balance on the account in full or set up a Deferred Payment Plan on the delinquent amount. Due to administrative costs a notice is not sent if the account balance is under \$25.00.

- C. Owners of the property are also sent a Landlord Notice to keep the owners informed because delinquent municipal utility bills may be levied as a tax as provided in Wis. Stat. 66.0809(3).
- D. Utility service may be disconnected or refused for any of the following reasons, including, but not limited to:
  - 1. Failure to pay in full a delinquent account, including delinquent bills from a previous address;
  - 2. Failure to comply with the terms of a deferred payment plan;
  - 3. Diversion of service or interference around the meter;
  - 4. Refusal to permit authorized utility personnel the necessary access to the base meter; and
  - 5. Failure to comply with Wisconsin State Statutes, Public Service Commission rules, or commission orders pertaining to utility service, etc.

*For more information see Wis. Stat. PCS 185.37.*
- E. Prior to the actual disconnection of water service, the Utility Department shall make a reasonable effort to inform the residential customer of the disconnection. This is accomplished by posting a Disconnection Notice on the customer's main entrance door not less than 24 hours or more than 48 hours prior to disconnection. The reason for disconnection and what actions shall be taken to avoid disconnection will be stated in the notice. While posting the notice an effort to personally contact the resident will also be made. If personal contact is made, representatives of the Utility Department shall review the reasons for the pending disconnection of service and explain what actions shall be taken to avoid disconnection.
- F. Examples of arrangements that can be made to avoid disconnection, include, but are not limited to the following:
  - 1. Pay the account in full;
  - 2. Set up a Deferred Payment Plan. (PSC rules require utilities to negotiate payment agreements to residential customers who are unable to pay their bill in full). Prior to disconnection, the utility is not required to, nor will, offer another payment agreement if a customer has defaulted on a deferred payment agreement and their ability to pay has not significantly changed;
  - 3. Informal Agreement. At the discretion of the Utility Clerk, a verbal agreement may be considered between the Utility and the customer to allow 5 extra business days to make payment without having to set up a payment plan. Decision would be based on the customer's payment history. Any subsequent violation will nullify the customer's ability to enter into an informal agreement.

## **VI. DEFERRED PAYMENT PLAN**

- A. If a utility customer requests a payment plan, then the customer will be asked to complete a Deferred Payment Agreement.
- B. Twenty-five percent of the past due bill is acceptable for down payment, but is negotiable.

- C. The Utility Clerk will set up payments that ensure if met, the balance will be paid in full in three months. Payment plans lasting in excess of three months should only be entered into under unusual circumstance. The Clerk may confer with the Water/Sewer Superintendent and the City Administrator prior to entering into a deferred payment plan in excess of three months.
- D. If the customer and the Utility Clerk agree to the terms of the payment plan, then both will sign and a copy of the agreement will be given to the customer. A letter will be sent to the customer highlighting the terms of the agreement along with a deferred payment schedule. If a payment is missed or current month's charges are not paid on time, the account is subject to disconnection and the entire balance becomes due and payable in full.
- E. Following are reasons why a utility **shall not disconnect/refuse services** to a particular dwelling (This is not an all inclusive list – further information can be obtained from the Public Service Commission):
1. Failure to pay for different type or class of utility service, except as provided by sub. (7)(c) or failure to pay for merchandise or non-utility service;
  2. The Utility may not disconnect service in affected counties when a heat advisory, heat warning, or heat emergency issued by the national weather service is in effect;
  3. Residential water utility service to an occupied dwelling may not be disconnected during the period November 1 to April 15 if the water service is a necessary part of a dwelling's heating system;
  4. If disconnection shall aggravate an existing medical or protective services emergency of the occupant, a member of the customer's family or other permanent resident of the premises where service is rendered and if the customer conforms to the procedures described in PSC 185.37 (10)(b); or
  5. When a residential customer, either directly or through the commission disputes a disconnection notice. During the investigation, utility service shall not be disconnected.
- For more information see Wis. Stat. PSC 185.37.*
- F. If the customer has made no attempt to reconcile with the Utility the delinquent amount due, the Utility shall proceed with the disconnection process.
- G. Water service will be re-connected:
1. After the customer has paid the account arrears and paid the re-connection fee; or
  2. Has set up a Deferred Payment Plan and has paid the re-connection fee.
- H. In the event service is disconnected and the customer has satisfied the requirements for reconnection, a reconnection fee will be applied. During business hours (Monday – Friday; 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) the reconnection fee will be as set from time to time by the Common Council. There will be an increased fee for reconnection requests falling outside normal business hours. Reconnection outside normal business hours will be subject to Utility employee availability.

- I. When utility service has been disconnected the local Police Department is informed of the disconnection and a welfare check is conducted to confirm there is no immediate danger to the residence.

## **VII. PROCEDURE TO LEVY DELINQUENT UTILITY BILLS AS A TAX**

- A. Utility charges in arrears and incurred prior to September 30<sup>th</sup> , and not paid in full by November 15<sup>th</sup> are designated for possible levy on the tax roll;
- B. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, a certification notice is sent to customers with delinquent utility bills and to property owners when applicable, that have a balance from charges incurred prior to September 30<sup>th</sup>;
- C. This notice will indicate that if the charges are not paid in full by a certain date, the delinquent utility charges, along with a penalty will be transferred to the property owner's tax bill;
- D. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, a 10% penalty is assessed to those customers with outstanding utility charges incurred prior to September 30<sup>th</sup>;
- E. On November 15<sup>th</sup> all unpaid utility charges incurred prior to September 30<sup>th</sup> are transferred to the tax roll, along with any penalties assessed.

***CITY OF HILLSBORO WATER / SEWER UTILITY CONTACTS***

City of Hillsboro Utility Office 123 Mechanic Street P.O. Box 447 Hillsboro, WI 54634 <a href="mailto:clerk@hillsborowi.com">clerk@hillsborowi.com</a>	608-489-2521
City of Hillsboro Water/Sewer Dept.	608-489-3388
City of Hillsboro Administrator	608-489-2350
Civic Systems, LLC (Utility Billing Software)	888-241-1517
ITRON, Inc. (Meter Reading Software)	800-635-8725
Public Service Commission 610 N. Whitney Way P.O. Box 7854 Madison, WI 53707-7854 <a href="http://psc.wi.gov">http://psc.wi.gov</a>	608-266-5481

## **CITY OF HILLSBORO WATER / SEWER UTILITY**

### **SUMMARY OF THE COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

- Bills due on the 25<sup>th</sup> of every month;
- 1% penalty added to a delinquent account the next business day following the 25<sup>th</sup>;
- Disconnection Notice will be sent out five days following the 25<sup>th</sup>, with disconnection date set for at least 10 days later according to PSC guidelines; Property owners (Landlords) are also sent a copy of the notice where applicable;
- Disconnection Notice left on door 24 hours prior to disconnection with an attempt to personally contact;
- Deferred payment agreements are accepted;
- 25% of past due bill is acceptable for down payment, but that figure can be negotiable. Balance to be paid in full in three months;
- Remainder is divided into payments to be paid in addition to current months charges;
- If a payment is missed or current month's charges are not paid on time, the account is subject to disconnection and the entire balance becomes due and payable;
- On October 15<sup>th</sup> a certification notice is sent to customers and the property owners that have a delinquent utility balance;
- November 1<sup>st</sup> a 10% penalty is assessed;
- November 15<sup>th</sup> unpaid utility charges are transferred to the tax roll per the procedures listed herein along with the penalty assessed on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **WATER / SEWER UTILITY BILLING FAQs**

### **Billing and Payment Questions**

1. How do I receive Water/Sewer Utility service?
  - a. You are required to complete a written application for utility service.
2. How do I receive the utility application?
  - a. The application is available from City Hall located at 123 Mechanic Street between the hours of 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Under certain circumstances an application may be mailed, e-mailed, or faxed to the customer.
3. When are utility billings sent out?
  - a. The billings are sent out on the 5<sup>th</sup> of every month. If the 5<sup>th</sup> falls on the weekend, they are sent out on the Friday before.
4. What are the charges on my bill?
  - a. W1 & WO – Water Usage: the charge assessed for the consumption of water.
  - b. W2 – Water Usage: Deduct Meter, or 2<sup>nd</sup> Water meter
  - c. WB – Water Base (Partial Meter Charge)
  - d. SW – Sewer: charge for sewer service
  - e. SM – Sewer Metered: charge for sewer service
  - f. SB – Sewer Base: (Partial Meter Charge)
  - g. SU – 25% Surcharge: charge for Rural Residential Customers (Outside City Limits)
  - h. RE – Refuse: Garage and Recycling charge
  - i. WP – Water Penalty
  - j. SP – Sewer Penalty
5. What is the payment due date?
  - a. Payments are due monthly on the 25<sup>th</sup>.
6. What is a minimum bill?
  - a. A minimum bill consists of a fixed meter service charge and a garbage and recycling fee.
7. How can I avoid these monthly charges?
  - a. Have the water service shut off at the curb stop.
8. Is there a charge to have my water shut off at the curb stop?
  - a. There is no charge to have your water shut off.
9. How do I get my water service reinstated?
  - a. Contact the Utility Office and pay the reconnection fee during regular business hours or an increased fee outside normal business hours.
10. What payment methods can I use to pay my bill?
  - a. You may pay in person, by mail with a check or money order or use the drop box outside City Hall. Please mail payments to:

City of Hillsboro  
P.O. Box 447  
Hillsboro, WI 54634

11. Is there a penalty for not paying by the due date?
  - a. 1% late payment penalty is applied the next business day after the due date.
12. How long do I get to pay on the delinquent amount after the Disconnection Notice is sent out?
  - a. You will have an additional 10 days, depending upon how the weekend falls. It will be stated in your Disconnection Notice.
13. How does delinquent balances affect the property owner?
  - a. Unpaid utility charges are transferred to the tax roll on November 15<sup>th</sup>.
14. What options do I have if my water has been disconnected?
  - a. Pay the account in full;
  - b. Set up a Deferred Payment Plan; and / or
  - c. Pay the water reconnection fee
15. What happens if I can pay on the payment plan but not on the current billing?
  - a. Failure to comply with the terms of the deferred payment plan, which includes maintaining a payment in full status for current charges, is subject to disconnection.
16. Can my services be disconnected if I heat with water?
  - a. Services may not be disconnected during the period of November 1st through April 15<sup>th</sup> if water is a necessary part of the dwelling's heating system.
17. Can a utility disconnect services if there are medical reasons why it should not be?
  - a. When disconnection would cause a medical emergency or interfere with protective services, the utility can postpone disconnection for up to 21 days, but may require a physician's statement or notice from social services or law enforcement.
18. What do I do if I'm moving?
  - a. Contact the Utility office to report the termination.

### **Meter Questions**

19. How often are the meters read?
  - a. Meters are read monthly on the 18<sup>th</sup>, unless the 18<sup>th</sup> falls on the weekend.
20. Who reads my meter?
  - a. The water/sewer utility department.
21. How is my meter read?
  - a. It is read electronically with a handheld device that receives a signal from a module placed on the meter.
22. What can I do if I feel my meter is not working correctly or if it is leaking?

- a. Contact the Utility office with your concerns at (608) 489-3388, or the Utility Office at (608) 489-2521.
23. If I believe my water usage is too high what do I check?
    - a. Check for water leaks such as faucets leaking;
    - b. Check to see if the toilet is functioning correctly; and
    - c. Check for broken pipes.
  24. What is an estimated meter reading?
    - a. An estimated reading is applied when an actual reading is unattainable, and if efforts to contact the residence to repair the meter have failed, the Utility Clerk will record an estimated reading with a notation stating it is an estimated reading.

### **What Do I Do If I Have A Dispute**

25. Whom do I contact if an issue between me and the Utility cannot be resolved?
  - a. Contact the Public Service Commission (PSC) at (608) 266-2001 or 800-225-7729.  
Website: <http://psc.wi.gov>.
26. Who is the PSC?
  - a. The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is an independent state agency that oversees more than 1,300 Wisconsin public utilities that provide natural gas, electricity, heat, steam, water and telecommunication services.