

ARTICLE VII. UNDERSTANDING YOUR BILL

Section 1. Meter Readings

- a. When meters are installed by the City to measure utility services used by its customers, all charges for units consumed, except basic facility charges, shall be calculated from the readings of such meters. Water meter readings are used as the basis for determining sewer bills.

It is the City's policy to read every utility meter each month. Meters are read on a cyclical basis, and monthly bills are mailed periodically throughout the month to each customer with a utility account. The reading dates are scheduled to fall within the same weekly period each month. The City will strive to maintain a billing cycle of no less than 26 days or more than 35 days in the billing period. This does not include first bills and final statements for closed accounts.

The City reserves the right to estimate usage when extenuating circumstances prevail. Unless it is unavoidable, it is the policy of the City to not estimate an account for two (2) consecutive months. When we do have to make an estimate, we base it on the customer's previous utility usage. Because the metering system is based on "continuous read" meters, estimating consumption for one month will not affect total consumption over a two-month period. Any error in estimating will automatically be adjusted when the meter is read the next time.

- b. All metering devices installed for the purpose of metering utility service shall be located on the exterior of structures, easily and safely accessible by City personnel, so that they will be accessible for reading and servicing. If metering devices are made inaccessible, the City has the right to disconnection of service, after proper notification by the City.
- c. In the event a meter reader is unable to gain access to a meter, including business and residential addresses, the meter is automatically estimated. In the event any authorized employee is refused admittance to the premises by the tenant or owner or is hindered by the tenant or owner from making an examination of the meters, the City reserves the right to disconnect utility services until free access is granted to an authorized employee.
- d. The City has remote meter reading available in some areas. With this technology, customers with remote read meters will no longer be required to unlock gates or contain animals to have the meters read. The remote read meters will communicate with our meter technicians via radio frequency.
- e. The City will test each of the customer's meters for accuracy upon request once per calendar year. These tests will be charged to the customer based on the Schedule of Fees and Charges located in Appendix A. The City may also randomly test meters currently in service at any time at no charge to the customer.

Section 2. Monthly Billing Procedures

Meters are read and bills are prepared each month. Before a customer is billed, meter readings and usage are audited to determine any unusual changes in the amount of utilities used. When differences are found, we immediately reread the meter before the account is billed to ensure accuracy.

Utility charges shall begin when the utility meter is installed. All installed meters are billed on active accounts.

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Utility bills are mailed to each customer once each month and are payable as of the billing date. We make every effort to give our customers a fair amount of time to pay their bills. The bill also informs our customers about dates for scheduled bank drafting, late penalty dates, and disconnect dates for past due bills. Non-receipt of a bill for utilities by the customer shall not release or diminish the obligation of the customer with respect to the payment thereof. Utility bills are mailed monthly. The customer should contact the City if a bill is delayed or not received. If payment is received past the close of business on the due date, a penalty according to rates established in the Schedule of Fees and Charges found in Appendix A will be applied.

Section 3. Selection of Rates

The City will select the appropriate rate schedule of those available in which the customer will be billed for each utility service. Copies of the City's rate schedules may be obtained from the Customer Services office or on the City's website. See Customer Service Hours and Location for contact information. The City encourages commercial and industrial customers to provide information about their operating conditions or other factors that may affect the selection of the rate schedule best suited for their operation.

Section 4. Adjustments and Billing Errors

If it is found that a utility has directly or indirectly, by any device whatsoever, charged, demanded, collected, or received from any consumer a greater or lesser compensation for any service rendered or to be rendered by such utility than that prescribed in the schedules of such utility, or if it is found that any consumer has received or accepted any service from a utility for a compensation greater or lesser than that prescribed in such schedules, or if, for any reason, a billing error resulted in a greater or lesser charge than that incurred by the consumer for the actual service rendered, then the method of adjustment for such overcharge or undercharge shall be as provided:

A. Overcharges

If the interval of overcharge can be determined, the amount of overcharge may be refunded to the customer for the entire interval, provided that such time period shall not exceed three (3) years. If the interval of overcharge cannot be determined, the City may refund the overcharge incurred for the previous twelve months. Usage and demand (when applicable) may be estimated if exact usage cannot be determined. If an overcharged customer owes a past due balance to the City, the City shall deduct that past due amount from any refund due from the City.

B. Undercharges

If the interval of undercharge can be determined, the amount of undercharge may be billed to the customer for the period of undercharge, provided that the time period for which the undercharge shall be calculated and time period for collection shall not exceed three (3) years. If the period of time over which the undercharge occurred cannot be determined, the City will collect the undercharged amount during the 12 months before the undercharge was discovered. Usage and demand (where applicable) will be estimated if exact usage cannot be determined. If the meter error is found upon test to be not more than 2% fast or slow, the utility shall not be required to make a billing adjustment. (NCUC Docket No. E-100, Sub 17, 5/10/74; NCUC Docket No. E-100, Sub 29, 11/29/77.)

Water and Sewer usage adjustment policy- If a customer has a water leak, broken pipe, toilet problem, or other similar issue causing a higher than normal water and/or sewer bill, the City will allow one adjustment to the water and/or sewer bill per three-year period for each location. Documentation showing repairs were made is required before an adjustment will be applied. Following proper documentation, the City will read the water meter to verify. The adjustment will not exceed two months billing cycle from date of first occurrence as indicated by the documentation presented for repairs even if multiple months are affected. Full water and sewer charges will apply to other billings. The customer will be required to sign a document stating they understand the water and sewer adjustment policy. The document will be kept on the account for the three-year period.

Section 5. Meter Tampering

Any customer whose service was disconnected because the meter, lines, or other apparatus serving their residence or business was tampered with in any manner shall pay such deposit as required to protect the City from loss of revenue, in addition to penalties and re-connection fees as defined in the Schedule of Fees and Charges found in Appendix A. An offending customer may also be subject to any civil or criminal penalties as may be imposed by City, State, or Federal regulations.

Tampering with utility meters is expressly prohibited by NC General Statute 14-151, as provided under Appendix D, and is punishable by fines and/or imprisonment.

Section 6. Appeals Process

Any customer who believes an error was made in an account balance or the amount of a bill has the right to appeal a decision based on the following order of sequence:

First Appeal:	To the Customer Service Representative
Second Appeal:	To the Customer Service Manager
Third Appeal:	A scheduled appointment with the Director of Finance
Final Appeal:	A written request to the City Manager or his designee