



## TOWN OF ELIZABETH

DICK EASON, TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

November 10, 2015

### WATER AND SEWER BILLING PROCESS / POLICY

Each property located within the Town limits and receiving water and/or sewer service must have an active customer account. An application is required to establish an account as well as a meter deposit that will remain with the account until such time as the account is closed. All property owners are required to deposit a \$25 fee, while all tenants are required to deposit a \$100 fee. Deposits are credited to the final bill (or refunded if there is an overage in the account) when a customer moves and closes the water account. It is the responsibility of the customer to keep the Town aware of current contact information such as phone number, e-mail address and mailing address.

#### **Billing Process**

Water and sewer bills are processed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, or as the calendar allows in the case that the 1<sup>st</sup> is on a holiday or weekend, based on meter readings taken on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the prior month. The billing period covers the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month and is calculated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the next month. Example: usage from November 16<sup>th</sup> to December 15<sup>th</sup> bills on January 1<sup>st</sup> with payment due by January 15<sup>th</sup>. The following steps outline the Town's billing process:

1) The first step in the billing process begins with the meter reads taken on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, or as the calendar allows, by the Public Works Dept. Readings are taken electronically with a hand held device (interrogator) which is then downloaded into the water billing system along with any manual meter reads. The billing program uses the readings to calculate the water charges for each account. Sewer charges are determined from an average of the water usage for December, January and February and are set for the coming year beginning with the March 1<sup>st</sup> billing, except for the car wash rate which is based on monthly water usage. The billing program combines the water and sewer charges along with any other miscellaneous fees to produce an itemized bill. The billing period runs in arrears as there must be a read and/or usage to calculate charges.

2) Bills are sent out on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month and are due by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. There is an additional grace period of (5) days before late penalties are assessed. Payments are currently accepted in the form of cash, check, money order or debit/credit cards. The Town also offers an automatic withdrawal of payments (ACH) which is administered on the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month for previously registered accounts.

3) Late Notices are sent out to customers (and copies to landlords) on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the month. A penalty of 5% of the balance is calculated and added to the existing balance. The notice gives at least (10) days for receipt of a delinquent payment before the next step of issuing a red tag.

4) Red Tags are issued on the date as indicated in the late notice (usually the first Friday of the month based on the calendar) if payment has not been received. A red tag informs the customer that if payment is not received by 9:00 AM on the business day specified on the red tag (usually the Monday following the red tag, but at least 2 calendar days after the red tag is issued), water service will be turned off. The red tag process also generates a fee which is added to the customer's balance. The red tag fee graduates per tagging, starting at \$25 for the first tag within a calendar year and increases by \$25 for each additional tag to a maximum of \$100, which continues until the end of that calendar year. The red tag fee resets to \$25 in January of each year.

5) If payment is not received per the red tag, a turn-off list is generated for the Public Works Department and they proceed with disconnecting service. There is a \$25 fee for disconnecting service.

6) Once service has been disconnected, payment of the delinquent balance is required to restore service. Service turn on must be scheduled with Town Hall and Public Works will work it in to their schedule during normal working hours (usually within 48 hours). There is a \$25 fee for reconnecting service. The property owner is responsible for any damage to their service line, interior plumbing or property that may occur as a result of the disconnected service (such as frozen pipes).

7) Once water service has been disconnected a delinquent account will be charged 1% interest per month in addition to the 5% penalty. Since sewer service cannot be disconnected, monthly sewer charges continue to accumulate even if the water has been disconnected.

8) Properties with delinquent balances or abandoned and foreclosed properties with delinquent balances are subject to a tax levy to be filed with the County Assessor's office in December of each year. A 10% penalty is applied to the balance to cover the Town's cost to assess the levy.

#### **Returned Checks**

Returned checks are charged back to the account and a NSF fee is added. In addition, charges from the Bank against the Town are passed through to the customer's account. The customer is sent a letter informing them of the returned check and demanding payment in cash, credit card or certified funds within 10 business days or service will be discontinued, with an associated \$25 disconnection fee. If a check is returned that was used to pay a red tag notice, the customer is subject to immediate turn-off without further notice. Once a customer has had a check returned for NSF, all future payments from that customer will need to be made in cash, credit card or certified funds for a period of 12 months. The Utility Billing Clerk will be responsible for tracking customers who are not allowed to pay with a check.

#### **Turn-on and Turn-off Requests**

Requests for turn-on and turn-off of water service (for other than delinquent accounts) will be made in writing on the Town's Request Form and the property owner will be charged a \$25 per trip charge. For requests made by persons other than the property owner (i.e. a Realtor) written property owner consent must be provided with the request. Once the request has been made it will be passed on to the Public Works Department for scheduling. Public Works will coordinate

directly with the requester to schedule the appropriate action. In the case of a major water leak (as determined by Public Works) a turn-off can be made immediately without the written request to minimize water loss and property damage. A written request will be supplied after the fact to document the actions taken.

### **Bulk Water Sales**

Prior to the purchase of bulk water, a Bulk Water Customer account must be set up and a \$100 deposit paid. Once the account is established and Public Works notified, the purchaser must coordinate the time, date and location of the bulk water loading with the Public Works Director. Bulk water meter will be read following each purchase, or in the case of multiple purchases in a single day at the end of the day. The Public Works Director will report the meter readings to the Town Clerk who will bill accordingly.

### **Exceptions to Policy**

Any requests for exceptions to the above policy (payment due date, payment plans, waiver of fees, etc.) must be made in writing, and will be placed on the agenda for consideration at the next scheduled Board of Trustees Meeting.

### **Curb Stops**

Curb-stops are an important part of the water system and allow water to be disconnected from the property in the case of a burst pipe, a leak or water system repairs. It also allows water to be turned off in the event of delinquent accounts to prevent additional billing. Lack of a curb-stop, or lack of access to a curb-stop severely limits the ability to turn off the water in the event of an emergency such as a line break or the enforcement of the red tag policy. The owner of such property can incur water damage and/or excessive fees if service cannot be turned off due to these circumstances. Installation and maintenance of curb-stops is a property owner responsibility. Each property owner is required to maintain access to the curb-stop. If required, the Public Works Department will dismantle a retaining wall or other landscaping if it interferes with accessing the curb-stop. In that case, the Town has no responsibility to restore the landscaping to its previous condition. If requested, the Town will provide assistance to a property owner in locating their curb-stop to facilitate landscape design to ensure access. A curb-stop will also act as the demarcation of the Town vs property owner responsibility effective December 31, 2016. The property owner is responsible for the service line from and including the curb-stop to the rest of the property. The Town is responsible for the service line from the curb-stop to the water main. If there is no curb stop installed, the property owner is responsible for the service line to the property line until December 31, 2016, and all the way to the water main line after that date.



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Town Administrator