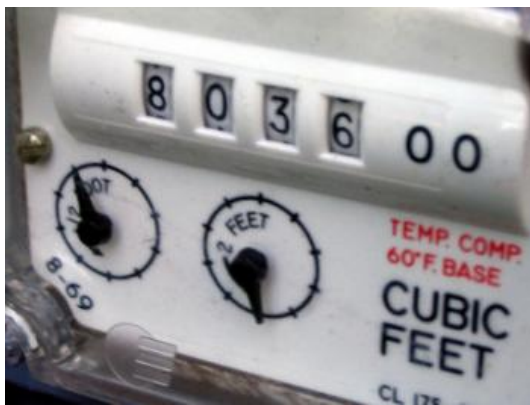


CITY GETS \$198,000 FOR NATURAL GAS BILLING ERROR

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Florida Gas has paid the city almost \$198,000 for natural gas billing discrepancies over the past six months.

Until earlier this summer, it had been thought that differences between the amount of gas the city was being billed buy the supplier and the amount of gas actually sold by the city was due to leaks in the city's distribution system.

The administration hired a consultant to track down where the gas was going. It turns out the missing gas had never gotten here.

Mayor Rusty Moody said an audit by

Florida Gas after the city insisted the gas wasn't escaping on its side of the Fournerat Road meter affirmed that.

Evidently volume information gathered at the meter was incorrectly entered into the gas transmission company's computer system.

Analysis by City Clerk Earlene LeJeune and consultant C.J. Arnold indicates the cost to the city of improperly computed gas charges over the past three years could total about \$375,000.

But convincing Florida Gas of the city's loss beyond the past six months is evidently going to take some time.

For the time being, the city has \$197,800 to put in the bank. Moody said it will probably be credited to the Utility Revenue account where it will used to offset continuing losses in the Gas Department operating budget.

The mayor has proposed, and the City Council tentatively approved, raising the city's base natural gas charge this fiscal year to help recover some of that operating loss.

Moody said it may not be necessary to do that at this time, but noted the city still faces the expense of replacing all its 4,500 or so antiquated gas meters. At a cost of perhaps \$350 each, that is a \$1.5 million project that will most likely be divided into annual phases and included in the operating budget.

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