

MUNICIPAL WATER AND WASTEWATER BILLING, PAYMENT AND COLLECTIONS POLICY

POLICY NUMBER	F&A 05-2022
CATEGORY	Finance
SUPERCEDES POLICY	F&A 05-2016
RELATED POLICIES	N/A
APPROVED BY	Resolution: 2022.20.07
EFFECTIVE DATE	September 28, 2022

PURPOSE

The Municipality of Dutton Dunwich recognizes the importance of having a written policy to establish procedures for municipal water and wastewater billing, payment and collections, incorporating good and acceptable business practices and efficiencies, which is consistent and fair to its residents and to the Municipality.

SCOPE

The Municipal Water and Wastewater billing, payment and collections policy applies to all customers who purchase or receive water and wastewater services within the geographical boundaries of the Municipality of Dutton Dunwich, and all property owners whose property is being supplied water and wastewater services by agreement with other municipalities. Municipal staff assigned to the administration and collection of water and wastewater accounts shall adhere to the policies and procedures outlined within.

OBJECTIVE

This policy is written in compliance with the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c.25; related Ontario Regulations under the Act; and applicable Municipal By-Laws, as amended from time to time. The objective is to ensure timely billing and collection of municipal water and wastewater fees and charges.

DEFINITIONS

Authorized Employee: Treasurer, CAO, Director of Operations or designated employee of the Municipality.

Property Taxes: means the tax account identified on the assessment roll.

Customer: means any owner, occupant, lessee, tenant or any other person purchasing or receiving services from the Municipality.

Owner: means an owner of a building or of lands.

Municipality: means The Municipality of Dutton Dunwich.

Payment Plan: means a written and signed payment arrangement approved by an Authorized Employee.

Water Certificate: means a certificate to estimate the water consumption and billing, up to and including the date of sale.

Fees and Charges By-Law: means the current schedule of applicable fees, rates and other charges for services, which may be amended by Council from time to time.

Council: means the Council of the Municipality of Dutton Dunwich

Due Date: means the last date by which an invoice may be paid by a customer in accordance with the terms of payment on the municipal invoice.

Invoice: means a bill issued by the Municipality to a customer indicating the amount owing over a single billing period for the delivery of water, wastewater and meter service charges.

Meter: means an apparatus for measuring the quantity of water used.

PROCEDURE

Readings

Meters will be read and billed on a quarterly basis. All customers agree to grant authorized representatives of the Municipality access to the outside remote reader or manual water meter at the service address. Meters and remote readers must be accessible at all times.

If an actual meter reading cannot be obtained, an estimated reading will be used for billing purposes. Any necessary adjustments will be made when an actual reading can be obtained.

Due dates for quarterly readings will be January 15, April 15, July 15 and October 15.

Final Readings

A final reading of the meter will be done on the date that someone moves out such as when a property sells or when a tenant moves out. When notified by a Lawyer for the purpose of the sale of a property, a water certificate may be produced to estimate the water consumption up to and including the closing date. The due date will be the 15th of the current month, if the final reading is completed before the 5th of the month, or the 15th of the next month, if the reading is completed after the 5th of the month.

Billing

All properties connected to the drinking water system and wastewater system shall be metered and every owner or tenant shall pay water and wastewater charges based on the metered consumption rate and any fixed charges at the rate specified in the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law.

Water and Wastewater Flat Rate Fees

Fixed rate charges for water and wastewater at the rate specified in the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law will be billed on a quarterly basis even when there is an interruption of service, or the service has been disconnected by the property owner upon request.

Interest and Penalty

Interest and Penalty at the percentage established by the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law will be added to the account 3 days after the due date.

Tenant Deposits

Where a property is tenant occupied, and the tenant is responsible for the payment of water and wastewater fees and charges, a deposit in the amount established by the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law is required to be paid prior to the utility service being activated.

The tenant deposit does not accrue interest and will be refunded after the final water bill has been paid by the tenant when they vacate the premises. Should the tenant not pay the final bill, the deposit will be applied to the final bill. If a credit remains after the deposit is applied, a refund will be sent to the forwarding address or the address on file. If there is a balance owing after the tenant deposit has been applied, the remaining balance will be transferred to the property tax roll for the service address.

Seasonal Service

Where there is a request for water and wastewater services to be disconnected or reconnected, the fee established in the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law will be added to account.

Temporary Disconnections

Where water and wastewater services need to be disconnected for repairs, replacements or inspections, there will not be a fee.

Bill Payment

Water and Wastewater net amounts will be accepted if received on or before the due date. All payments will be marked received by the date they arrive at the office.

Payments for water and wastewater received after the specified due date will be considered late and the penalty as specified by the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law will be applied to the account.

Penalties added to the water and wastewater account that remain unpaid are subject to penalty in the same manner as metered water and wastewater and water and wastewater fixed charges.

Payments may be made at the Municipal Office located at 199 Currie Road by cash, cheque or debit; through online banking, and at most bank branches, bank machines and kiosks. Post-dated cheques are accepted. A secure drop box is available at the side door of the municipal building for payments being made after business hours. It is strongly recommended that residents do not leave cash in the drop box. Preauthorized Payment Plans are available through the office and can be arranged on a monthly or quarterly basis. Preauthorized Payment Plans are exempt from late fees and penalties and will not accrue interest on outstanding balances, nor will it accrue interest on credits. It is the responsibility of the customer to monitor monthly payment plans to ensure their account is not carrying a large balance owing or a large credit.

Returned Payments

Should a cheque or Preauthorized Payment be returned for insufficient funds, closed account, frozen accounts or account errors, the fee as established by the Municipal Fees and Charges By-Law will be added to account. A letter along with a statement of account will be sent to the property owner or tenant to advise them of the returned payment. If a pre-authorized payment plan has more than one returned payment, the Municipality reserves the right to notify the customer in writing that they are being removed

from the preauthorized payment plan. Should the customer pay the amount that came back as returned within a 24-hour period, the fee will be waived.

Statements

Statements will be sent out after the due date for unpaid water and wastewater bills for any amount over \$25.00, once penalty and interest has been added to the customer's account. A letter along with a statement of account for tenanted properties will also be sent to the property owner(s).

Statements for accounts where the customer is the same as the owner on the property tax account will have a message on the letter stating that all unpaid not received by the 15th of the next month will be automatically transferred to the property tax roll.

Collections

Water and wastewater bills that remain unpaid will be automatically transferred to the property tax roll for the service address at the end of the month following the due date. For the quarterly billing cycle, all unpaid balances will be transferred on January 31, April 30, July 31 and October 31. A letter and statement of account will be sent to the property owner to inform them.

Uncollectable Amounts

Periodically throughout the current year and prior to the end of the current year, an authorized employee will review the customer accounts with outstanding balances and after all collection efforts have been exhausted, present a report to the Treasurer recommending that the outstanding account balances be written off as uncollectable.

Meter Reading Disputes

In the event of a dispute, the reading of the water meter register shall be the sole evidence of the quantity of water used by the property owner or tenant.

Unauthorized Interference with a Meter

No person, except a person authorized by the Municipality, shall be permitted to open, or in any way whatsoever tamper with the meter, remote reading device or with the seals placed thereon, or do any manner of thing which may interfere with the proper registration of the quantity of water passing through the meter or the operation of the unit.

Should any person change, tamper with or otherwise interfere in any way whatsoever, with any meter, remote reading device, and/or equipment placed in or on any building or property the water operations department may forthwith shut off the water to such building or property, and the water shall not be turned back on to such building or property until all applicable fees and repair costs are paid and without the express consent of an authorized employee of the Municipality. The property owner or tenant will be charged a fee for turning the water off and a fee for turning the water back on, as specified in the Fees and Charges By-Law. The cost of repairs will also be the responsibility of the property owner or tenant.

High Water Bill

In the case of a high water bill, the municipality will send out an authorized employee of the municipality to check the meter reading for accuracy. If the meter reading has been incorrectly entered, the bill will

be corrected and re-sent. Where the meter reading is correct and there is high usage, a data log may be produced to assist with investigating where the high water usage occurred.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to have the cause of the high water usage corrected. If the meter is broken due to frozen pipes, the Municipality will replace the first meter for free. All other meters that have to be replaced will be at the expense of the property owner.

If the property owner or tenant wishes to request relief from all or a portion of the water and wastewater bill, they are required to submit a request to the Clerk for Council consideration. The ultimate decision on whether or not all or a portion of the bill will be reduced will be determined by a vote by council. The decision will be communicated to the property owner or tenant within a week following the council meeting.

Payment Agreements

An authorized employee may set up a payment plan to assist customers that have a high water bill. The payment plan will remain in effect until the bill is caught up provided that the customer adheres to the agreement. Penalty and interest will be waived during the term of the agreement.

METHOD OF ENFORCEMENT

Ontario Regulation 581/06 and 566/07 of the Municipal Act, 2001

Certain public utility fees and charges

1. Fees and charges that are imposed by a municipality or local board under the Act for the following services and added to the tax roll under subsection 398 (2) of the Act have priority lien status as described in section 1 of the Act:
 1. For the supply of water.
 2. For the supply of artificial or natural gas.
 3. For the supply of steam or hot water.
 4. For the use of a sewage system.
5. For the use of a waste management system. O. Reg. 581/06, s. 1; O. Reg. 566/07, s. 1.