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CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission
FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager 
DATE: May 6, 2009
SUBJECT: Expansion of the City's Utility Sub-Meter Program

Effective October 1, 2008, the City, through its Water and Sewer Utility Department, began offering water sub-meters to utility customers for irrigation systems and is now expanding the program to allow water sub-meters for swimming pools and cooling towers.

A water sub-meter is a separate water meter installed down-stream from the City's service water meter for the purpose of receiving credit for the potable water that does not enter the City's sanitary sewer system. Sub-meters can be installed to measure water flows (gallons used) to fill up or refill a swimming pool, to service a cooling tower or for an irrigation system. These sub-meters are read at the same time as the customer's main water meter is read and the amount of water used through the sub-meter is then deducted from the usage on the customer's main water meter. The customer does not pay a sewer fee for the gallons difference between the two readings; thereby allowing the customer to obtain a savings on their utility account. The sub-meter program is offered to the City's utility customers in order to obtain a reduction on the sewer portion of their bill.

Prior to October 1, 2008, the City provided an option for customers to have SEPARATE irrigation meters only. These irrigation meters were connected to the main water line via a SEPARATE lateral water line. Once the separate irrigation meter was installed, no sewer fees were charged for the water flow measured through these meters. The sub-meter program will allow utility customers the same benefits as a separate meter at a lower expected installation cost.

In October of 2008, the City began a program where utility customers could have sub-meters for irrigation systems. Customers are required to purchase the meter from the City and either have the City install it or have it installed by an authorized contractor. If the sub-meter is installed by a contractor; the installation is subject to City inspection and approval. The City prefers that the sub-meter be placed in the public right of way, if at all possible. However, if it is necessary to install it on private property it must be placed where it is conveniently accessed by City personnel who read the meters monthly. There cannot be a fence or other obstruction between the City's service water meter and the sub-meter.

The sub-meter program is now being expanded to include swimming pools and cooling towers. The same procedure will apply for acquisition, installation and inspection of the sub-meters. Sub-meters for swimming pools can either be separate from an irrigation system or part of the same sub-meter depending on the location of the water line serving each system.

The sub-metering of a cooling tower is a bit different as they are not generally located near the right of way and most frequently are located on a roof in an area that will not be easily accessible for City personnel to read the meter. Therefore, the customer will have the obligation to read the sub-meter and report on a strict timetable to the City for billing. The City will have the right and obligation to periodically verify readings made by the owner and impose penalties for fraud.

Consistent with the County's sub-meter program, it will be the customer's responsibility to maintain the sub-meter within City standards at all times. If the customer fails to make any necessary maintenance needs with a sub-meter, the meter shall be removed from the City's billing system and full sewer fees will be applied. Maintenance issues would be, for example: the box full of dirt, the sub-meter box cover needs to be replaced, the area around the sub-meter is not clear and accessible, or if a sub-meter has been in use for a long period of time and has become defective the customer must replace it with a new meter. Sub-meters are to be replaced after every 10 years of active service.

There are some risks that go along with a sub-meter program. Once installed, customers can make modifications to divert water to functions that also utilize the sewer system. As a result, sewer fees could be significantly undercharged. The City will need to periodically audit/verify that sub-meters are only being utilized for water-only functions. Additionally, sub-meters may be placed in locations that are difficult for City personnel to read or customer provided readings may be erroneous or untimely; however, the benefits to our customers outweigh the risks and can provide the City's utility customers a cost effective way to obtain a reduction on the sewer portion of their bill.

JMG/PDW

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