



Department Source: City Utilities - Water and Light

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: March 21, 2016

Re: Amending Chapter 27 of the City Code

Executive Summary

Staff has prepared for Council consideration an ordinance amending Chapter 27 of the City Code.

Discussion

The City of Columbia is in the process of implementing new software for the utility billing system. As part of this process, staff has been reviewing ordinances that impact utility billing. Staff has determined that there are a number of changes that should be made prior to the implementation of the new utility billing system. Currently, the new system is anticipated to go-live on May 2, 2016. The proposed amendments to Chapter 27 are to simplify future changes; clarify processes; correct changes that should have been made during prior changes; and, to maintain equity of charges for similar functions.

The following are each proposed section change with a brief discussion of the purpose and reason of the change.

Sec. 27-18(a) Eliminates the distinction in the service initiation fee between accounts that do not have a metered service and those that do. There is no time difference in the process required to establish a new account because of the type of service and the charge should be the same.

Sec. 27-18(c) The due date of the monthly utility bill is 20 days after the billing date. If a customer does not pay, a delinquent notice is mailed to the customer 3 days after the account was delinquent. The customer has 5 "working days" (weekends and holidays excluded) to pay. After that time the account is subject to disconnection. A courtesy telephone call is provided to each customer and if payment is not received a disconnect order is sent to field workers (due to safety concerns, two workers are always sent). Currently, there is a fee for disconnection that is applied when an order for disconnection has been sent to the field workers. There is a separate reconnection fee that is applied after a metered service has been disconnected but before it is reconnected. Because of the availability of mobile technology, there are customers that will "pay by phone" when they see a field worker coming to disconnect their metered service. They can then argue that they were never disconnected and should not be subject to a reconnection fee. The total cost to the City for the disconnection process far exceeds the amount currently charged. The proposed change does not increase the total charge but does combine the disconnection/reconnection charges into one fee that is applied when a field worker is sent



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the order to disconnect. The other change outlined in Sec. 27-18(c) restates the same fee that is charged when reconnection is requested outside of normal business hours.

Sec. 27-19(g) The new utility bill will be two pages and will provide more detailed information to customers. This change removes specific terminology and clarifies some information. A sample bill has been provided as a supporting document.

Sec. 27-19(i) The new billing software will allow the City to include energy efficiency loans on the utility bill. The proposed change establishes energy efficiency loan payments as the first priority if a partial payment is received.

Sec. 27-54(a) The proposed change requires that any “master-meter” water account be in the name of the property owner. Customer service representatives have reported cases where Apartment A had water in their name and covered the usage for Apartment B. Tenants should not be the responsible party.

Sec. 27-54(c) The proposed change references Sec. 27-122, Sec. 27-123, and Sec. 27-124 which are the residential water rates based on service location relative to City limits.

Sec. 27-121.3 This section reestablishes a rate for street lighting that is the basis of charges from Boone Electric Cooperative when public street lighting is provided in their service territory.

Sec. 27-122.3.(b)(2) through Sec. 27-124.2.(a)(4) All of these proposed changes establish the “inside City limits” water rates for meter charge, usage charge, fire flow charge, and backflow device charge as the reference point for the same class of customer that is at a location other than inside the City limits. The current utility billing system requires that any difference in charges be addressed by a separate rate. The result is that the current utility billing system has 102 water rates and 47 irrigation rates. The new utility billing system uses a calculation for each variation in charge rather than a set number. This will greatly reduce the number of individual reference charges. By making the proposed change, the calculation can be used instead of the referenced fixed number. The change will also require that only inside City limits rates be changed in the future. No existing customers will be impacted by the change except for those at the Columbia airport – Sec. 27-123.3 – because that section of the ordinances was inadvertently missed during prior changes. The fifteen customers, at the airport, should have paid an average of \$4.12 more per month and the proposed amendment will correct the previous oversight.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: No significant impact

Long-Term Impact: No significant impact

Vision & Strategic Plan Impact

[Vision Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Primary, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

[Strategic Plan Impacts:](#)



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Primary Impact: Primary, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

[Comprehensive Plan Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Primary, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

Legislative History

Date	Action
Manually enter dates in this format: MM/DD/YYYY. Use hard returns to get to the next line of action entry.	Manually enter action items here. Use hard returns to space down to align with the corresponding date to the left. Order history from most recent to oldest. For each Council action, significant procedural action by a Board/Commission and Interested Parties meeting, enter the action date and brief statement of the action with vote totals, if known. Include ALL information you feel is relevant to this item.

Suggested Council Action

Staff recommends that Council amend Chapter 27 as outlined in the accompanying ordinance.