



Legislation Text

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CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

Memo Date: April 3, 2020
Agenda Date: April 22, 2020
Prepared By: Jessica Dovale, Utility Support Service Manager
Through: Rebecca Bowman, Finance Director
Requested Action:

To Approve a Resolution amending and updating the Utility Handbook with a supplement policy for temporary changes in existing policy related to the COVID-19 response.

BACKGROUND:

The Utilities Handbook is updated periodically, through City Council adoption, to reflect current practices, update rates, or to further clarify policies and procedures. The handbook and its exhibits are an extremely useful tool used to govern the relationship between the City and its utility customers. On many occasions the policies within the handbook have been cited enabling customer disputes to be settled with a fair and consistent approach that are applicable to all customers in the same manner.

Attached to this agenda is a copy of a proposed policy Utility Handbook COVID-19 Response #1002.0 to the Utility Handbook that outlines temporary changes in policy during the City of Cocoa's response to COVID-19.

The policy changes proposed in Utility Handbook COVID-19 Response #1002.0 are:

- Walk-in customers: Effective March 23, 2020, the lobby of City Hall will be closed to the public for the duration of the COVID-19 response. Requests for utility service can be made by phone, fax, e-mail, USPS mail, or by dropbox on the west side of the building.
- Payments: Effective March 23, 2020, cash payments will temporarily be accepted through the dropbox on the south side of the City Hall building. All other payment channels such as mail, online, IVR, over the phone, or through the dropbox will continue to operate as normal.
- Payment Plans: Effective Monday, April 20, 2020 outbound calls will be made to all delinquent accounts to educate and offer a payment extension or a payment plan that is customizable to the customer's needs. There will be a payment plan message on all utility bills, for two full billing cycle's in order for customers to set up payment plans, before late fees and delinquency processing resume.
- Delinquency Processing: Effective March 23, 2020, accounts will not be processed for delinquency fees, nor will they be shut off. The only exception to this would be accounts with repetitive theft of service or illegal connections. Once normal business operations resume, one

full billing cycle will occur prior to resuming delinquency processing.

- **Late Fees:** Effective March 23, 2020, late fees will not be assessed on any utility account for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, and a period of one full billing cycle after the response. This includes late fees for the City of Cocoa, City of Cocoa Beach, and Cape Canaveral. Once normal business operations resume, one full billing cycle will occur prior to resuming late fees. Late fees will only be assessed on accounts that do not have a payment plan in place.

Staff is requesting Council to review and approve the Utility Handbook COVIDS-19 Response Policy #1002.0

STRATEGIC PLAN CONNECTION:

N/A

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Budgeted	N/A
If not budgeted, is amendment/transfer attached?	N/A

PREVIOUS ACTION:

On August 16, 2011, during a revision of the Utility Handbook, City Staff worked with our consultant Stantec, then Burton and Associates, to update the High/Excessive Consumption Policy. The analysis provided by Stantec was of the nature that each of the City's four tiers had a specific function. The first tier rate is a discounted rate to promote conservation, the second tier rate is the actual cost of water, and the third and fourth tiers were put in place to also promote water conservation. Therefore, with the 2011 revision to this policy, the City would recalculate excessive water loss over the customer's average, and bill all of the consumption at the second tier rate and not penalize the customers by billing at the higher third and fourth tier rates.

On October 22, 2013, during the Utility Handbook update, the City made additional efforts to assist our customers in regards to the financial impact created by excessive water consumption loss. The changes to the policy included: An "event" which causes the water loss to cross into a second billing cycle, both bills would be considered in the adjustment, and the adjustments were now to be calculated at the first tier rate, thus creating an even more generous policy.

On December 12, 2017, after Hurricane Irma, the City made additional efforts, through a Utility Handbook update, by eliminating some eligibility criteria for a high consumption adjustment in order to assist our customers in regards to the financial impact created by excessive water consumption loss during a natural disaster and in the event the City of Cocoa declares a state of emergency.

On August 14, 2019, the City updated the existing Utility Handbook with comprehensive policy language.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

To Approve a Resolution amending and updating the Utility Handbook with a supplement policy for temporary changes in existing policy related to the COVID-19 response.