



CITY OF HOUSTON - CITY COUNCIL

Meeting Date:

ALL

Item Creation Date:

HPW 20HPW17 - Water Bill Relief - Ordinance Amending Chapter 47

Agenda Item#:

Background:

SUBJECT: Ordinance Amending Chapter 47 of the Code of Ordinances relating to water bill relief in and applied in accordance with Chapter 47-74, 47-74.1, 47-61, 47-63, 47-75, 47-75.1 and customer discount offering.

RECOMMENDATION (Summary): The Director of Houston Public Works (HPW) recommends the changes detailed to provide additional relief to single-family residential water customers.

SPECIFIC EXPLANATION: The current Chapter 47 Ordinance has strict rules and processes that do not reflect the current impacts of aging infrastructure, meter reading estimates, inclement weather, damaged components or meter and human performance (not enough resources to reach each meter requiring manual reading each month). HPW is committed to Customer Service and is proposing several changes to Chapter 47.

While more than 99% of the more than 500,000 monthly bills are correct, the less than one percent that encounter problems have become untenable for those customers and can number in the hundreds of customers. HPW continues to look at operational process improvements and ordinance changes that will allow greater assistance and benefits to our customers.

The changes HPW recommends are as follows:

1.	Current	47-74 – A customer can apply for maximum of two leak adjustments per year.
	New	<i>Remove the two times per year allowance and allows customers additional relief should multiple leaks occur in one year more than twice.</i>
2.	Current	47-74 – Allows customers adjustment to their water bills at 50% rate once proven leak repair.
	New	<i>Incentivize Citizens - 100% for customers repairing 30 days after leak began, 75% for repairing within 60 days after leak began and standard 50% after 60 days.</i>
3.	Current	47-74 – Customers get 50% credit on excess water usage on both water and wastewater charges.
	New	<i>100% credit on excess wastewater charges. This is based on the idea that a customer water leak usually doesn't go back through the sewage system.</i>
4.	Current	47-74.1 - Leak Balance Remaining must be greater than \$2,000.00. And \$250 For elderly customers who meet the eligibility criteria in section 36-62 (1) of this Code.
	New	<i>Reduce the leak balance remaining amount from \$2,000.00 to \$1,000.00 and \$250.00 to \$100.00 for eligibility qualifiers.</i>
5.	Current	47-75 - Qualified account for Unusual Large Bill adjustment can only be adjusted down to 150% of average water use.
	New	<i>Lower the customer responsibility percentage from 150% to 125% of the monthly average water usage.</i>

6.	Current	47-75.1 – Exceptional Circumstances Adjustment (ECA) a..... any billed amount in excess of five times the average monthly bill. b..... account may be reduced by up to \$4,000.00 for one occurrence. c..... does not exceed a two-month timeframe.
	New	<i>Changes to this section are as follows:</i> a..... any billed amount in excess of two times the average monthly bill. b..... account may be reduced by up to \$10,000.00 for one occurrence. c..... does not exceed two billing cycles.

7.	Current	47-61, 47-63 - Customers are charged minimum monthly base fee where a water meter is present because the City must reserve that capacity for the customer. Base charge includes water and wastewater. To avoid charges, a customer is required to pay for a private plumber to remove the meter, cap the line, and then cancel the account (cost approximately \$1500).
	New	<i>Offer a customer an option to have the meter locked for a one-time fee estimated to be \$150 and once customer account is charged for lock, all base charges will be removed from the account. See ordinance for detail. Provides less expensive option for customer to remove monthly base-charges.</i>

8.	New	Benefits to sign-up for e-bill.
		<i>Provide and promote \$.50 discount for each bill for paperless customers.</i>

9.	Current	Long term estimations have resulted in high catch-up bills of up to 24-months.
	New	<i>Codify Public Works current practice by not back billing greater than 3 months for residential customers.</i>

The Administration and Houston Public Works recommend Council approval of these changes.

DocuSigned by:

A93C410B72B3453...

Carol Ellinger Haddock, P.E., Director
 Houston Public Works

Contact Information:

Roberto Medina, Assistant Director
 HPW Government Relations Office
 Phone: 832.395.2456

ATTACHMENTS:

Description	Type
High Bill Relief - One Pager	Backup Material