Water

Water is a complex issue. It is essential for the quality of life we enjoy in North Texas, is critical for businesses to operate, and is necessary for public health and safety. The cost, however, continues to rise and estimates foretell that water will likely become the highest utility bill in our households. According to Circle of Blue, the price of water has risen over 48 percent since 2010 as utilities respond to changes in water use and availability. As you’ll remember, from 2012-2015, North Texas experienced the most severe drought since the mid-1950s. While residential usage declined during that period due to water restrictions, costs continued to increase. Rowlett’s underground utilities also underwent four years of drought, causing damage to an already-aging infrastructure. Since then, necessary improvements to water and sewer lines, lift stations and pump stations have begun and will be ongoing for the foreseeable future in order to sustain this vital system.

In an effort to structure this utility to meet the needs of EVERY Rowlett citizen and business, last year the City tiered the rate structure. We also went live with the AMI meter system, which gives YOU access to hourly usage information. And coming this month, we will replace the daily-calculated base rate fee with a monthly flat fee. Please read on in this newsletter for more information regarding these topics.

While water quality remains the top priority, water conservation and the wise use of water is still critical. For most of us, outside irrigation is the main reason that water usage increases during the summer, so I encourage you to check your sprinkler systems and monitor usage. You’ll be amazed at just how much water (and money!) you can save.

Mayor Tammy Dana-Bashian

Speaking of water, Barry and I had a great time kayaking in Paddle Point Park on a gorgeous June day with a group from First Rowlett United Methodist. I hope you have a chance to check out this amazing paddle trail and recently renovated park.
AMI-Flexnet System
Online Access to Real-Time Usage Data

Realizing that we all have to work together to reduce water use, improve the reliability and sustainability of our water system and minimize costs, in 2016-17, the City replaced citizens’ meter radio antennas for this upgrade to the water meter reading system. Approximately 18,000 meter radio antennas were installed! The Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) offers increased reliability and customer convenience as antennas transmit water consumption data directly to the City’s Utility Billing Department, instead of storing that information. This eliminated the need for staff to drive by each home and business to acquire monthly meter readings. You have the ability to access water consumption online, the system reads every hour so you can get real-time usage information. Simply create an account at www.rowlett.com/AMI, set up your alerts and start tracking your usage. Armed with this information, you can spot and repair potential leaks before they result in a higher bill.

WHAT IS AMI?

AMI stands for Advanced Metering Infrastructure. It is a method of using communication technology to read meters remotely without having to access the meter located in meter boxes in the ground.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The fixed-based network provides two-way communication from the meter box to strategically located Base Stations. The radio antenna, also referred to as an MXU, is used to collect and transmit meter reading data, unique identification numbers, operating status, and various alarms at regular intervals to the Base Stations.

WHY DID THE CITY UNDERTAKE THIS EFFORT?

Advanced meter systems are quickly becoming the standard for utilities around the country. These newer devices allow more accurate and faster collection of water usage readings and improve safety conditions for City staff. Introducing automatic meter reading as the standard for Rowlett allows us to better serve customers and improve utility department efficiency.

DOES THE ELECTRONIC DEVICE INTERFERE WITH OTHER EQUIPMENT?

No. The radio transmission operates in compliance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations to avoid interference with other electronic devices.

IS THE ELECTRONIC DEVICE DATA ENCRYPTED?

Yes. Data transmitted from the meter through the system is encrypted throughout the entire process.

CAN I ACCESS DAILY READINGS ONLINE?

Yes, you now have the ability to access a variety of data, including daily water consumption, online.

CAN I COVER UP THE METER NOW?

No. Access needs to be available at all times. There will still be instances when meter technicians will visit the meter on site to perform routine maintenance, verify readings, or emergency shut off. For example, be careful during the fall foliage season not to cover your water meter with piles of leaves!

HOW WILL I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE MY READING & NOT SOMEONE ELSE’S?

Each radio frequency device has a unique identification number, which is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique number is compared to your account record electronically to ensure a match.
Your City Water Rates

For the past six years, the City of Rowlett has experienced a 10 percent increase in the cost of water from the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD), and these increases will continue in the coming years. Like many such water wholesalers, the NTMWD has a “take-or-pay” provision that requires their customers (including City of Rowlett) to purchase a minimum amount of water based on the historical highest annual usage. For Rowlett, this amounts to 3.2 billion gallons annually, which was set after the drought of 2006. Rowlett residents are currently only using just over 2 billion gallons of water annually. So, over the past 13 years, Rowlett has paid $9.9 million to the NTMWD under the “take-or-pay” agreement for water we were unable to sell to Rowlett residents. This results in a higher per-unit cost to our residents as we must recover a portion of this $9.9 million paid to the NTMWD.

In an effort to keep our residential rates as low as possible, the City of Rowlett did not pass on all utility costs to residents and businesses the last several years. As a result, the City’s Utility Fund has been negatively impacted and we are currently in a two-year plan to rebuild utility financial reserves. Also, the four years of drought from 2012 through 2015 wreaked havoc with City infrastructure, and capital maintenance needs still remain high. To further compound matters, Rowlett’s infrastructure is older than in many other cities, which increases our cost of maintenance. And, many cities are able to transfer some cost burden from residential customers to commercial customers. Rowlett has less flexibility in this area as our commercial base is less robust than many surrounding cities, which contributes to higher residential rates for Rowlett residents compared to many neighboring communities.

After researching and analyzing the rate structures of NTMWD cities and usage patterns of Rowlett customers, we determined last year that Rowlett rates should be adjusted, particularly the base rates. Rowlett had included increases from the NTMWD and the City of Garland (wastewater treatment) to the base rate over the past few years due to uncertainty in the volume of water that may be used while the City was under water restrictions. This resulted in an unfair burden being placed on residential low-volume water users. Our objective was to develop a pricing structure that was more equitable across the board, as well as to provide relief to these low-volume residential users. Adjustments were also made to our commercial rates, including multi-family developments, to more equitably align these rates with our actual costs which allowed us to reduce the cost burden to residential customers.

The new water rate structure was implemented October 1, 2017 and included a shift from the base rate to the volume rate. Additionally, there is now a three-tier volume rate, where historically there were just two. In addition to your base rate, residential customers have volume charges of:

- **0 to 3,000 gallons:** $4.35 per 1,000 gallons
- **3,000 to 15,000 gallons:** $5.45 per 1,000 gallons
- **15,001 and above:** $6.80 per 1,000 gallons

Utility Bill FAQ

**Conserve Water and Save $$ Remember: Every Drop Counts!**

PUBLIC SERVICES SUMMARY

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<th>DUE DATE</th>
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**ACCOUNT INFORMATION**

- **Service Location:** 1224 Central Ave.
- **Service Period:** 05/01/2018 to 06/01/2018
- **Billing Date:** 06/15/2018

**RATE INFORMATION**

- **Base Rate:** $28.93
- **Water:** $5.50
- **Sewer:** $19.79
- **Trash:** $1.65
- **Maintenance Fee-Pavement:** $3.00
- **Tax:** $1.45

**CURRENT CHARGE SUMMARY**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL NEW CHARGES</td>
<td>$77.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CURRENT CHARGES PAST DUE AFTER 07/05/2018**

- **Reply Envelope:** $0.13

***Base Rate - Flat Fee You Spoke - We Heard You!***

This month, the City will be updating financial software and implementing an enhancement to the billing process.

Currently, base rates for services are based on a 30-day billing cycle. This causes them to prorate (both up and down) slightly when that cycle is more, or less, than 30 days. **Beginning with the utility bills sent out on August 15 and August 30, all base fees will become a monthly flat fee** for the billing cycle. This will eliminate the fluctuations in base amounts customers have experienced in the past due to varying billing cycle lengths.

**Monthly residential base rate fees for fiscal year 2018:**

- **Water** - $28.00
- **Storm Water Management** - $5.50
- **Sewer** - $19.79
- **Trash (1 Trash/1 Recycle)** - $17.00
- **Maintenance Fee-Pavement** - $3.00
- **Trash Tax** - $1.65

Have questions about your monthly bill?

Most can be answered with a little knowledge of how the bill is formatted and where important information is located.

Your account number and customer ID number can be found in the upper right hand corner of your bill and is read as the account number “dash” customer ID number.

In the next section you will find the service period, or the dates the meter was read.

The section directly below contains the usage for both the current and previous billing periods.

The “Current Charge Summary” field consists of a breakdown of all current charges for the most recent billing period. The City of Rowlett bills for water, sewer, storm management, trash, and pavement maintenance (pays for the upkeep and maintenance of the City’s paved infrastructure such as alleys and roadways), all of which have a monthly base fee for active accounts. Water and sewer services have consumption charges added based on monthly usages.

Finally, it is important to pay attention to the images on your bill every month. This is one way the City of Rowlett communicates important messages and updates to you!
Utility Bill Adjustments and Assistance

Utility Bill Adjustments

In an effort to assist Rowlett utility customers in special circumstances, your City Council approved two policies regarding late fees and a leak adjustment provision.

Late Fees
City policy provides that a ten percent penalty will be applied to all past due balances. Our community is blessed with many established charitable organizations, which occasionally assist citizens with their basic needs. In the past, when assistance is provided for a Rowlett residential utility bill, the organization paid all penalties. Last year, the Senior Citizens of Rowlett (SCOR) requested the waiver of residential penalties when their organization assists citizens with past due utility bills. Although only one North Texas Municipal Water District member city waives penalties when charitable organizations assist citizens, Rowlett provides that relief under the parameters to the right...

Leak Adjustment
Preventing the wasting of water is a concern that affects our entire community. The City has implemented a residential leak adjustment policy based on the following parameters:

- Proof of an actual leak and the repair of the leak must be provided.
- Adjustment may be allowed only once per rolling twelve-month period for residential customers.
- No adjustments will be given for sprinkler systems, swimming pool equipment, commodes, above ground leaks or other leaks that should be noticeable by the residential customer.
- Adjustments will be given to the date the residential customer is notified by the City or the date the leak is repaired, whichever is earlier.
- The adjustment will be for a maximum of two months billed consumption.
- The adjustment will be calculated using the prior year consumption for the months being adjusted. If a customer does not have 12 months of consumption history, the adjustment will be calculated using the prior six months average.
- The adjustment will be limited to 50 percent of the consumption attributable to the leak, at the rate billed.

- Penalties will be waived once per rolling twelve month period when an established assistance organization provides for the payment of past-due residential utility bill.
- Disconnect and reconnect fees will not be waived as these incur direct costs to our utility.

City of Rowlett Funds Utility Bill Assistance

Rowlett residents who need help with their utility bills may qualify to receive assistance administered by the Salvation Army in Garland:

Residents can receive utility assistance once every 12 months (on a rolling basis).

Residents will income qualify by showing they make 80% or less of the median income as defined by HUD.

Utility bill must be in the resident's name requesting assistance.

These funds can be used to pay for penalties.

These funds cannot be used to pay for deposits.

There is no residency length-of-time requirement.

Please visit http://www.salvationarmydfw.org/p/locations/Garland or call the Salvation Army Garland office at (972) 272-4531 for more information.
We care about the water you drink. We extensively test the water to assure that the City of Rowlett's drinking water system maintains a “Superior” rating. This is the highest rating for water quality issued by the State of Texas.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality requires that water providers, such as the City of Rowlett, maintain chlorine residuals in transmission and distribution systems to assure water quality so that the treated water supply is safe for use. These chlorine residuals are depleted by increases in temperature during summer months. To maintain water quality, the City of Rowlett, along with other NTMWD Member and Customer Cities, perform hydrant flushing to remove water that has decreased chlorine residuals.

Occasionally, flushing will occur during off-peak hours or overnight due to the volume of water that needs to move through the system at a high rate of speed. This helps avoid a noticeable water pressure drop-off during peak hours. In other words, we all appreciate a nice level of water pressure during our morning shower and your City water crews try to perform the higher volume flushing while we sleep!

I understand how it may look to you as a citizen, seeing a fire hydrant wide open as the system is being flushed for hours, but please know that flushing does not affect customer consumption or cost as this water does not go through customer's meters.

In the summer, outdoor water usage can account for 50 to 80 percent of a home’s water use. Knowing when to water and how much to use are important factors in water conservation and maintaining lower water bills. Watering should always be done either in the early morning or late evening hours. This keeps water from evaporating between the sprinkler and grass, as well as off the grass itself. Most Texas lawns only require one inch of water once a week to maintain a deep, healthy root system. Lawns with a shallow root system are not drought tolerant and will not survive our hot Texas summers!

Maintaining Water Safety and Quality is our Commitment to YOU!

Learn more about the safety and quality of YOUR drinking water by reading the City of Rowlett Annual Drinking Water Quality Report.