Water

Water 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 negatively impact all of North Texas, including our community. Over the last 10 years, our water wholesaler, The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD), has raised our water rates by 239%. The cost of water to our residents also includes system improvements and maintenance necessary to service our entire community. The City has made great progress over the last couple of years improving our underground aged infrastructure, which suffered significantly from the 2012-2015 drought. The City has taken several steps in an ongoing effort to structure this utility to meet the needs of EVERY Rowlett citizen and business. These include tiering the rate structure; replacing the daily-calculated base rate fee with a monthly flat fee; and launching the AMI meter system, giving residents access to hourly usage information.

Under the compulsory NTMWD take-or-pay structure, Rowlett citizens have paid $15.1 million for over 10 billion gallons of water that was not received or used by Rowlett citizens or customers. Based on the current cost structure in place by the District, we will continue to be charged every year for hundreds of millions of gallons of water that we do not use. Earlier this year, I spoke at the Public Utilities Commission meeting on behalf of the City expressing our support for the position asserted by the NTMWD Member Cities of Garland, Mesquite, Plano and Richardson, and urged the Commission to initiate the cost-of-service hearing sought by those cities (more on that in this newsletter).

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

Mayor Tammy Dana-Bashian
For Fiscal Years 2013-2018, the City of Rowlett experienced an annual average 11 percent increase in the cost of water from the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD). For Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020, we were pleased when the increase was just five percent. And thankfully, the District is taking the economic impacts of COVID-19 seriously will not increase their rates for Fiscal Year 2021. However, we do anticipate increases will resume 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 approximately 2.3 billion gallons of water annually. So, over the past 18 years, Rowlett has paid $15.1 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 this $15.1 million paid to the NTMWD.

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. 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, in 2017 we adjusted our rates - particularly the base rates. Rowlett had included increases from the NTMWD and the City of Garland (wastewater treatment) primarily 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, therefore we implemented a pricing structure that was more equitable across the board. Adjustments were also made to our commercial rates - including multi-family developments - to more uniformly align them with our actual costs, which allowed us to reduce the cost burden to residential customers.

We do monitor our rates closely in comparison with other cities. In comparison to the 14 other cities served by NTMWD, our rates are the third highest at 7,500 gallons of usage, the eighth highest at 15,000 gallons, but the sixth lowest at 25,000 gallons. The incremental cost of water with increased usage is extremely high compared to citizen expectations from many years ago, when water was relatively inexpensive.

City of Rowlett Water Rates

Monthly residential base rate fees for Fiscal Year 2020:
- Water - $27.50
- Storm Water Management - $5.50
- Sewer - $22.81
- Trash (1 Trash/1 Recycle) - $18.92
- Maintenance Fee-Pavement - $3.00

Additionally, there is a three-tier water volume rate:
- 0 to 3,000 gallons
  - $4.61 per 1,000 gallons
- 3,001 to 15,000 gallons
  - $5.76 per 1,000 gallons
- 15,001 and above
  - $7.20 per 1,000 gallons

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 news and updates with you!
In February 2020, after concluding at a hearing that North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) rates were adverse to the public interest, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) agreed to initiate a cost-of-service hearing sought by the City of Rowlett and four of the NTMWD member cities; Garland, Mesquite, Plano and Richardson. Instead of issuing the expected order for this review at their meeting on Friday, April 17, the PUC instead ordered the NTMWD and its 13 member cities into mediation.

On Thursday, May 14, the PUC granted a 90-day extension requested by the 13 member cities to provide additional time to come to a resolution, prior to ordered mediation, over their dispute regarding the water rates and take-or-pay practices of the NTMWD. The 13 member cities must come to an agreement by August 12 or face mediation ordered by the PUC.

I am very disappointed at this abrupt turnaround by the Public Utilities Commission. As the largest customer City of the North Texas Municipal Water District, Rowlett will continue to vigorously advocate for our citizens and strongly support the efforts of the cities of Garland, Mesquite, Plano, and Richardson to stop the unfair water practices of the NTMWD. The anticipated cost-of-service hearing provided an avenue for representation for the over 100,000 citizens in the Customer Cities and Special Utility Districts. That representation has been silenced by the PUC not proceeding with the cost-of-service hearing.

An update to my March Spotlight, which provided in-depth information about our concerns and actions to date as we continue vigorously advocating to ensure the interests of our citizens are appropriately represented...

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What is the North Texas Municipal Water District?

The North Texas Municipal Water District is a wholesale water provider serving more than 1.8 million people in nearly 90 communities across 10 North Texas counties. There are 13 Member Cities and over 30 Customer Cities and Special Utility Districts. A wholesale customer for 54 years, Rowlett is the largest Customer City, with a population of over 66,000 residents and over 20,000 water accounts. Based on the current take-or-pay wholesale water pricing methodology in place by the NTMWD, Rowlett will continue to be charged every year for hundreds of millions of gallons of water that goes unused - the high cost of water correlates directly with this pricing structure. Due to limited resources, smaller communities such as Rowlett have no ability to mitigate the negative impact of the take-or-pay structure and, with no feasible alternative, there is no choice but to purchase water from the NTMWD.

What is the Public Utilities Commission?

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) of Texas is a state agency that regulates the state's electric, telecommunication and water and sewer utilities, implements respective legislation, and offers customer assistance in resolving consumer complaints.

Find more information and view an FAQ on this subject at Rowlett.com
AMI-Flexnet
Online Access to Hourly 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. 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.

The AMI system is great tool to help you save money! You have the ability to access water consumption online and get hourly usage information. Simply create an account, set up your alerts, and start tracking your usage. Armed with this information, you can spot and repair potential leaks and monitor irrigation usage, all 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 MY WATER METER?

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.
To assist citizens impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rowlett City Council has allocated additional Community Development Block Grant funds. Residents may receive utility assistance in the amount of $250/month for up to 3 consecutive months. This program is also administered by the Salvation Army.

In an effort to assist Rowlett utility customers in special circumstances, the City may waive late fees and offers a leak adjustment provision.

**Utility Bill Adjustments**

**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 was provided for a Rowlett residential utility bill, the organization paid all penalties. That policy changed in 2017, when the Senior Citizens of Rowlett (SCOR) requested the waiver of residential penalties when their organization assisted citizens with past due utility bills. Although only one other North Texas Municipal Water District member city waives penalties when charitable organizations assist citizens, Rowlett now provides that relief under the parameters to the right...

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

**Leak Adjustment**
Preventing the wasting of water is a concern that affects our entire community. Therefore, Rowlett has a **residential leak adjustment** policy wherein the City may provide adjustments to utility charges in the event of a leak 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.

**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.

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Please visit [http://www.salvationarmydfw.org/p/locations/Garland](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 performs 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 50-80 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!

How and When to Water Your Lawn

Water Wise Tip

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