



COUNCIL POLICY MANUAL

Pages: 1 of 7
Approval Date: January 21, 2013
Council Resolution: 047/2013

SECTION: COLLECTIONS
SUBJECT: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL:

To provide clarity and consistency on the customer service policies of the Utilities Department.

SCOPE:

To detail the policies surrounding customer service.

DEFINITIONS:

“Collector” means the municipal officer assigned responsibility as collector of taxes for the municipality, as defined by the *Community Charter*;

“Fees and Charges Bylaw” means the City Fees and Charges Bylaw as amended from time to time.

POLICY:

ACCOUNT INFORMATION AND HISTORIES

1. Access to utility account information is normally restricted to the customer, the registered owner (if the account is in a tenant's name), the City and other authorized government or law enforcement agencies.
2. Information pertaining to a customer's balance and/or payment history is normally only available to the customer and the City. However, in the case of a tenant's active utility account, the owner is entitled to know whether a tenant's account is in arrears and, if so, the details of those arrears. Once a tenant account has been finalized, the owner is entitled to the final balance owing as soon as it is available on our system. **The owner may also be given a tenant's forwarding address on a finalized account once the account is overdue.**
3. If a manual calculation of a tenant's final bill is required for the return of a damage deposit paid to the landlord, it will be made available to the tenant upon request and to a landlord on the 10th day after finalization.

4. On receipt of a written request/authorization from a customer, the City will provide a credit reference to another utility. If the account is still available on our billing system, the cost to the customer will be less than should access to historical account information (CD rom or microfiche) be required. The applicable charges are contained in the Fees & Charges bylaw.
5. The City will supply, upon request of the utility customer or the owner of the property, whatever history is available on our history screens. If a customer requests an on-screen account history on one account only, there will be no administration charge. If the request for historical information is from the registered owner or owner's agent or if account histories are requested for more than one account, a charge for each account is applicable. Before a tenant's account history is supplied to an owner, the payment history is to be removed.
6. If a request is received for historical information on a utility account that is not readily available on our computer system, the City will endeavor to accommodate the request as soon as possible at the current hourly rate (minimum ½ hour charge). The applicable charges are contained in the Fees & Charges bylaw.
7. Staff will respond to requests for credit references and/or historical account information as soon as workloads permit. Under normal circumstances, requests can be accommodated within one week of receipt of the request.

AFTER HOURS CALL-OUTS

8. When an electrical or water after-hours call-out has been requested by a customer, the City's answering service will contact the on-call service rep who will in turn contact the customer. The service rep will determine whether a call-out is warranted and will insure the caller is informed of the associated cost. If a call-out is authorized, the customer is to sign the "Notice of Billing & Damage Report" and be instructed to attend to City Hall by noon on the next working day.
9. If payment or satisfactory arrangements for payment are not received on the next working day, services may be disconnected once again without notice.
10. The cost of a call-out may be shared if the service rep performs other turn-ons or duties within the two-hour call-out timeframe. Whatever the applicable fee, it is payable immediately unless payment arrangements are approved by the Collector. When a call-out results in a new application for service, the call-out fee payable replaces the normal application fee payable.
11. Should a call-out be initiated on behalf of a new resident to Penticton who would not have reasonably been aware of the requirement to apply in advance for services, consideration will be given to the City absorbing 50% of the normal call-out costs. Any occurrences are to be referred to the Collector for consideration.
12. Should it be determined that services have been turned on by someone other than an authorized City employee, the utility account involved will be debited for the equivalent of an after-hours call-out fee and the customer so informed. Payment of the fee is due immediately unless payment arrangements are approved by the Collector. The customer is also to be informed that such action is illegal and may be referred to the RCMP for investigation.

APPLICATION FOR SERVICE

13. Electric and water services to premises within the City of Penticton are to be disconnected between customers unless the City has been provided with a new application for service.
14. Application for utility service is to be made in person at the "Electric & Water" counter on the main floor of City Hall. If "same-day service" is not requested, turn-on/ turn-off/ transfer of service is available on any subsequent City Hall working day. Customers requiring 'same-day service' will be subject to different application fees as outlined in the Fees and Charges Bylaw. An application for utility service is to be supported by two (2) pieces of signature I.D., and the applicant's signature; the appropriate fee will be added to the first billing.
15. When an application for "same-day service" is received the request will be accommodated dependent upon the availability of outside staff. Any additional costs incurred, such as administration and/or overtime costs, are to be borne by the applicant. If no staff is available to accommodate a customer's request for service, service is available through the use of on-call staff at call-out rates.
16. While the normal application fee applies to both electric and water service, only one fee will be charged when an application for electric and water service on the same account is made at the same time as per the Fees and Charges Bylaw.
17. Should an applicant not be able to attend to City Hall to apply for service, he/she may authorize an agent in writing to act on his/her behalf or application by fax (including photocopies of the required I.D.), or email (with scanned copies of required I.D.) may be accepted with the application fee debited to the first billing on new account.
18. Every reasonable attempt to match up the dates of applications for connection or disconnection will be made by utility staff and, with the consent of an applicant, application dates will be "updated" to coincide with another application for the same service.
19. Where no "sign-off" notification is received from an existing customer, a service will be finalized in his/her name (NSOR) when the service is transferred into the name of a new applicant. The final billing will be sent to the last known address on file unless advised otherwise.
20. A "leave-on authorization" service is available to owners whereby services to a premises will be maintained and transferred into the name of the owner should a tenant/occupant vacate and "sign-off" the services. An owner is required to provide the City with his/her signed authorization for this service which will remain in effect until otherwise cancelled in writing by the owner. The leave on authorization application fee is payable and will be debited to the first billing on the new account. A leave on authorization does not stop the regular disconnection process.
21. Should an applicant for service advise (in writing) the City of the presence of emergency (e.g. life support) equipment on their premises, this fact will be noted on the customer's account for the information of staff dealing with that account.
22. Should an applicant for utility service, or any adult co-occupant, have a current utility account with the City, any overdue portion of the said account(s) must be paid prior to the provision of any service at a new location.

23. Should an applicant or co-occupant have an outstanding delinquent account from a former address, that account, together with applicable interest (as per Fees and Charges Bylaw.), must be paid to the City (for refund to the affected owner) prior to the provision of service. Any arrangements for repayment, other than payment in full, are subject to the approval of the Collector.

CUSTOMER PAYMENT OPTIONS

24. The City offers the following payment options to Utility customers:

- Payment by mail or courier
- In person to City Hall cashiers (Monday – Friday)
- City Hall external drop box (24 hours/day 7 days/week)
- Drop boxes in mall financial institutions (CIBC - Cherry Lane & Valley 1st - Peachtree Square – banking hours on banking days)
- Pre-authorized payment plan
- Telephone/PC banking (allow 5 business days for receipt)
- Post-dated cheque
- In extraordinary circumstances, inter-bank transfer to the City's banker

25. The City accepts the following tender types:

- Cash
- Debit cards
- Personal and third party cheques
- Money order, bank draft, bank settlement, etc.
- Travelers' cheques

On all cheques made payable to the City of Penticton and on any third party cheques, the full amount must be applied to the customer's account. In the case of travelers' cheques, family allowance and old age pension cheques, change may be given as long as the majority of the cheque is applied in payment of a customer's account. In addition, acceptable I.D. is required.

26. From time to time a customer may request that a credit on one account be transferred to another account belonging to the same customer. Between utility accounts, this request can be accommodated by the utility clerks whereas transfers to/from a utility account to/from a tax or other type of account with the City may be accommodated with the approval of the Collector. Should a customer request a refund of a credit on an active utility account, the request may be accommodated in exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Collector. Transfers between accounts may be subject to the Account Transfer fee as per the Fees and Charges Bylaw.
27. Any credit balance on a finalized customer account is normally transferred to the customer's new account. Where the customer has no new account, the credit would normally be refunded. That refund is payable to the customer in whose name the account exists. The City will accommodate a customer request to transfer the credit to another account. A customer request for a manual refund on a finalized account may be accommodated in exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Collector.

'HIGH RISK' PREMISES/TENANTS

28. The City may require utility services to be maintained in the name of the owner if;
- a) the occupancy of a rented premises has proven to be of a transient nature whereby there is a risk of financial loss due to non-payment or a risk of abuse to staff due to the nature of tenancy, or
 - b) a tenant has proven to be a high risk customer with respect to abuse of staff and/or non-payment of bills.
29. A premises or tenant will be designated "high risk" by the Collector on the recommendation of the utility staff and after review of the circumstances.
30. Should an owner or tenant feel aggrieved by such a decision, the matter may be referred to the Chief Financial Officer for review and final decision.

ILLEGAL POWER DIVERSION

31. The theft of electricity or water is an offense under the Criminal Code and it is the responsibility of all City personnel who have direct contact with customer installations or customer billings to be alert to this potential problem and to report any suspected occurrence to their supervisor.
32. The City, for its part, views any such incident as a serious offense and will do everything in its power to cooperate fully with the RCMP in the prosecution of suspected offenders and in the recovery of the costs incurred by the City as a result of the illegal diversion.
33. If an employee suspects that a meter or installation has been tampered with or that power/water consumption levels are questionable, the situation is to be brought to the attention of his/her immediate supervisor. The supervisor will review the facts/circumstances and decide upon an appropriate course of action.
34. If an on-site inspection is to be carried out, the supervisor, together with one other City employee, will visit the location to attempt to determine if an illegal diversion exists. If it is determined that theft of power/water is occurring, sufficient pictures should be taken to clearly illustrate the nature of the diversion. It is also critical to record the date & time of the visit, the employees present and any pertinent information observed on site, such as, vehicles present, any individuals encountered, etc. The report should also include the customer's name, address, meter number, meter location.
35. Once all the evidence has been obtained, the supervisor will contact the RCMP who will review the information provided, carry out any further investigation and proceed with any warranted charges. If it is determined that sufficient evidence exists for the laying of charges, the City will cooperate fully with the RCMP and the Courts. Should it be determined that insufficient evidence exists to proceed with charges, it may still be advisable for direct contact with the customer and the pursuit of any costs incurred by the City.

36. Whether or not charges are laid, when it becomes evident to the City that illegal power/water diversion has occurred, the customer's service will be disconnected. The service will not be restored until it has been inspected and approved by, in the case of an electrical diversion, the Provincial Electrical Inspector, in the case of a water diversion, Water Division staff, and all outstanding billings are paid (including the estimated lost revenue from the power/water diverted) together with any applicable connection/administration fees and a security deposit.
37. The cost of power/water diverted will be estimated by the Collector, using whatever information may be available from city staff and the RCMP. The amount of the security deposit required will be determined by the Collector in consultation with the Treasurer and will be retained for a minimum of two years or until such time as the customer is no longer receiving service from the City.
38. If services are re-connected for the same occupant(s), the City will carry out biweekly on-site inspections of the service at the customer's expense for a minimum of a three-month period.
39. Where the existing customer has vacated the premises, service may be restored in the owner's name or the name of a new tenant providing the power/water diversion has been corrected and the service has been inspected and approved by the Provincial Electrical Inspector/Water Division staff. The registered owner of the property is liable for all associated costs outlined in paragraph 6 with the exception of the provision of the security deposit. Subject to the approval of the Collector, those costs may be charged to the existing occupant's utility account and paid or transferred to taxes in like manner to other unpaid tenant utility accounts

PROMPT PAYMENT DISCOUNT

40. City bylaws provide for a 10% prompt payment discount on current charges providing payment is received by the City by the discount date. The 10% discount is applied to the "current" basic, consumption, and demand components of the utility billings. Taxes (where applicable) will be charged on the discounted or net amount of the billing in all cases.
41. On all services, the discount date will be twenty-two (22) days after the mailing date. Should those dates fall on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, the discount date will be the next succeeding day that is not a holiday.
42. In the event of a partial payment of current charges on or before the discount date, a proportionate discount will be allowed.
43. Should a payment made prior to the discount date not be honored and not be replaced before the discount date the 10% discount will be forfeited.
44. Should a discount forfeit result from an error or misinformation on the City's part, the discount will be credited to the customer.

SERVICE TO MORE THAN ONE PREMISE

45. Where a single-metered electrical or water service provides utilities to more than one rental premise, the utility account must be maintained in the name of the registered owner or the owner's agent. However, where a single tenancy agreement covers a premise in which more than one tenant is housed, the utility account is to be maintained in the name of either the

owner or the primary tenant (in which case, only that primary tenant is considered to be our utility customer).

46. Where an owner-occupied duplex is serviced through one water meter, either owner may have the water account in their name. However, it is highly recommended that both owners' names appear on the water account to allow for each of them to have access to information on the account.
47. Where the City services a multi-occupant building through one metered service, the owner may, at his own expense, install information meters for the purpose of allocating costs to the occupants. The reading of the information meters is the owner's responsibility and the allocation of those costs is between the owner and tenants.
48. In a multi-occupant building, the "common area" load should be metered separately and that account is to be maintained in the name of the registered owner/agent. Should that load not be separately metered, the account(s) through which that load is metered and billed must be in the owner's name.

Previous Revision/s: None
Date:

City Manager:

