

# City of Monroe City – Utility Collection Policy

As approved by the Board of Aldermen on April 16, 2020

## New Applicants

- New applicants are required to complete the utility service application.
- A picture ID must be presented so that a copy may be made and attached to the application.
- The social security number must be listed on the application.
- The service initiation fee and deposit (if required) must be paid as well as all outstanding utility bills in the applicant's and co-applicant's names prior to the utilities being read in their name.
- All adults living in the household must be listed on the application along with the picture ID being presented and social security number being listed on the application.
- Commercial and Industrial customers must also complete an application and provide the necessary documentation.
- Renters must have documentation that they are allowed to be residing at the property; or the Landlord must directly contact City Hall Administration.

## New Co-Applicants

- New co-applicants will be given credit for having utility service at the specified location if they:
  - Are listed on the new applicant's application for utility service.
  - Have provided a picture ID and listed their social security number on the application.
  - Have signed the application.

They will also be responsible for payment of the utility bill in the event of default by the applicant.

## Customers with Multiple Locations

- Applicants who currently have utilities in their name, may have utilities read into their name at another location.
- They will not need to make a new application; but may have to pay additional deposits depending on the deposits required for the location at which they are requesting service.
- They will have to pay the service initiation fee of \$20.
- There is no limit on the number of locations in which an applicant may have utilities in their name if none of their locations are delinquent, including residential and commercial accounts.
- There is a limit of two (2) locations in which an applicant may have utilities in their name if their utility bill is delinquent, one of which may be commercial.
- IF a customer has more than one location in their name and service is disconnected at any location due to non-payment, utility service at ALL locations will be disconnected – this includes corporations, limited liability companies and partnerships.
- Exceptions may be made by the City Administrator to address extenuating circumstances.

## Landlords

- Landlords must be registered at City Hall and complete a Landlord Designation Form. This sets out what the landlord wants done with the utilities between renters. They can have them automatically shut off, read back into their name or have the City personnel contact them when a renter reads out of the location.

- If a Landlord does not pay a bill in between renters at any location, all locations in the Landlord's name will be shut off and no utilities will be put back into their name until all delinquent bills are paid. The Landlord will have to pay a meter deposit to put the utilities back in his/her name.
- If the Landlord is aware that a renter is moving or has moved out, they must contact the City.
- Landlords must contact the City and confirm that an individual is to be residing at the Landlord's rental property.

#### **Initial Meter Deposits**

- Residential - \$100 per service for Electric, Gas and Water- total of \$300
- Residential – Electric Heat - \$200 for Electric and \$100 for Water – total of \$300
- Commercial – Same as residential unless it is a hotel or restaurant. If it is a hotel or restaurant it will be an amount equal to a 12-month average and then rounded up to an even figure. (If 12-month average is \$1,265.80 – the deposit will be \$1,300.00.)
- Industrial – No initial deposit will be charged. However, if an industry becomes delinquent at any time, a deposit will then be assessed. If the company has been in business for 12 months, then an average will be determined and then rounded up to an even figure. (If 12-month average is \$1,265.80 – the deposit will be \$1,300.00). If there is not a 12-month history available, if a similar industry is in business or has been in business, then a 12-month average will be calculated and rounded up to an even figure.

#### **Meter Deposit Retainage**

- Meter deposits will be held for a maximum period of two years.
- They will be applied to the utility account after one year if the customer has not been assessed more than one penalty in a 12-month period.
- They will be applied to the utility account after two years regardless of the customer's payment history.
- If the customer moves to another residence, the deposit will follow them to that location.
- If the customer ceases utility service with the City for any reason, the deposit will be applied to their final bill. Any remaining deposit balance will be sent to them via check. If the final bill exceeds the amount on deposit, a bill will be sent to them.
- Commercial and Industrial deposits may be held longer if payments are consistently late (6 or more times in a 12-month rolling period); but no longer than five years.

#### **Meter Deposit Waiver**

- Meter deposits are required for all new customers unless they can provide a credit reference from their prior utility provider(s) from which they have had utility service in their name for 12 consecutive months during the past 24 months.
- The customer must complete the utility service reference request for each provider stating the provider's name, fax number and the location in which the customer had utility service.
- If the customer's prior utility suppliers(s) will complete, sign and return the City's utility reference request, documenting that the new applicant met those requirements and did not receive a penalty more than once in the 12-month period, the deposit will be waived.
- It must be received prior to utility service being put into the new applicant's name.
- Deposits will not be waived for commercial customers but may be assessed to industrial customers the first time that their payment is late.

## Utility Billing Process, Billing, Billing Concerns and Payments

- Meter Reading
  - All meters are read between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of the month. This may change due to weekends, holidays, and the availability of meter reading personnel.
  - Gates and fences must be unlocked to read the meters. If not, the resident will be contacted to provide the reading. If the customer does not respond, the meter will be estimated. The meter will need to be physically read by City personnel at a minimum of every six months.
  - If you receive a bill and you feel that it is incorrect, please contact City Hall as soon as possible so that the meters can be re-read. If it is incorrect then a corrective bill can be issued.
  - If you incur a water leak during the billing period and it exceeds 20,000 gallons, once you advise that there was a leak and that it had been fixed, (providing documentation if necessary) the bill will be reduced to 20,000 gallons for water and 20,000 for sewer.
  - Any customer that feels a meter is not operating correctly can request that the meter be sent in for testing. However, the customer must pay \$100 up front for the testing. If the testing determines that the meter was reading accurately the money is kept to pay for the shipping of the meter and the test itself. If the testing determines that the meter was not reading accurately then the money is refunded to the customer. All results will be sent to the customer and their utility account will be adjusted accordingly.
  - If you have an issue with a utility service – whether electric, gas, water or sewer – please contact City Hall so that a utility worker can review the issue and determine whether it is a City issue or a customer issue. If a contractor is hired by the customer to fix the issue and it is then determined that it was a City issue, the City will NOT reimburse any expenses as they were not given the opportunity to review the situation prior to the contractor being called.
- Disputed Utility Accounts (Ordinance 2-2020)
  - If the customer does not agree with a billing and feels that there is an issue that needs to be resolved, the customer must contact City Hall and file a Utility Dispute Form which sets out the customer's name, address, date of dispute, the service being disputed and the issue as well as how the customer feels the issue should be resolved.
  - The information is reviewed by City Administration. The City personnel must investigate the issue, document their findings on the form, document their proposed resolution on the form and inform the customer in writing within five (5) days of receiving the dispute.
  - If the City does not receive any follow-up from the customer within 10 days of issuing the proposed resolution, the dispute is considered resolved and the appropriate box is checked on the form and the dispute is closed.
  - If the customer agrees with the resolution but is not able to pay the bill when due, then the customer can request a Time Payment Plan (Ordinance 18-2019), the appropriate box is checked.
  - If the customer does not agree with the resolution, he/she may appeal the decision and request a hearing with the Board of Aldermen (their decision is final). The appeal must be submitted in writing and received by the City Administration office within 10 days of the date of the resolution.
  - A hearing will be held at the next regularly scheduled Board of Aldermen meeting – provided the appeal has been received 72 hours prior to the meeting. If it has not been, then the hearing will be held at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

- At the hearing, both sides will be able to present evidence and to call witnesses to support their version of the facts surrounding the dispute.
- The Board will render their decision at or before the next regularly scheduled Board of Aldermen meeting. The decision will be in writing and will document the reasons for their decision and mailed to the citizen within 5 days of the decision being made.
- If the decision is made in favor of the customer, corrective measures should be taken as soon as possible. If the decision is made in favor of the City, the amount will be due as if it were part of the regular monthly statement.
- All documentation will be kept on file at City Hall for two years after the date of final resolution.
- **Billing and Payments**
  - Utility bills are generated and mailed to the customers on the last business day of the month with the intention that the bills are received on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the next month.
  - Utility bills are due on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month. If the 25<sup>th</sup> is on a holiday or a weekend, the due date will be moved to the next business day.
  - All accounts that have not been paid by 5 pm on the due date will receive a 5% penalty. This applies to residential, commercial and industrial accounts.
  - Payments can be sent via regular mail to the City of Monroe City, PO Box 67, Monroe City, Missouri 63456; can be set up on an ACH service where the amount due is withdrawn from the customer's bank account on the due date; can be paid online at [www.monroecitymo.org](http://www.monroecitymo.org); can be called in with a credit or debit card (fee is charged) or can be personally delivered to City Hall at 109 Second Street. Payments being delivered to City Hall on the due date, must be delivered inside City Hall prior to 5 pm. The drop box is sealed off once City Hall is open for business on the utility bill due date. The drop box is checked every day around 8 a.m.

#### **Additional Time to Pay, Termination and Reconnection of Service**

- **Promise to Pay**
  - Residential customers who have not paid their bill in full by the due date are subject to termination of service and a friendly reminder being posted on their door. If the delinquent customer cannot pay their bill in full, they may obtain a promise to pay for \$10 which will extend their due date to the second Friday of the following month.
  - Commercial customers who have not paid their bill in full by the due date are subject to termination of service and a friendly reminder being posted on their door. If the commercial customer cannot pay their bill in full, they may obtain a promise to pay for \$10 which will extend their due date to the second Friday of the following month.
  - Industrial customers who have not paid their bill in full by the due date are subject to termination of service and a friendly reminder being posted on their door. If the industrial customer cannot pay their bill in full, they may obtain a promise to pay for \$10 which will extend their due date to the second Friday of the following month. They will also be assessed a deposit at this point.
- **Termination Criteria (Per Ordinance 1-2020)**
  - Utilities can be disconnected Monday through Thursday between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm.
  - They will not be disconnected the day before a holiday, weekend, or the day of a forecasted extreme weather condition. Utilities will not be disconnected within five days after becoming delinquent. Utilities will not be disconnected if the bill is subject to

a dispute which hasn't been resolved. Utilities will not be disconnected if there has been no breach of a time payment agreement.

- Before disconnection (unless on a time payment agreement) written notice must be mailed to the customer at least 10 days prior; or personally delivered at least 5 days prior. Documentation of termination correspondence will be maintained by City Hall staff.
- Between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>, if there have been attempts to contact the customer within 96 hours (4 days) before disconnection either by a door hanger (states the name and address of customer, clear statement as to reasoning of the proposed termination and the exact delinquent amount) or two phone calls, the utilities will be disconnected if there is no return communication.
- Between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>, utilities will not be disconnected if the City is advised that a customer will be receiving assistance from any agency; including, but not limited to NECAC, Division of Family Services, social service or charitable organization, etc.
- Medical Emergencies – termination will be postponed for 21 days if the utility termination will aggravate an existing serious medical emergency, chronic or acute, of the customer or other member of the household where service is rendered. Determination of the medical emergency shall be made following the dispute procedures of the Disputed Utility Ordinance (2-2020).
- Termination for non-payment
  - If the residential customer cannot pay their bill in full after the second Friday of the following month, they will be disconnected on the next Monday beginning after 9 am without notice.
  - If the commercial customer cannot pay their bill in full after the second Friday of the following month, they will be disconnected on the next Monday beginning after 9 am without notice.
  - If the industrial customer cannot pay their bill in full after the second Friday of the following month, they will be disconnected on the next Monday beginning after 9 am. Due to the potential of a heavy load that an industrial customer utilizes, there can be a significant safety hazard to the employee as there can be a large arc between the meters and the meter base as the meter is removed. The industry will be given 30 minutes notice that the utilities will be shut off so that their processes can be disconnected. If the industry refuses to shut down the loads, then the service will be disconnected at the pole.
- Reinstatement of Service
  - When service is terminated for non-payment, the reconnect fee of \$20 (residential and commercial) must be paid in addition to the promise to pay or the full amount of the bill prior to being reconnected. Payment must be received prior to 3:30 pm in order to be reconnected the same day.
  - After 3:30 pm, the reconnect fee will be \$100 if the customer wishes to have the utilities reconnected that day.
  - Industrial customers wishing to be reconnected prior to 3:30 pm will need to pay \$20 per meter to be reconnected. After 3:30, the reconnect fee will be \$100 per meter.
- Time Payment Plan (Per Ordinance 18-2019)
  - Available one (1) time in a 12-month period.

- Any utility customer whether residential, commercial or industrial, in which their account has become delinquent due to illness, personal disaster or other valid reason. The customer must provide proper evidence of the extenuating circumstance.
- 17% of the delinquent amount will be paid each month by the due date, in addition to the current bill until the account is paid in full.
- A time payment plan will not be offered if a customer has failed to abide by a prior payment/time payment plan; cannot show present ability to perform; if there is a reason to believe that the customer is preparing to leave the City in the immediate future; or if the customer's identity or good faith in requesting a time payment plan is questioned. However, the refusal of a time payment plan will not be based upon race, income, personality, religious or ethnic background, sex or marital status.
- Failure to make a scheduled payment as designated on the time payment plan will result in immediate disconnection of utilities. If the utilities are off for more than two business days without the account being paid in full, all remaining utilities will be disconnected, and the account will be read out of the customer's name.

#### **Assistance from Outside Agencies**

- The City shall accept written, faxed or oral verification from NECAC, Family Services or any other agency pledging funds for a delinquent customer's utility account.
- Upon such verification, the amount pledged shall be posted immediately to the customer's account. Verifications must include the name of the agency, contact person, and specific information about who they are assisting and what dollar amount.
- It is the customer's responsibility to make an application or contact the agencies at least one week PRIOR to the utility due date or disconnection date. This will allow the agency to contact the City prior to the due date and request a disconnect notice.

#### **Special Medical Needs**

- Utility customers with special medical needs must register with City Hall.
- This registration does NOT prevent them from getting their utilities disconnected due to non-payment. It does, however, put them on a list so that if the electric goes out, they will be one of the first turned back on if it is a sizeable outage.

#### **Estates**

- City personnel shall determine the contact person of the estate and request the contact information for the person responsible for paying the deceased's utility bill. If the bill goes unpaid and every reasonable attempt is made to determine a contact person, the utilities will be subject for disconnection.

#### **Missouri Extreme Weather Rule**

- As a municipally owned utility company, the City is not required to follow the Cold and Hot weather rules. However, the City does honor Missouri's extreme weather rule when it comes to disconnecting the utility service of residents for non-payment in extreme weather conditions.
  - Cold Weather – The heating source will not be disconnected for non-payment if the temperature is forecast to be below 32 degrees within 24 hours after disconnection.
  - Hot Weather – The cooling source will not be disconnected for non-payment if the temperature is forecast to be above 95 degrees or the heat index is above 105 degrees within 24 hours after disconnection.

### **Final Billed Accounts**

- Final billed accounts that are not paid within 90 days are referred to the City's collection agency. Final billed customers that did not provide a forwarding address may be referred to the City's collection agency sooner.
- Write-offs are at the discretion of the Board of Aldermen. Final billed accounts that have been referred to a collection agency and have been deemed as uncollectible by that agency may be written off for accounting purposes only upon a vote by the Aldermen. Regardless as to whether or not the Aldermen vote to write off the accounts for accounting purposes only, the City Administration will still pursue collection of the accounts.
- A listing is kept at City Hall with all customers that have left the City owing money so that it can be checked as individuals move to town.
- When an individual does come back into town and has left the City owing money, they will not be allowed a new service until the final bill (including any collection fees the City has incurred trying to collect the bill), meter deposits and a service fee have been paid. No payment plan will be set up for this situation.

### **Budget Payment Plan**

- Customers who have lived continuously at the same location for 12 months may elect to participate in the Budget Payment Plan.
- The current utility rates are applied to the customer's utility consumption for one full year. A contingency percentage may be added. The total estimated cost plus the contingency is divided by 12 in order to obtain the budget payment amount.
- The customer will pay this amount every month unless notified by the City that it has changed.
- The City reviews the customer's utility bill budget plan in March to determine where the customer stands. The customer is advised of this review via letter.
- In October, the City refigures the budget payment for each customer. This information is sent to each customer.
- If City Hall is not contacted by the customer of any concerns with the new budget amount, the new amount will go into effect with the October 31<sup>st</sup> billing.
- If the customer has concerns with the new amount, they need to contact City Hall as soon as possible.
- Budget customers can make extra payments to their utility bill accounts at any time.
- Budget customers who are unable to pay their budget amount on or before the due date may be removed from the budget payment plan at the discretion of the City Clerk and/or City Administrator.
- Budget plans will not be initiated after March of each year as new ones will be set in October. Customers wanting to request a budget plan being set up for them can request that their name be added to a list at City Hall and the information will be sent to them in October. They will not be set up on the budget plan unless they sign the paper and return it to City Hall.