



The Corporation of the Town of Essex

Section:	Corporate Services
Subject:	Water/Wastewater Billing and Collection Policy
Policy Number:	#072
Approval Date:	January 15 th , 2024, <u>amended at September 30, 2024</u>
Approved By:	COUNCIL
Prepared By:	Kate Glurissevich, CPA, CA, Director Corporate Services/Treasurer

Purpose

This policy outlines the billing and collection process of water and wastewater billing for ratepayers in the Town of Essex. It was created to ensure a consist, fair and equitable process.

It should be used in conjunction with the Water Supply Policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all water/wastewater ratepayers within the boundaries of the Town of Essex

Definitions

"Adjustment" - a credit provided on a ratepayers account, typically for an approved high water bill adjustment application.

"Fees and Charges By-Law" - a by-law amended and approved by Council on an annual basis detailing the Town's various fees and corresponding charge.

"Final Bill" - once the Billing staff are aware that a new property owner has occupied a property (typically through an ownership change request) a final bill will be generated for consumption used by the previous account holder.

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“High Water Usage” – Water volume in a bill cycle that is double the cubic meters of the previous billing cycle.

“Leak”- means unintentional water loss caused by a broken or otherwise malfunctioning plumbing system.

“Meter” means the Water Meter supplied and owned by the Town of Essex to measure the quantity of Water used by the Customer.

“Water” means potable water supplied by the Town.

“Water Usage Charge” means the monthly charge for the operation and maintenance of the drinking water system and the purchase of water, typically recommended through an adopted Water/Wastewater rate study, as measured by the Meter, and as set out in the Fees and Charges Bylaw.

“Wastewater Charge” is equal 1:1 to the consumption of Water Usage as measured by the Meter and as set out in the Fees and Charges Bylaw.

Policy

Meter Reading: Water meters are generally read within the first week of the month for the previous month by Town Water Operators. In the event the meter can not be read, an estimate based on previous consumption may be used. In the event a meter is not in place prior to occupancy, charges will be applied on a flat rate per the Fees and Charges by-law in effect.

Billing Frequency: Ratepayers will be billed monthly.

Fees: Fees are established annually, adopted with the annual Fees and Charges By-Law and based upon the most recently adopted Water/Wastewater Study.

Bill Delivery: Customers have the following options for bill delivery:

- Paper Bill
- Emailed/Electronic Bill
 - Should ratepayers opt to receive their bill through a provided email address, a discount (per Fees and Charges By-Law) will be applied to their account monthly. If the Town receives a non-deliverable bills notification, the ratepayer will be mailed a paper-bill (with no discount applied).

~~Bills will only be delivered to property owners and tenant accounts that were created prior to January 1, 2024. Property owners can mail to any address at written request.~~

Payments: The Town provides the following options for customers to pay their water/wastewater bill:

- In person at Town Hall (33 Talbot St S, Essex ON)
- Pre-Authorized payment plan
- Online with a credit card with a convenience fee as per the Fees and Charges By-law
- Online and telephone banking at your financial institution
 - When prompted to select the payee, please search 'Essex'. The search results should list 'Town of Essex, Water'.
 - Use your account number, leaving out any spaces or dashes. If additional characters are required for your financial institution, please use 0's for the remaining characters. Account Number Example (12345678.90)

Payments will be allocated to the outstanding balance in the following order of priority: Penalty and Interest Charges, Miscellaneous Fees including NSF, Principal, allocated to the oldest outstanding balances first.

Tenant Accounts: as of March 1, 2025 the town permits water/wastewater accounts only in the name of the property owner(s) and does not allow the creation of new accounts for non-property owners. The property owner can elect to have a tenant as a secondary account holder and address the water/wastewater bill to the tenant mailing address. The tenant can make payment on the account.

Late Payments: If a payment is not received by the due date, interest of 1.25% is charged on the outstanding balance per month.

NSF Payments: In the case a payment is made and returned due to Non-Sufficient Funds in the account, an NSF Charge will be applied to the account based on the Fees and Charges By-law in effect.

Arrears Collection: Accounts that are deemed to be in arrears and uncollectible will be transferred to the tax roll for the property under the authority of *The Municipal Act* Section 398(2).

The following steps outline the Arrears collection process to occur twice annually, being after the June due date and December due date:-

Step	Account Standing	Town Action
1	Account outstanding 3 calendar days beyond due date	Past Due Reminder Notice mailed to account holder

12	Account outstanding 30 or more days beyond due date	Final Notice <u>primary and secondary account holders¹ (if at different addresses)</u> before transfer to the tax roll (where arrears exceed notice threshold amount)
23	Account outstanding 60 or more calendar days beyond due date	<u>Total</u> Outstanding Amount <u>greater than 60 days</u> transferred to property tax account roll "Water Arrears Transfer to Tax Letter" mailed to property owner. <u>Each addition to a tax account would be subject to an administrative fee as per the Fees and Charges By-law in effect.</u>

Ownership Changes: A request for final reading is required in the event of an ownership change on a property. The request must be received at a minimum of 3 business days in advance of the **requested date for final read and should note the new account holder's name**. The Town will attempt but can not guarantee a meter read on the date requested. The Final bill will be sent to the address noted on the request.

Automatic transfer to tax account of Final Bill (total balance): If the Final Bill is not paid by the prescribed due date, it will be automatically transferred to the tax account of the property.

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Billing Adjustments:

In accordance with the below, at the discretion of the Treasurer, adjustments may be made to bills as below:

- Errors: If a billing error occurs, an adjustment for the error will be made and a new bill issued.

¹ Per Ombudsman Letter Dated XXX

- Faulty Meter: Any customer who believes their water meter may be malfunctioning can submit a request for inspection to the Water Billing Department. The Water Operations team will inspect the meter for accuracy and reserves the right to replace any meter.
 - If the meter is found to register correctly, or not exceed 5% of actual volumes in favour of the Town when tested, then the property owner will be responsible for the cost of the test and new meter installed.
 - If the meter is found to register more than 5% of actual volumes, then the Town will refund the customer equal to the excess percentage amount of the account for three months prior to the date of testing.
- High Water Usage Bill Relief: If a residential property owner believes a leak after the meter is occurring, they can dispute the charges for a one-time relief assistance through a High-Water Usage Bill Adjustment Request (attached).
 - The request must be made within 90 days of the bill due date noting the high usage.
 - For the water usage to be deemed high, the volume must be double the previous bill to be eligible.
 - The Town holds the right to inspect the property and infrastructure to verify the claim.
 - The adjustment is for water loss because of leaks only and no adjustment is provided for theft, vandalism, unattended or vacant dwellings, filling of pools/spas, irrigation systems, or any other cause.
 - The relief will be a 50% net reduction in cubic meters used from the volume in dispute less the prior 12-month cubic meter usage average.

For Example:

Jane Smith incurred high water usage in the month of November. Her volume of consumption for water was 350 m³. Her October consumption was 125 m³ and she believes it was due to a leak, therefore it could be eligible for relief. After contacting the water department, her 12-month average consumption was 160m³. This means the potential relief that is received is $350 \text{ m}^3 - 160 \text{ m}^3 \times 50\% = 95 \text{ m}^3$ then multiplied by the volume rate in effect.

- The adjustment will be applied as a credit and appear on the next bill.
- The adjustment is capped at \$1,000 per application.
- The property owner must certify that they are seeking to make or have made the necessary repairs to the leak cause.
- Only one adjustment will be granted to each property owner in a 10-year span.
- Only the Finance Committee/or Council can make billing exemptions outside of the eligibility criteria above.

Responsibility

Water Billing / Infrastructure Department will abide by the Water and Wastewater Collection Policy.

Treasurer (or in absence Deputy Treasurer) ensures this policy is being adhered to and administered as stated. Holds final approval for Water Bill adjustments within the parameters of this policy.

Council authorizes the approval of the Fees and Charges By-Law and the Water/Wastewater Collection Policy