MINUTES

CITY OF COCOA
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL
UTILITY WORKSHOP

April 2, 2019

A Utility Workshop was held on Monday, April 2, 2019, in City Council Chambers at Cocoa City Hall, 65 Stone Street, Cocoa, Florida as publicly noticed.

I. OPENING MATTERS:

Mayor Williams called the workshop to order at 5:36 p.m.

Councilmember Koss provided the invocation. Councilmember Boisvert led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present:	Jake Williams Jr.	Mayor
	Don Boisvert	Councilmember
	Alex Goins	Councilmember
	Lorraine Koss	Councilmember
	Matt Fuhrer	Assistant City Manager
	Monica Arsenault	Assistant City Clerk
Absent:	Brenda Warner	Deputy Mayor (arrived 5:50pm)
	John Titkanich	City Manager (arrived 5:37pm)
	Anthony Garganese	City Attorney (arrived 5:37pm)

Other Staff Members Present:

Jack Walsh, Utilities Director; Katie Ennis, Deputy Utilities Director; Rebecca Bowman, Finance Director; Lora Howell, Deputy Finance Director; Jessica Dovale, Utility Customer Service Manager; Lisa Souter, Customer Service Supervisor; Bethani Foster, Utility Billing Supervisor; Jeremy VanRaemdonck, Customer Service Supervisor; Chris Collier, WFO Manager; and Lea Taylor, Budget Analyst.

II. WORKSHOP TOPICS:

1. Overview and Recommended Changes to the Utilities Handbook

Ms. Rebecca Bowman, Finance Director, introduced Finance and Utilities staff. She pointed out several handouts that were provided to Council and members of staff. She explained that this meeting is a workshop and staff is only seeking Council direction at this

time. At a later date there will be a Public Hearing at which time Council will vote and there will be a delegation portion where citizens may speak if they wish.

Ms. Bowman noted that a summary[1] of the proposed changes to the Utility Service Policy and Procedures Handbook and the Utility Schedule of Utility Fees, Rates and Charges was provided to each Councilmember.

Ms. Bowman shared several new proposed processes that staff would like to include in the Utility Handbook.

Mayor Williams asked what the purpose is for keeping the billing for fire lines in the property owner's name. In response, Ms. Bowman explained that the City wants to ensure that they are getting the money for the service they are providing.

Mayor Williams asked what would happen if a tenant was behind on their water bill and left town without paying it and then a new tenant wanted to move in. In response, Ms. Howell explained that Customer Service will ask for a notarized copy of the current lease.

Ms. Bowman spoke about residential deposits and added that if the applicant has good credit and is a "low-risk" they are exempt from paying a deposit.

She also discussed public records requests exemptions and explained that per Florida Statues, people that are first responders are exempt from public records requests. Customer Service has a form where the applicant can complete and submit it in order to have their information redacted.

Ms. Bowman mentioned that there is a solid waste discount for seniors and staff is seeking to extend this to veterans that are residents in Cocoa. They are also looking to exempt these people from late fees as staff realizes that seniors and veterans usually depend on federal checks and may not always be able to pay their bill on time.

Furthermore, she pointed out that staff is seeking to charge seasonal residents a "base fee" to make it fair between seasonal and non-seasonal residents. She noted the two options which are to either bill the seasonal fee to the property owner or consider having no seasonal policy at all.

Mayor Williams asked what happens when seasonal residents leave. In response, Ms. Bowman explained that their service is disconnected. Additionally, Mayor Williams asked if staff places locks on the meters. In response, Ms. Bowman stated no.

Mayor Williams asked what the base fee is. In response, Ms. Howell shared that it is $15.66 for residents located inside the City and $17.23 for residents located outside of the City.

Ms. Bowman discussed Customer Service hours. She shared that staff would like to stop serving customers in the lobby and on the phone thirty minutes earlier to allow for closing procedures. She mentioned that overtime is budgeted yearly due to the fact that staff has to

[1] Utility Handbook – Summary of Significant Changes to Policy

work late sometimes to take care of customers past five o'clock, which also requires the security guard to stay late while there are still customers in the building.

Councilmember Koss inquired about wait times in the water line. In response, Ms. Howell shared information regarding the issue with the wait time for customers coming in to pay their bill. She pointed out that this has always been a struggle as there seems to be an influx of customers during lunch hours, Mondays, the first day back to work after a holiday, and the first of the month. She shared that staff has staggered lunches within a four hour window in order to try and accommodate the customers during the afternoons. She noted several different ways that people can pay their bill.

Additionally, Councilmember Koss asked if there is a way to keep track of average times people are waiting in line. In response, Ms. Howell explained that staff does not have a way to track how long people are physically waiting in line but staff does track wait times on the phone system.

Mayor Williams inquired about kiosks. In response, Mr. VanRaemdonck explained that staff is working with a third party organization, First Billing, and it was quoted that a kiosk would cost $25,000.

Ms. Howell added that there is a $2.99 convenience fee for using a credit card to pay a water bill, but this is regardless of whether they pay online or if they come in and pay. She explained that the City was losing money by accepting credit card payments for not only Cocoa residents, but for all residents coming in to pay from surrounding municipalities. The convenience fee offsets the costs that the City is paying for accepting credit card payments.

On the topic of changing the customer service hours, Ms. Howell pointed out that if this is something Council approves, this will be heavily advertised so the public is aware of the changes.

Ms. Bowman shared on November 10, 1994 the Cocoa City Council adopted the Utilities Handbook and its exhibits for the purpose of formalizing operating policies and procedures for the City's Utility System. The Utilities Handbook is updated periodically, through Council adoption, to reflect current practices, update rates, or to further clarify policies and procedures. The handbook and its exhibits is an extremely useful tool used to govern the relationship between the City and its utility customers. On many occasions the policies within the handbook have been cited enabling customer disputes to be settled with a fair and consistent approach that are applicable to all customers in the same manner. She mentioned an example of an issue that arose to which resulted in an audit.

The Utility Handbook, Exhibit A Rates, Fees and Charges and the Customer Service Policy Manual are three documents that contain high level utility topics that are most frequently asked by customers or explained by staff, however, not all of the current utility practices or concerns utility customers have are outlined in these documents.

Staff is requesting that Council review and consider changes made to the Utility Service Policy and Procedures Handbook and the Utility Schedule of Utility Fees, Rates and

Charges as proposed by staff. The revised Utility Service Policy and Procedures Handbook merges the contents of the current Utility Handbook along with the Customer Service Policy Manual into one comprehensive document.

In regard to the Seasonal Policy, Mayor Williams pointed out that he is in favor of option 1. He is also in support of all of the other changes.

Councilmember Boisvert and Councilmember Goins agreed with Mayor Williams. Councilmember Koss agreed with the other Councilmembers as well, however, she added that her only concern is with the hours of operation change because she fears that with citizens already anticipating an increase in their water bill they may perceive the change of hours in a negative way. In response, Ms. Howell explained that this is something that would be well advertised and will take months to implement. She explained that plenty of information will be provided beforehand so everyone is made aware.

Deputy Mayor Warner stated that she is also in agreement with the other Councilmembers.

Ms. Bowman explained the newly proposed miscellaneous Utility fees and charges, sharing the current costs vs. the proposed increases. Additionally, Mr. Collier and Mr. Walsh shared information regarding onsite meter testing.

Ms. Howell pointed out that one of the issues that Billing frequently sees is when old meters slow down or get stuck which allows the customer to occasionally get free water as their meter is not reading correctly. She pointed out that staff even takes it a step further and calls a high consumption customer prior to sending the bill out to ask if they are aware of any issues with their water.

Ms. Souter explained that Mr. Don Downs also provides a free service where he will go out to customer's homes and will inspect their faucets, toilets, etc. to make sure there are no leaks.

Ms. Bowman discussed the following proposed miscellaneous Utility fees and charges, sharing the current costs vs. the proposed increases as follows:

- Meter Calibration Testing Charge
- Meter Access Tow Charge
- Data Log Report
- Service Initiation Fee
- Credit Screening Fee
- Utility Lien Recording Fee
- High Consumption Credit Application Processing Fee
- Lock Fee
- Tampering Fee
- Meter Removal Charge
- Deposits
- At-Risk Deposit

Consensus made by Council to lower the proposed Meter Calibration Testing Charge from $100 to $60.

Consensus made by Council to change the Utility Lien Recording Fee to $50.

Consensus made by Council to charge a first time Tampering Fee of $150, a second offense charge of $300 and a third offense charge of $500.

Consensus made by Council to eliminate the at-risk deposit proposed by staff.

Consensus made by Council to agree to all other proposed changes recommended by staff.

Deputy Mayor Warner asked Ms. Bowman, in her experience, if she finds that when locks are placed on meters or the meters are removed entirely, if this is due to people being indignant about paying their bill or if they can't afford to. Furthermore, if it is someone who already can't afford their bill how can the City expect to collect that money? In response, Ms. Bowman shared that in her experience this seems to be geared more towards individuals who are indignant about paying their bill. She shared that staff is happy to work with those who can't afford to pay their bill as long as they contact the City. Ms. Howell added that staff is happy to work out a payment plan or an extension for those who are struggling to pay their bill.

Councilmember Koss shared some of her concerns about the increases due to the fact that thirty percent of Cocoa's population is below the poverty level. She is worried that these increases will hinder them from having water or will force them to choose between feeding their families or having water. In response, Deputy Mayor Warner pointed out that these increases will only apply to new applicants, not those who already have existing accounts. She added that if you look at the new homes that are being built in the City, the majority of new applicants should have no problem paying the new costs.

Ms. Souter added that there are also payment plans available on new deposits and fees on their first bill.

City Manager Titkanich clarified that Utility staff is only looking at credit backgrounds as it relates to utility bills and not other bills such as their credit card payments, etc.

Ms. Bowman further explained that first time deposits are also billed. They are not required to be paid on the day that the account is opened.

Councilmember Goins inquired about the $60 fee for same day service and asked if this is a fee that has to be paid upfront or if a payment plan can be established. In response, Ms. Bowman explained that this is a fee that is tied into the first bill and it is not required to be paid up front.

Ms. Bowman announced information for the Public Hearings as follows:

- 1st Public Hearing – TBD

- First Reading of revised Ordinance Chapter 22 Water & Sewer. Vote on the proposed Utility Handbook & Schedule of Rates, Fees and Charges.

- 2nd Public Hearing – TBD
  - Adopt the revised Ordinance Chapter 22 Water & Sewer, Utility Handbook and Schedule of Rates, Fees and Charges.

2. **Presentation of Utilities System by Jack Walsh, Utilities Director – TABLED**

III. ADJOURNMENT:

The Utility Workshop adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Jake Williams Jr., Mayor

ATTEST:

Carie Shealy

Carie Shealy, City Clerk
(Transcribed by M. Arsenault, Assistant City Clerk)



Utility Handbook Presentation

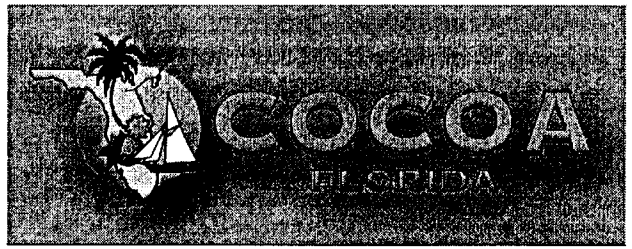
Council Workshop
April 2, 2019

Objectives

- Discuss NEW Proposed Processes in Utility Customer Service

- Discuss Proposed Increase in Miscellaneous Utility Fees & Charges

Utility Handbook
NEW Processes



- Fire lines – keep the billing in property owner's name.

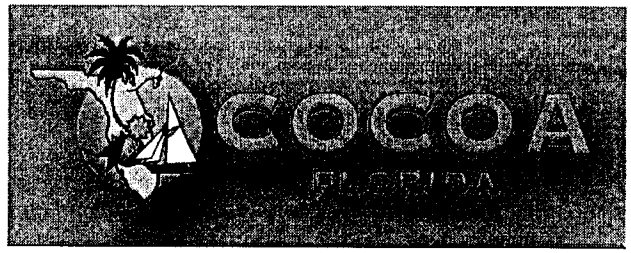
- Property Owner Prior Debt – all locations owned by property owner must in good standing before prospective tenant can apply for service.

- Residential Deposits
  - Additional exemption criteria for property owners and non-property owners.

Utility Handbook
NEW Processes

- Service to Locations with Increased Risk of Debt
- Utility Customer Public Records Exemption Request
- Discounts & Exemptions Eligibility Criteria

Utility Handbook
NEW Processes



- High Consumption Processing Fee Waived During State of Emergency

- Seasonal Policy

- Customer Service Hours – stop serving customers (in lobby & by phone) 30 minutes earlier to allow for closing procedures. Staff works until 5:00pm.

Utility Handbook

NEW Miscellaneous Utility Fees & Charges



Item	Description	Current	Proposed
1	Meter Calibration Testing Charge	$50	$100
2	Meter Access Tow Charge	Actual ($50)	$75
3	Data Log Report	Free	1 Free/Year/Customer $30
4	Service Initiation Fee	$30	$30 Next Day Service $60 Same Day Service
5	Credit Screening Fee	NEW	$5
6	Utility Lien Recording Fee	Actual ($20)	$70
8	High Consumption Credit Application Processing Fee	Free	$5

Utility Handbook

NEW Miscellaneous Utility Fees & Charges

Item	Description	Current	Proposed
9	Lock Fee	$35	$50
10	Tampering Fee	$30	$150
11	Meter Removal Charge	$150	$300
12	Deposits	Water = $40 (residential meter size) Sewer Inside = $50 Sewer Outside = $60	Water = $60 (residential meter size; increase all meter sizes by $20) Sewer = $100 (inside or outside)
13	At-Risk Deposit	NEW	$50

Staff Proposed Utility Handbook Update & 1st & 2nd Public Hearings

- 1ST Public Hearing – **TBD**
  - First Reading of revised Ordinance Chapter 22 Water & Sewer. Vote on the Proposed Utility Handbook & Schedule of Rates, Fees, & Charges

- 2nd Public Hearing – **TBD**
  - Adopt the revised Ordinance Chapter 22 Water & Sewer, Utility Handbook, and Schedule of Rates, Fees, & Charges

Questions?

