

## **November 4, 2024 update to City Council**

**Utility bill status:** All billing cycles have went out for September usage (generally September but the dates are slightly different for every cycle). There are a few bills that have to be done manually due to issues that were noted with them. As soon as they are done, we intend to post bills for all 4 cycles as early as next week (generally October bills). This means many people will get a bill less than 30 days after their last one but that is necessary to get us back on schedule. The bill will be for a 30 day period again for water and sewer. In many cases, the solid waste amount will be less than a full month as it is charged from bill date to bill date. After this billing cycle, we should be back to 30 day bills at the same time of the month as they used to be sent. This schedule does assume no issues come up so there is a possibility of delay.

**Customer Contact:** Our office is receiving many inquiries – approximately 1/2 of which are concerns about the high bill or an explanation of charges. The remainder of the calls are for new service, payments, stop service, and other regular activities. These activities need to be done without delay – as you can imagine, you would not want to move into a new house without water! We are continuing to staff phones with staff outside of fiscal services but they are only able to answer general questions. This means we have many customers who are waiting for a call back about the high bill concern. We are trying to set expectations that it may take several days, up to a week, for a response and we do not expect them to pay their bill until they have received a call back with the information they need. Unfortunately, some people are calling multiple times every day which makes it hard to be efficient when we are calling some people back multiple times. If you have a customer with a concern, please assure them that we will respond but it will take some time.

**Known Issues:** There are several known issues at this time – many that we have mentioned in previous updates and some new ones. The issues do not impact the bill amounts but are generally related to the appearance of the bill or to a specific process. To mention a few, previously we've conveyed that the graph is not accurate so we asked that it be removed until it can be fixed to accurately reflect the usage. The graph did not impact the amount of the bill but it did cause a lot of confusion. We also had issues with autopay taking out the current charges rather than the full amount due for certain bills. Also, budget billing was recalculating automatically and displaying incorrectly on the bill. And, as mentioned in a previous update, we knew that we had more than the typical amount of bills that were estimated last month but we did not know why or the extent of the estimation. We now know that the entire group of cycle 2 bills (approximately 7,800 residential customers) were estimated for the 60-day bill. The estimations may have been greater or less than actual water use, but the 30-day bill then automatically accounted for the actual amount. Through random sampling, initial indications are that 60% of the residential bills were estimated close enough to not push usage into a higher tier and will not require a future adjustment. Approximately 40% of the bills were estimated enough higher or lower to change the tier amounts on either the estimated bill or the subsequent bill. The resulting bills were either higher and should receive credit or lower and to the customer's benefit. The average impact on the random sample was \$13 per account that we will need to issue adjustments for on future bills. This adjustment will take some time to be added to accounts as it involves significant manual effort. To be clear, the consumption

data is correct over the 3-month period but it was not billed in the month it was used which impacted the tier calculations. Generally, cycle 2 is the west end and in this case, covers accounts with bills that have a billing date of 10/16/24. We did confirm that no other billing cycle had the same estimation problem. Beyond the issues we've seen with the residential billing, there are a few issues that impact a small portion of our customers regarding compound meters, deduct meters, meter change outs, and summary customers and have open tickets with our vendor to fix these issues. We currently have 111 open tickets, albeit some are very low priority and not affecting billing.

**Audit:** The auditors from SL-serco will be on-site starting Wednesday. We will continue to give updates as the process progresses.

**Communication:** While most information has been available on the website, it has been developed over time as questions have come up. We are working to make the information on the website easier to access and understand. Improvement to the website will be done this week. We have also committed to posting updates or information on social media at least twice per week. We do monitor the comments and are DM'ing anyone with a specific question or concern.