



# Town of Garland, North Carolina

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## Utility Billing Policy and Procedures

### History:

**Adopted October 14, 2014**  
**Amended December 9, 2014**  
**Amended April 14, 2015**  
**Amended August 8, 2015**  
**Amended September 8, 2015**

**Effective October 14, 2014**  
**Effective December 9, 2014**

This document supersedes all Utility Billing Policy and Procedures previously established or approved by the Town of Garland Board of Commissioners.

## Utility Billing Policy and Procedures

**Objective:** To bill for utility service accurately and promptly, and to take timely and reasonable action to collect past due accounts.

**Scope:** All utility customers are billed by the Town of Garland (hereinafter, referred to as Town). A utility is defined as water service, sewer service, and/or sanitation services. This Utility Billing Policy and Procedures Manual is intended for use as a guide to the Town of Garland's utility billing and collecting methods and practices. When used properly and with common sense, the policies and procedures established herein will enable the Town to bill and collect utility service provided by the Town of Garland, fairly, efficiently and economically while providing great customer service.

### A. Utility Billing Set Up

1. Initial Contact. Upon receiving a request for new utility service from a residential customer and business, the Town is responsible for having the customer complete the application, collect the appropriate deposit, photocopy two (2) forms of ID, verifiable social security number and complete the set-up of the customer account. If setup occurs 10 or less days before the scheduled meter reading, you will not be billed in the next billing cycle. Any water consumption from those days will be added to the next full months billing cycle.
2. Application. Any customer who is not the property owner must provide a lease agreement (which includes the service address and the terms of the agreement) signed and dated by the tenant and the landlord. The applicant(s) must be the residents of the property for which they are applying for utility services.
3. Customer Deposit. The purpose of a customer deposit is to try to ensure that all utility charges are collected, which helps keep rates from unduly increasing for those customers who do pay their bills.
  - i. Any person requesting utility service that has previously had an unpaid bill account will be required to repay this amount, in addition to the deposit.
  - ii. The Town has the right to apply the customers deposit to unpaid utility charges after an account is more than 60 days past due. If all or any portion of a customer deposit is applied to the past due charges, and the customer continues to receive utility services, the Town will require the customer to replenish deposit amounts.
  - iii. Effective June 1, 2015, If your service is disconnected due to non-payment, you will be required to bring your deposit up to the current deposit amount set out in accordance with the fee schedule adopted by the Board of Commissioners, before your service will be reconnected.
  - iv. We utilize NC Debt Setoff to collect unpaid balances, which requires us to submit your social security number to aid in collection. If you cannot, or do not

provide your social security number, you will have to pay an unsecured deposit amount, which is defined as 2 times the secured deposit amount. A secured deposit is defined as providing a verifiable social security number.

4. Refund of Deposit. The Town reserves the right to retain deposits indefinitely to assure payment of utility charges. No interest will be paid upon deposited amounts. Your utility deposit will be applied to your final bill and you will receive a refund (within 21 days) or a bill for the difference.
5. Transfer or Disconnection of Service. A customer will remain responsible for any utility charges until they properly notify the Town of their request to terminate services. This requires the account holder to call in person to request termination of services.

## **B. Utility Billing Procedures**

1. Billing.
  - a. Bills shall be prepared monthly for consumption used by each customer in the billing period.
  - b. Bills are due when received. Payment may be made by check, money order, debit/credit card, bank ACH draft or cash at the collections counter. We do not accept partial payments on utility bills.
  - c. Any bill that remains unpaid after 5pm on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month will be considered past due and incur a 10% late fee penalty.
  - d. Any bill that remains unpaid after 5pm on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month will incur a reconnect fee as set out on the fee schedule adopted by the Town and will be subject to disconnection. While disconnections will begin on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the fee will add to the account even if the customer pays before actual disconnection occurs. If the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the customer will have until the next business day to make payments to avoid disconnection. Once service is disconnected, the meter will be locked. Removing lock or tampering with a water meter can result in a \$500 Meter Tampering Fee, a Civil Penalty and/or Criminal Charges as set out in N.C.G.S. §14-151.1. To reconnect service, full payment must be made including all applicable fees and penalties. This payment must be made by Cash, Debit/Credit Card or Money Order only. No checks will be accepted once you have been disconnected.
  - e. If a bill is returned to the Town of Garland by the Post Office as undeliverable, the Town shall make all reasonable efforts to obtain a forwarding address and correct the address in the utility records. It is the customer's responsibility to contact the Town in the event that they do not receive a bill within 45 days of initiating service, or within 30 days of their previous bill. Failure to receive bills will not be considered justification for nonpayment of amounts due or permit an extension of the date when the account would be considered delinquent.
  - f. Payments will be applied to customer accounts in the following order: penalty fees and miscellaneous charges, sanitation charges, sewer charges, water charges.

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2. Payments.
  - a. By applying for utility service, a customer agrees to pay the rates, fees and charges of the Town in accordance with the fee schedule adopted by the Town.
3. Returned payments.
  - a. All checks returned for uncollected or insufficient funds will result in the customer being notified to replace the payment and pay all fees within 24 hours of the Town being notified of the return. We will accept cash, credit/debit cards or money orders. Once a customer submits 2 check that are returned, we will no longer accept checks as their method of payment.
  - b. Bank draft payments will only be presented once, and if returned, the customer will be notified to replace the payment and all fees within 24 hours. The customer will also be removed from the bank draft service after 2 draft attempts are unsuccessful.
  - c. Customers presenting checks and drafts which are not honored by their banks will be assessed a charge to reimburse the Town for any such fees charged by the bank.
  - d. Customers who do not make good any returned checks or bank drafts and applicable fees in the time allotted, will be considered to have not made any payment, and will be subject to procedures for the collection of past due Utility charges.
4. Collection of Past Due Utility Charges
  - a. Any payments outstanding after 5pm of the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month will be disconnected. No second notice will be given.
  - b. We may take one or more of the following actions, as to the most optimum method of securing payment:
    - i. Forward information to the Town Attorney who will prepare a collection letter, explaining the legal consequences of non-payment.
    - ii. Customer may be denied access to future utility service with the Town.
    - iii. Customer may be submitted to the North Carolina Debt Set-off program for collection of outstanding utility bills from their tax returns and/or lottery winnings.
5. Deceased Customers

We are not able to maintain utility account in the name of a deceased customer. In the event that it is an account with a husband and wife, we can remove the deceased and the account will remain in the surviving customer's name. If the customer passes without a surviving spouse, the account will need to be finalized within the 90 day probate period so a refund or final bill can be sent to the Estate. Anyone remaining on the property needing utility service will need to go through the process of setting up an account and paying any deposits as described in Section A above.

## **C. Consideration of Credits**

### 1. Credits.

#### a. Filling Swimming Pools.

Consumption Credit may be extended for one filling of a swimming pool per calendar year. Full credit may be given for customers who properly have their meters read before and after the pool is filled. You may receive an adjustment for sewer charges for Above Normal Usage. You will pay for all water charges.

#### b. Maintenance Problems

The Town of Garland may allow credit for Utility charges resulting from leaks on the customer's side of the meter.

1. Credit may be extended to the customer's account only once in a 12 month period.
2. The customer must provide the Town of Garland a bill for repairing the leak(s). This must be accompanied by a statement confirming that a leak (or multiple leaks) has been repaired, and a description describing where the leak(s) occurred.
3. The Town of Garland does not repair leaks on the customer's side of the meter.
4. Any leak that goes into the Town's sewer system will not be considered for an adjustment.

## **D. Water Meter Antenna Damage / Replacement**

The Neptune R900 Registers have an antenna that is attached to the meter box lids. The antenna is a round, flat, silver-topped disc that sits up about ¼ inch on the lid. Please be aware that this antenna could easily be damaged. Please avoid driving over it with a lawnmower, car or bicycle. Also, please do not allow your children or pets to play in the area. We have provided the first antenna upon installation. Please know that the customer will be charged the cost of the antenna for any additional antennas needing to be replaced. The cost will be added to the customer's water bill. Section B, Subsection 2 and Subsection 4 explains the collection of these charges.

## **E. Liability**

The Town shall not be liable for damage of any kind resulting from water and wastewater or the use of water on the Customer's property. The Town shall not be responsible for damages done by or resulting from any defect in the piping, fixtures, and/or appliances on the customer's property. The town shall not be responsible for negligence of third parties or forces beyond the Towns control resulting in any interruption of service. Otherwise, under normal conditions, all potentially affected customers shall be notified in advance of any interruption of service.

## **F. Amendments**

The Town may from time to time amend these utility billing policies and procedures. No agreement of the town shall be binding unless in writing and approved by the Board of Commissioners. While this may not answer all questions related to the billing and collecting of utilities, it does provide the foundation for a sound billing and collection process. Any questions and/or problems that are not addressed within this manual must be heard by the Board of Commissioners for resolution.