

Let's Talk About...

## YOUR UTILITY BILL

*(Utility policies, procedures, and rates have changed over time to address changing conditions in our city. This is the second in a series of articles written to alleviate any misunderstandings or confusion about those changes and to dispel the misinformation frequently posted on social media.)*

At the end of each month, Hamilton residents and businesses are mailed a two-part, red, white and blue postcard that details current utility charges. The right-hand side with the bar code is meant to be returned with the payment. The slightly larger left-hand side is intended to be retained by the account owner as a record of that month's activity. Both sides have the "Account Number", the amount "Due Now", the amount "Due After the 15<sup>th</sup>", and the "Disconnect Date".

The first ten digits of the account number identify the physical location of the account and do not change as the occupancy changes. The last two digits are the tenant number, which starts at 98 and goes down by one as each new tenant moves in. There are many homes in Hamilton with a tenant number of 98 or 97; these homes have had the same tenant since the Logics system was installed almost 20 years ago. There are many rental houses with a tenant number in the 70's or 80's; these houses have had a number of occupants in the same timeframe. For each account, the lowest tenant number is the current occupant if the account is active, or the most recent occupant if the account is closed.

The Due Date for the amount Due Now is printed in the upper right corner on the left-hand half of the postcard. The amount Due after the 15<sup>th</sup> is the amount Due Now plus a 10% Late Fee. The Disconnect Date is always the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, unless the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or a holiday, in which case the Disconnect Date is the next business day. As printed on the lower left-hand side, payment must be received prior to 7:30 a.m. on the disconnect day. Otherwise, the \$50 Non-Payment Penalty is applied, and the water service is discontinued, until payment is received in full.

Note that, if the Due Date is 4/15/2020, the "Service From" date is 2/15/2020 and the "Service To" date is 3/15/2020. Utility bills are always due a full month behind actual usage. This means that, even if a utility bill is paid in full and the account closed on the 15<sup>th</sup>, there is still a full month's Final Bill due. This is important to understand when looking at Previous (meter reading), Present (meter reading) and Consumption (usage in gallons). When I received my September bill (i.e. Due Date 9/15/2020), it showed 9900 gallons of Consumption, when my average usage is 3500 gallons per month. My knee-jerk reaction was, "Oh my gosh, we've got a leak!" But when I saw the Service From and Service To dates of 7/15 – 8/15/2020, I remembered that we started watering the grass before the big rain, which meant my consumption was for water used over a month earlier.

On the right-hand side of the postcard is the mailing address. Since the mailing address may be a PO box, the Service Address is printed on the left-hand side. The name(s) above the mailing address are the account owner(s). An account can only be changed or closed by an account owner, by someone with the owner's Power of Attorney, or in the event of death by presentation of a Death Certificate. An owner can transfer their service, including their deposit, from one location to another. However, service at a single location cannot be transferred from one person to another; this requires closing the account of the current owner and opening an account in the next tenant's name.

If the account has been set up for automatic payment, the words "Bank Draft" and the draft date will be printed under the bar code on the right-hand side. Bank drafts are always processed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, or the next business day if the 15<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday. If payment is received by check, and that check is returned "Insufficient Funds", that account will be flagged and no future checks will be accepted from that person. If payment is made by credit card, either online at [www.HamiltonTexas.com](http://www.HamiltonTexas.com), or by phone or in person at City Hall, the credit card company adds a charge of \$3.00 per \$100. That is not a City of Hamilton charge; the fee goes directly to the credit card company.

The majority of utility bills will list five charges: Sewer, Water, Mtr Chg, Garbage, and Sales Tax. When the account was opened, it was set up as Residential or Commercial, Inside City Limits or Outside City Limits. These designations determine the sewer, water and garbage rates that are charged and will be addressed in depth in future installments of this column.

For a 1" or smaller meter, the Mtr Chg is \$5.75/month Inside City Limits, and \$6.75/month Outside City Limits. The meters, which were installed in 2017, will be paid for in 2024.

The Sales Tax is charged on Garbage only and the amount of sales tax depends on the type of service - residential vs. commercial, inside vs. outside, number of totes or size of dumpster.

These little two-part, red, white and blue postcards are a snapshot of your account status. As stated last week, it costs the city \$450/month to mail them out. Please hang onto them and return the right-hand, barcoded side with your payment. This ensures that your payment is associated with the correct account. It will also reduce the number of times that the Utility Billing clerk has to look up an account to tell the owner how much that month's bill is. This will give her more time to answer the frequent calls like "Where do I get my driver's license?", "When are the elections?", "Does the city still sell minnows/" and "What's the time and temperature?".