



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
CONFERENCE MEETING

#16-1214

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Lee R. Feldman, ICMA-CM, City Manager

DATE: October 5, 2016

TITLE: High Consumption and Meter Reading Discussion

At its meeting on July 12th, 2016, the Commission requested that the City Manager schedule an item to discuss high water consumption and recommendations for making amendments to the code of ordinances governing water consumption. This item provides some background on handling of high consumption and meter reading.

When a neighbor calls Utility Billing and Collections to report high consumptions at their property, the representative will discuss with the neighbor any number of reasons for the unusual consumption, such as extra irrigating of the lawn, any additional visitors in the home, or a running toilet. The neighbor is also instructed to do a simple test on the meter, by turning the water off in the house and check the meter to see if the dial is spinning. If the dial is moving, this is a good indication there could be a leak somewhere on the property. An investigation service order is completed on the account, where a City serviceman visits the property to verify the reading on the meter. According to the City Code, if a leak is found at the property, the neighbor may be eligible for a leak credit on the water and sewer portions of the bill at a reduced rate. If there is no known reason for the higher consumption, the City Code provides for a credit on the water and sewer portions of the bill at a reduced rate. Every effort is made to find the cause of the high consumption.

In some instances the current process does not offer satisfactory relief. The City staff polled other municipalities in Florida, to compare how they are handling these types of issues:

Orlando

- Neighbor must submit a letter requesting unusual consumption credit.
- Meter gets double checked.
- Once it is approved, it is processed as a leak adjustment.

Miami

- Offers a one-time credit through their "One Time Lifetime" program.

Pompano

- No relief for unexplained consumption.

Sunrise

- Offers a one-time adjustment using the following process:
 - o Average 2 billing cycles.
 - o Credit the consumption.
 - o Not to exceed 150,000 gallons.

The City currently offers more adjustments than most other municipalities. Staff has also taken steps to help neighbors identify the cause of high consumptions and ordered a limited number of cellular automatic meter reader devices which replaces the current register on the meter to track up to the minute consumptions. It will also detect the times of high consumption at the property.

Meter Reading Services

The Meter Reading contractor (Bermex) is responsible for accurately reading approximately 62,815 water meters monthly. The meter reads are collected using the City's meter reading handhelds and submitted to the City on a daily basis.

The contractor is also required to check for errors such as "stopped/stuck" meters on all accounts (domestic and sprinkler). All actual and suspected malfunctioning meters are reported for repairs.

The contractor also dedicates sufficient resources outside of those needed to maintain the reading schedule and to reread any and all "suspected" erroneously read meters reflected on an exception report. Meters that read high are automatically re-read.

The meter reader is required to "read" every meter in the route, even when the handheld personal computer indicates that there is no meter in the box. It is not unusual for the City to have installed a new meter in the box, but the information has not been entered into the City's computer system in time for it to be reflected in the handheld personal computers. Also, it is not uncommon to find the installation of "straight pipe" after the meter has been removed for non-payment. Any instances where a meter reader suspects an illegal hook-up is reported immediately to the City for follow-up investigation.

Recommendations

- The City could explore the possibility of offering the service of an account/irrigation specialist to review anomalies in consumption of the City's approximate 63,000 accounts on a continuous basis as a more proactive measure for mitigation of high consumptions while advising neighbors of potential solutions.
- The City Commission may wish to consider revising the Code of Ordinances to give the administration the ability to offer more credits to customers for

unexplained high consumptions consistent with any applicable bond covenants.

Strategic Connections

This item is a *Press Play Fort Lauderdale Strategic Plan 2018* initiative, included within the Internal Support Cylinder of Excellence, specifically advancing:

- Goal 12: Be a leading government organization, managing resources wisely and sustainably.
- Objective 2: Routinely examine and improve procurement and payment processes.

This item also furthers the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035 Vision Plan: We are United*.

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