

**RESOLUTION NO. 26-13**

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES  
FOR ADJUSTMENTS TO WATER BILLS**

**RECITALS**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with the provisions of Section PW 5-310 of the Public Works Article of the Code of Public Local Laws of Worcester County, Maryland ("the Code"), the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland ("the Commissioners") annually adopt Sanitary Service Area budgets, assessments and charges for each sanitary service area in Worcester County, Maryland ("the County"); and

**WHEREAS**, Subsection PW 5-310(c) of the Code provides that user charges shall be assessed based upon the best available determination of the volume of water used or wastewater discharged; and

**WHEREAS**, the Commissioners recognize the need to protect the financial integrity of the utility enterprise fund while providing reasonable relief to customers experiencing unusual or unintended water loss;

**WHEREAS**, water conservation rates have been established in all sanitary service areas which provide a tiered rate structure with the lowest rate for a basic level of water usage and progressively higher tiered rate for water usage in excess of the basic level of use; and

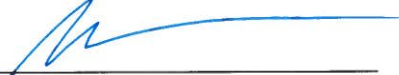
**WHEREAS**, the County previously adopted a Water Leak Adjustment Policy in 2010 to provide relief to customers experiencing unusual or unintended water loss, and it has become necessary to review and update that policy to reflect current utility practices, advances in metering technology, and evolving standards for equitable and consistent billing adjustments; and

**WHEREAS**, the Commissioners find it necessary and proper to establish a uniform, fair, and transparent policy governing the adjustment of water and sewer utility charges in cases of billing error, leaks, extraordinary circumstances, and other qualifying events;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland that the following policy is hereby adopted to address billing issues that arise during the financial management of the service areas,

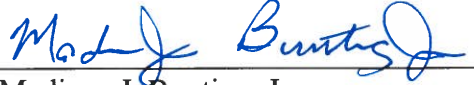
AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall take effect upon its passage.  
PASSED AND ADOPTED this 2nd day of June, 2026.

ATTEST:

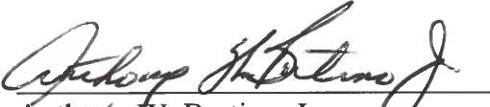
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Weston S. Young  
Chief Administrative Officer

Worcester County Commissioners

  
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Theodore J. Elder  
President

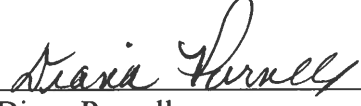
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Madison J. Bunting, Jr.  
Vice President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Caryn G. Abbott  
Commissioner

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.  
Commissioner

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Eric J. Fiori  
Commissioner

  
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Joseph M. Mitrecic  
Commissioner

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Diane Purnell  
Commissioner

|                        |                                                                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Policy Name</b>     | Water Leak Adjustment Policy                                               |
| <b>Adopted</b>         | [ Date of Adoption ]                                                       |
| <b>Effective</b>       | [ Effective Date ]                                                         |
| <b>Administered by</b> | Department of Public Works, Water and Wastewater Division                  |
| <b>Supersedes</b>      | 2010                                                                       |
| <b>Review Cycle</b>    | Every three (3) years, or as directed by the Board of County Commissioners |

## I. PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a fair, consistent, and transparent framework for adjusting water and sewer utility bills when a customer experiences unusually high consumption due to a leak on the customer's side of the meter. The policy aims to:

1. **Provide Relief to Customers:** Reduce financial burden caused by unforeseen water loss due to leaks, pipe breaks, or other mechanical failures.
2. **Promote Timely Repairs:** Encourage customers to promptly identify and repair leaks, helping conserve water and protect the utility infrastructure.
3. **Ensure Consistency:** Apply adjustments uniformly across all customers to maintain fairness in billing practices.
4. **Protect Utility Revenue:** Balance customer relief with the financial sustainability of the water and sewer system.
5. **Enhance Customer Service:** Offer a transparent and easily understandable process for requesting adjustments, including clear eligibility, documentation, and limitation criteria.

## II. DEFINITIONS

1. **Billing Error:** An incorrect charge applied to a customer's account due to meter misreading, data entry mistake, or other administrative or technical error.
2. **Customer:** Any person, property owner, tenant, or entity that receives water and/or sewer service from the utility and is responsible for payment of the associated charges.
3. **Department:** Worcester County Department of Public Works
4. **Non-Sewer Contributing Leak:** A water loss from a customer's plumbing, fixtures, or pipes that escapes externally (e.g., landscaping, outdoor irrigation, yard flooding, or runoff) and does not enter the sewer system.
5. **Meter:** A device that measures and records the volume of water consumed on a property for billing purposes, with readings collected by County personnel at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly).
6. **Relief Adjustment:** Reduction of the water consumption charges available to domestic and commercial customers.
7. **Sewer Contributing Leak:** A water loss from a customer's plumbing, fixtures, or pipes that flows into the sewer system.
8. **Usage:** The total volume of water measured by the customer's meter during a specific

billing period, including all water supplied for domestic, commercial, or other authorized purposes, and recorded in gallons.

9. **Outdoor Leak Adjustment:** Reduction in sewer charges available to domestic and commercial customers for non-sewer contributing leaks that have not entered the sewer system.
10. **Unexplained High-Water Usage Adjustment:** Reduction of the water consumption charges available to domestic and commercial customers where the cause for the high-water usage cannot be determined.

### **III. GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### **1. Billing**

- a. Bills are sent quarterly and are due 30 days after they are invoiced. The due date will be indicated on the bill.

#### **2. Fees**

- a. Accounts that are delinquent over 30 days from the date of billing shall be assessed a \$5.00 penalty, plus 3% interest per quarter.
- b. Late fees and interest will be waived for billing errors.
- c. A one-time waiver of late fees and interest will be granted upon request for customers with no history of late payments.

#### **3. Billing Errors**

- a. In the event of a confirmed billing error attributable to the Department, the County shall correct the error and issue a revised bill.
- b. Adjustments for billing errors may be applied retroactively for up to six (6) months from the date the error is discovered.
- c. Where a meter is determined to be inaccurate, consumption shall be estimated using the customer's average metered consumption for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings.

#### **4. Financial Responsibility of Customer**

- a. While a leak adjustment is under consideration, the customer shall pay consumption-related water and sewer charges equal to the average metered consumption for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings for the account in addition to all other fees and charges on the bill under consideration.
- b. The remaining consumption-related water and sewer charges will be suspended until a determination is made on the pending leak adjustment request. If an adjustment is made, the customer shall be required to pay the remaining account balance within 30 days.

### **IV. LEAK ADJUSTMENTS**

#### **1. Eligibility**

- a. Relief Adjustments and Outdoor Leak Adjustments are offered to domestic and commercial customers upon their request when there is valid high-water use such as leaks, theft, vandalism, or other documented unintended water use. To qualify:
  - i. The customer must submit a completed application form within thirty (30) days of the billing date.

- ii. The leak must have been repaired within thirty (30) days of discovery or notification by the Department.
  - iii. The usage in question is equal to or exceeds three (3) times the customer's usage for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings. Water use by the customer has returned to pre-leak levels.
  - iv. The customer must provide documentation demonstrating repair, which may include a paid invoice from a licensed plumber, contractor affidavit, or photographic evidence.
  - v. No adjustments will be made available for construction water accounts.
- b. Unexplained High-Water Use Adjustments are offered to domestic and commercial customers upon their request when there is unexplained high-water use. To qualify:
  - i. The customer must submit a completed application form within thirty (30) days of the billing date.
  - ii. The usage in question is equal to or exceeds three (3) times the customer's usage for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings. Water use by the customer has returned to pre-leak levels.
  - iii. The customer may request that the meter be pulled and tested by the County for accuracy at the customer's cost. If the meter is found to be accurate, the bill will be eligible for an Unexplained High-Water Use Adjustment. If the meter is found to be inaccurate, the testing fee will be waived, and the high-water use will be treated as a billing error.

## **2. Limitations**

- a. Customers will be eligible for a Relief Adjustment, or for a combination of a Relief Adjustment and an Outdoor Leak Adjustment, once within a 36-month period. This 36-month eligibility period will reset upon a change in property ownership, but will not reset with a change in tenants.
- b. Customers will be eligible for an Unexplained High-Water Use Adjustment once within a 60-month period. This period will reset with a change in property ownership, but not with a change in tenants.
- c. Adjustments will not apply to irrigation systems unless the customer demonstrates that the leak was sudden, accidental, and not due to lack of maintenance.
- d. No adjustment shall be granted for negligence, willful damage, or failure to repair known plumbing deficiencies.
- e. Any adjustment granted under this policy may be voided and reversed by the County if the County determines that the customer obtained the adjustment through the submission of false or fraudulent information. In such cases, the full original charges shall be reinstated, and the customer shall be liable for any outstanding balance.

## **3. Relief Adjustment**

- a. A Relief Adjustment is calculated by charging a domestic customer for high-water use at the current adopted rate using the customer's average metered consumption for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings. The sewer charges will not be adjusted.
- b. The Relief Adjustment applies to domestic and commercial customers and may

apply to no more than two sequential quarterly bills.

**4. Outdoor Leak Adjustment**

- a. When a non-sewer contributing leak is found, an Outdoor Leak Adjustment will be applied. This adjustment is calculated by setting the sewer usage to the same water usage as the customer Relief Adjustment. Proof that the leak has been repaired must be provided before an adjustment will be granted.
- b. The Outdoor Leak Adjustment is for domestic and commercial customers and may apply to no more than two sequential quarterly bills.

**5. Unexplained High-Water Usage Adjustment**

- a. When there is unexplained high-water usage, the adjustment will be calculated using the customer's average metered consumption for the preceding twelve (12) months of reliable readings. The sewer charges will not be adjusted.
- b. The Unexplained High-Water Leak Adjustment is for domestic and commercial customers and may apply to no more than two sequential quarterly bills.

**V. APPEALS**

If the property owner is still disputing the bill, they may request in writing to have it reviewed by the Grievance Committee, consisting of the Director of Public Works, Deputy Director of Public Works, Enterprise Fund Controller and County Finance Officer, or their designated representative.

The written appeal must be submitted within 14 days of receipt of the denial notification or the final adjusted bill, whichever is applicable. Appeals not received within 14 days will be considered waived.