

Policy Statement

1. The City recognizes the importance of fair, consistent, and accountable billing and collection practices for water and wastewater services. This policy supports financial sustainability, ensures ratepayer transparency, and promotes responsible revenue management while balancing customer service.

Purpose

2. The purpose of this policy is to effectively and equitably manage the City of Owen Sound's water and wastewater receivables, support customers in meeting their payment obligations, rectify outstanding balances, and ensure responsible handling of revenue.

Scope

3. This policy applies to all water and sewer customers, including tenants and property owners, and to all City staff involved in billing and collection. It complements the City's Water Management By-law, which governs service delivery and operational matters.

Definitions

4. For the purposes of this policy,
"account holder" means the owner of the property, unless otherwise grandfathered in from a previous policy;
"authorized employees" means any Director of Corporate Services (Treasurer), City Manager, Director of Public Works and Engineering, Deputy Treasurer or designated employee of the City;
"average consumption" means a calculation which takes the average water consumption for a service address over the most recent consecutive nine (9) month period;
"arrears" means any unpaid balance on a utility account, which is outstanding after the applicable due date has passed;

“business days” means Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, excluding statutory holidays;

“City” means The Corporation of the City of Owen Sound;

“customer” means any owner, occupant, lessee, tenant or any other person purchasing or receiving services from the City;

“Council” means the Council of the City of Owen Sound;

“due date” means the last date by which an invoice must be paid by a customer in accordance with the terms of payment on the City’s invoice;

“Fees & Charges By-Law” means the current schedule of applicable fees, rates and other charges for the services, which may be amended by Council from time to time;

“invoice” means a bill issued by the City to a customer indicating the amount owing over a single billing period for the delivery of water, sewer and meter service charges;

“letter of authorization” means the form utilized by the property owner to appoint a tenant billing designate to the account;

“meter” means an apparatus for measuring the quantity of water used;

“owner” means an owner of a building or of lands;

“payment plan” means a written and signed payment arrangement authorized by appropriate City staff;

“property tax roll” means the tax account maintained by the City for each property, to which property taxes and other collectable charges may be added under *the Municipal Act, 2001*.

“ratepayer” means the customer or owner responsible for payment;

“receivables” means any monies owed to the City for goods and/or services rendered other than property tax;

“run water advisory” means a notice issued by the City advising a property owner to allow water to run continuously to prevent freezing of water lines, including instructions on flow and duration;

“services” means all water and sewer services supplied by the City

“tenant billing designate” means a tenant who has been authorized by the property owner to receive billing information and discuss the account with the City, as outlined in a valid Letter of Authorization. The tenant billing designate is not the account holder.

Policy

Key Billing Principles

5. In accordance with Section 398 of the *Municipal Act, 2001* and O. Reg. 581/06, all fees and charges for the supply of a public utility are considered the responsibility of the property to which the utility is provided.
6. In all cases, the owner of the property is responsible for payment of all applicable water and wastewater charges.
7. Any unpaid amount owing to the City for utility services shall constitute a priority lien against the property and may be collected in the same manner and with the same legal remedies as property taxes.
8. All rates for metered water and associated wastewater charges, as well as any additional applicable fees, are included in the City's Fees and Charges By-law.
9. All customers are required to grant authorized employees of the City access to the outside remote reader and water meter at the service address. Meters and remote readers must be accessible at all times.
10. If a meter reading cannot be obtained, the City will, with best efforts, leave a notice card at the service address, indicating that the customer must contact Water Billing in order to provide a meter reading for billing purposes. In the event that this reading is not provided, estimated usage will serve as the basis for billing for the period.
11. The City must be notified of a required final reading a minimum of ten (10) business days prior to the date a customer vacates or occupies a property or the property changes ownership. The current customer will continue to be billed until such time that a final read can be obtained and a final bill can be completed. A final read/bill cannot and will not be backdated nor will any issued billings be re-billed to a subsequent customer/property owner due to failure to notify the City of such change.
12. There will be no penalty exemptions or billing charge exemptions due to failure to provide the City with a correct forwarding mailing or e-billing address for any accounts, including those for final billed accounts.
13. No reductions or refunds will be provided for regular billings where there is no consumption of water/wastewater. Property owner(s) may choose to have the water service turned off at the curb for risk mitigation purposes (e.g. during extended vacancy or renovations, etc.). If the following criteria are met, only the fixed water/wastewater service fees will continue to be charged for the duration that the service is turned off:

- a. The ratepayer has provided written notice requesting that water services be turned off;
 - b. The applicable shut-off fee has been paid in full;
 - c. And any outstanding balances have been paid.
14. In the event of a dispute, the reading of the water meter register will be the sole evidence of the quantity of water supplied unless the meter is proven to be defective after proper testing by the City or designate.
15. If a property owner requests a meter bench test, the City will coordinate the test in accordance with established procedures.
- a. If the meter is found to be functioning accurately, no further billing adjustments will be made and the property owner will be responsible for the cost of the bench test, as set out in the City's Fees and Charges By-law.
 - b. If the meter is found to be defective, the City will cover the cost of the bench test and billing will be adjusted based on estimated consumption for the relevant period. The property owner will be liable for all associated billing charges based upon this estimate.
16. In instances where there is a discrepancy between the meter register and the remote reading device, the reading taken from the meter register will be deemed correct.
17. Unless otherwise specified, all estimated billings will be based on:
- a. the property's average consumption over the most recent nine (9) months; or
 - b. historical consumption during the same billing period in prior years, regardless of account ownership; or
 - c. Average consumption for similar account types.
18. The method of estimation shall be determined at the sole discretion of the City, based on the availability of data, the nature of the account, and the specific circumstances requiring the estimate.

Billing Disputes or Adjustment Requests

19. The City will no longer process water leak adjustment requests unless extenuating circumstances exist. Responsibility for maintaining internal plumbing systems, fixtures, and appliances lies solely with the property owner. As such, the City will not adjust utility charges for water that has passed through the meter, regardless of whether the consumption resulted from leaks, equipment failure, or accidental usage.

20. Circumstances that will not be considered extenuating and will not qualify for billing adjustments include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Leaking or running toilets, hot water tanks, or faucets;
 - b. Appliance or irrigation system failures;
 - c. Outdoor hoses accidentally left running;
 - d. Any plumbing issue located on the private side of the water service connection.
21. While the City acknowledges the potential burden of unanticipated consumption, the costs to produce and deliver water remain incurred. As such, charges based on metered usage will stand unless otherwise directed through the formal review process.
22. In extenuating circumstances, a ratepayer may request a formal review by submitting a written appeal to be reviewed jointly by the Director of Public Works and Engineering and the Director of Corporate Services (Treasurer), explaining the extenuating circumstances that the ratepayer believes support the billing adjustment request. These directors will, at their sole discretion, determine whether an adjustment is warranted based on the explanation provided and in alignment with the authority granted under the Water Management By-law. The submission of a formal review request does not guarantee any billing adjustment will be made.
23. If the formal review is not resolved to the satisfaction of the account holder, they may appeal the decision in writing to the City Manager. The City Manager's decision is final.

Eligibility for Sewer Surcharge Waiver

24. Requests for the waiver of sewer surcharge fees are reviewed in the same manner as billing disputes or adjustment requests and are only considered in exceptional circumstances, such as substantial and sustaining flow differential, with the provision of supporting evidence.
25. Requests may be submitted if the flow differential (i.e., the portion of metered water that does not enter the sanitary sewer system) exceeds 20% of total water consumption. The property owner must provide supporting evidence (e.g., usage records, technical calculations) to demonstrate the consistent diversion of water for non-sewered purposes.
26. The following circumstances are not eligible for sewer surcharge adjustments:

- a. Lawn Watering and Irrigation - usage of water for lawns, gardens, or landscaping is considered normal residential usage and does not qualify for sewer surcharge relief.
- b. Swimming Pools - sewer surcharge discounts will not be granted for filling swimming pools. Water from pools is typically discharged into the sewer system either through bottom drains, sump pumps, or portable discharge into household sewer connections or exterior storm drains.
- c. Plumbing Problems or Leaks - water loss due to plumbing failures (e.g., leaking toilets, pipes, or fixtures) are not eligible for sewer charge adjustments. It is often not possible to verify the volume of water lost or whether the water eventually entered the sanitary system.

Billing Due Dates and Late Payment Charges

- 27. The City issues utility bills based on billing cycles assigned to each property address. Typical billing dates vary by cycle and can be found on the City's website.
- 28. Regardless of billing cycle or frequency, all bills are due twenty-one (21) days after the bill issue date.
- 29. Non-receipt of a utility bill, whether mailed or electronically delivered, does not exempt the ratepayer from the obligation to pay for services nor void the application of interest or penalties under Section 345 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Ratepayers are responsible for all utility charges levied by the City, regardless of whether they receive a bill.
- 30. The City encourages all ratepayers to ensure they receive their bills in a timely manner by signing up for e-billing and maintaining current contact information with the City.
- 31. All payments are deemed to be received and applied based on the date they are received by the City, regardless of the method of payment. Payments must be received by the City on or before the due date to avoid penalties.
 - a. For payments made by mail, the City is not responsible for delays caused by postal service. Payments must be received by the City on or before the due date to avoid penalties.
 - b. For payments made online, through telephone banking, or at a financial institution, the ratepayer is responsible for ensuring payment is submitted early enough to allow for processing time.
- 32. Partial payments will be applied first to any outstanding arrears and accrued interest, and then to the current billing, unless the City has made alternative arrangements in writing.

33. A late payment charge of 1.5% per month (18% per annum) will be applied to any unpaid balance as authorized under Section 345 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.
34. A penalty will be added to the account on or around the 15th of the month following the due date, and on or around the 15th of each subsequent month until the outstanding balance is paid in full.
35. Where an account remains unpaid for more than twenty-one (21) days following the due date, the balance will be considered overdue and subject to the late payment charges described above. This applies to all charges related to water and wastewater service, including but not limited to:
 - a. consumption and fixed service charges;
 - b. service installations;
 - c. meter supply and installation;
 - d. repairs or inspections; and
 - e. any other service or water-related charge billed by the City.

Billing Errors

36. A billing error may include, but is not limited to:
 - a. incorrect meter readings;
 - b. data entry or account setup errors; or
 - c. incorrect service address or rates applied.
37. Where a billing error results in over-billing, the ratepayer will be credited the overcharged amount, including any interest paid on the excess billing amounts only, for a period not exceeding two (2) years from the date the error is identified.
38. Where a billing error results in under-billing, the ratepayer will be charged the amount that the City can reasonably determine should have been billed, retroactive for a period not exceeding two (2) years. This determination will be based on available meter data, historical consumption patterns, billing records, and any other relevant documentation.
39. In the event of a dispute, the matter will be reviewed by the Manager or designate responsible for utility billing, whose decision shall be final.
40. Standard interest and penalties will continue to apply to any unpaid amounts that were correctly billed at the time.

41. Adjustments will be applied only where the billing error can be reasonably verified through meter data, records, or supporting documentation. All billing error adjustments must be reviewed and approved by the Manager or designate responsible for utility billing.

Multi-Unit and Multi-Owner Properties

42. Where a utility account is associated with a property containing multiple tax roll numbers, and the account becomes past due, the City will determine the appropriate roll number(s) to which the outstanding arrears will be transferred for collection. This decision will be made at the City's sole discretion and will be based on operational considerations, including whether:
 - a. all parcels are under the same ownership;
 - b. a primary roll has been historically associated with the utility account;
 - c. title has changed or is anticipated to change on one or more parcels; and
 - d. arrears should be distributed proportionally across all affected roll numbers.
43. In such cases, the City will not accept a direction from the property owner regarding which tax roll(s) should bear the transferred arrears. The City reserves the right to consolidate, divide, or reassign arrears in a manner that best supports timely collection.
44. Where property ownership is divided and only one utility account remains in service, the property owner(s) will be responsible for determining an internal allocation of utility charges. The City will continue to treat the account as a single unit for billing and collection purposes unless individual metering is installed and separate accounts are established.
45. Property owners are advised to consult legal counsel prior to completing the sale or severance of units where utility arrears exist or may arise, as responsibility for payment and recourse among multiple owners is a private matter not managed by the City.
46. To avoid complications arising from multiple ownership interests and a single utility account, the City may require the installation of individual water meters for each separately owned unit or roll number as a condition of continued service. This requirement may be imposed under the following circumstances:
 - a. upon property severance or registration of separate ownership titles;

- b. at the time of redevelopment, building permit issuance, or site plan approval;
 - c. where utility arrears have previously been transferred to multiple tax rolls; or
 - d. where ownership is anticipated to change and a shared account structure poses a risk to future billing or collection.
47. Where separate metering is required, the property owner(s) will be responsible for all associated costs, such as meter cost and installation, account setup fees, and any necessary plumbing modifications to ensure accurate and independent service to each unit.
48. The requirement for individual metering may be imposed as a condition of:
- a. development approval or site plan control;
 - b. consent or severance granted by the Committee of Adjustment;
 - c. issuance of a building or occupancy permit; or
 - d. continued provision of municipal water services, where deemed necessary by the City to support billing integrity and enforceability.
49. Property owners may request an exemption from individual metering requirements by submitting a written request to the City, outlining the rationale for exemption and any proposed alternatives to ensure fair and reliable billing. The City will review each request on a case-by-case basis and may grant a conditional exemption subject to additional requirements, such as written service agreements between co-owners or the appointment of a primary billing contact.

Tenant Billing Designates

50. Water and other charges will be charged and billed to the owner of the property, regardless of tenancy or occupation of the property.
51. Owners of commercial, industrial and institutional uses may additionally identify units and occupants for the purpose of issuing separate bills under the owner's name.
52. Property owners may request that a tenant be added to the account as a billing designate, by submitting a Letter of Authorization to the City. This applies to both residential and commercial tenancies.
53. The property owner is considered to be the account holder for all City intents and purposes. The property owner remains legally and financially responsible for the account. As the account holder, the property owner retains full

access to the account and may monitor billing activity, balances and payment history at any time.

54. A tenant billing designate is an individual authorized to receive billing information, such as copies of bills and account balances, make payments, and to discuss account details with City staff. A billing designate is not the account holder.
55. Further clarification and determination of responsibility relating to the property owner and tenant billing designate's expectations for whom is responsible for the ongoing payment of water and wastewater charges during the tenancy period is considered a private matter in which the City does not play a role and assumes no responsibility for. It may be in the interest of both parties to enter into a written agreement or include language regarding payment in the lease agreement.
56. The Letter of Authorization must be signed by the property owner and tenant billing designate in order for the tenant billing designate to receive account information. No prior account information can be provided under this Letter of Authorization, regardless of instruction from the property owner. All Letters of Authorization will be considered to be in effect on a go-forward basis after the date of acceptance by the City.
57. The property owner is responsible for ensuring that Letters of Authorization are updated or revoked when a tenant vacates the property.
58. In the event that there is only one water meter for multiple rental units or that a meter is inaccessible at a property, no Letters of Authorization for a tenant billing designate will be accepted.
59. By signing and submitting the Letter of Authorization, the tenant billing designate agrees to:
 - a. Acknowledge that responsibility for water and wastewater charges during the tenancy is a private arrangement between the billing designate and the property owner, and that failure to pay may result in additional recourse by the property owner, such as legal or financial recovery through other means.
 - b. Notify the City of changes in occupancy or contact information;
 - c. Provide access to the premises during regular business hours to allow authorized employees to read, repair, remove and replace meters;
 - d. Submit the application using an accepted method (in person, by mail, courier, fax, online, or email in PDF format); and
 - e. Comply with all terms outlined in this policy.

60. By signing and submitting the Letter of Authorization, the property owner agrees that:
- a. As the account holder, the property owner is ultimately responsible for any unpaid water and wastewater charges, regardless of tenant arrangements.
 - b. Any past-due or unpaid balances will be transferred to the property owner's tax roll.
 - c. Property owners may monitor account balances and activity at any time and are encouraged to take proactive steps to ensure timely payment of charges during a tenancy.
 - d. Acknowledge that responsibility for water and wastewater charges during the tenancy is a private arrangement between the billing designate and the property owner, and that any enforcement or recourse related to non-payment is solely the responsibility of the property owner. The City will not intervene in such matters.
 - e. That they will abide with all terms outlined in this policy.
61. The City's billing system allows only one mailed bill per account. Where a property owner wishes to designate a tenant billing designate to receive billing information directly, both the owner and the billing designate must sign up for e-billing to receive electronic copies.
62. It is the owner's responsibility to forward billing information to the tenant or ensure their private arrangements are met. The City will not issue duplicate paper bills or mediate disputes between owners and tenants regarding billing arrangements.
63. The City also reserves the right to cancel any tenant billing designate arrangement at its sole discretion, without notice, if it is determined that the arrangement poses risk to the City's ability to collect or manage the account.

Payment Arrangements

64. Payment plans will only be accepted from the property owner or an individual with written authority to act on the owner's behalf for account decisions. Tenant billing designates may not enter into payment arrangements with the City directly. Tenants wishing to pursue a payment plan must do so with consultation with the property owner.
65. Where a tenant has been added as a billing designate, any request for a payment plan must be submitted on the City's prescribed form and must be signed by both the property owner and the tenant billing designate.

66. The property owner remains solely responsible for the account and must consent to the terms of any payment arrangement. The City will not accept or negotiate payment plans directly with a billing designate without the property owner's written authorization.
67. The City reserves the right to deny or discontinue payment arrangements at its sole discretion. This may occur in cases including, but not limited to:
 - a. Non-compliance with the terms of an existing payment arrangement;
 - b. Ongoing disputes between the owner and tenant that create excessive administrative burden;
 - c. Situations where a final meter reading is scheduled or where the property is in the process of being sold or transferred;
 - d. Cases where the payment plan would interfere with timely billing, collections, or other account processes.
68. Ratepayers are expected to adhere to all agreed-upon payment schedules. Failure to do so may result in the revocation of the payment arrangement and the full outstanding balance becoming immediately due. The City may also refuse future payment plan requests based on past non-compliance.

Final Readings and Bills

69. The City must be notified of a required final reading a minimum of ten (10) business days prior to the date a customer vacates or occupies a property or when a change in ownership is scheduled. This notice allows sufficient time to schedule the final read and help prevent delays in final billing preparation or account ownership changes.
70. Where a final meter reading request is not received in advance of when a ratepayer vacates the property or the property changes ownership, bills will continue to be issued to the current account holder until such time that the City receives notice.
71. A final meter read and corresponding bill cannot and will not be backdated, nor will any previously issued bills be re-billed to a subsequent customer or property owner due to failure to notify the City of a change in occupancy or ownership. It is the responsibility of the account holder or property owner to provide timely notice to ensure accurate billing.
72. The City will not adjudicate disputes regarding responsibility for water and wastewater charges in cases where proper notice of occupancy or ownership change was not provided. Parties involved in such disputes are encouraged to seek independent legal advice to determine appropriate resolution.

73. For final bills, the City will make reasonable efforts to obtain an actual meter reading. If a reading cannot be obtained, due to access issues, equipment failure, or other limitations, the City will issue an estimated final bill based on the estimate parameters outlined above. In such cases, the City will proceed with the best information available at the time and is not responsible for any discrepancies resulting from inaccessible meters.

Payment of Bills

74. Ratepayers may enroll in the City's Pre-Authorized Payment Plan (PAP) by submitting a completed PAP application form, along with one of the following:
- a. A void cheque,
 - b. A copy of a void cheque, or
 - c. A pre-authorized debit form issued by their financial institution.
75. Payments will be withdrawn on the due date and in the amount shown on the ratepayer's bill.
76. Active accounts enrolled in PAP will be exempt from late payment penalties and will not accrue interest on outstanding balances. Interest will also not accrue on credit balances.
77. Any changes or cancellations to a PAP must be submitted in writing at least ten (10) calendar days prior to the next scheduled withdrawal date. If notice is not received within this timeframe, the payment file may already have been transmitted to the bank, and the scheduled amount may still be debited from the account. The City is not liable for any resulting fees incurred by the ratepayer as a result of insufficient notice or other returned payments.
78. PAP enrollment is account-specific. If a property is sold or a ratepayer relocates, the PAP does not transfer to the new property or account.
- a. It is the ratepayer's responsibility to cancel the existing PAP upon leaving a property.
 - b. A new application must be submitted for each new utility account or property.
79. A returned payment fee will be applied to the account for any payment that is rejected by a financial institution due to insufficient funds, account closure, or any other reason.

80. The City reserves the right to remove a ratepayer from the PAP if multiple payments are returned or the account is otherwise no longer eligible for participation in PAP.
 - a. Specifically, any account with two (2) returned payments within a twelve-month period will be removed from the plan.
 - b. The City will remove a ratepayer from PAP if a payment is returned due to the payor being deceased.
 - c. The City may, at its sole discretion, deny future re-enrollment in the PAP program.
81. If a PAP payment is returned, the full amount of the payment will be considered immediately due and will not be automatically reprocessed or added to future pre-authorized withdrawals. The PAP payment plus any additional associated fees and penalties, must be paid to the City by another accepted payment method to avoid future late payment fees.

Returned Payments

82. An administrative fee, as set out in the City's Fees and Charges by-law will be charged to the account for any payment returned by the account holder's financial institution (e.g., due to insufficient funds, account closure, or incorrect banking information).
83. The returned payment amount, administrative fees and any applicable late payment charges will be added back to the account. This amount will be considered immediately due and must be paid to the City by another accepted payment method. Failure to do so may result in late payment penalties and additional collection action.
84. The City will notify the account holder by mail or email, based on the preferred communication method indicated on the account, whenever possible.
85. Where a returned payment was initially applied to an account already in arrears, the City will continue collection efforts as though the payment had not been made. This includes the re-application of late fees, continued issuance of past due notices, and eligibility for transfer to tax.

Arrears & Transfer to Property Tax Roll

86. Utility accounts with arrears will be identified and reviewed twice per year, as part of the City's standard collections process, regardless of whether the account is:
 - a. Held by the property owner;

- b. Tenants grandfathered under a previous billing policy;
 - c. A previous tenant account with arrears owing against the property that remains unpaid;
 - d. Associated with a property that has since changed ownership.
87. In all cases, the City will have made best efforts to recover the outstanding balance in accordance with the policy in effect at the time. Where no payment has been received, the balance may be transferred to the current property tax roll for collection.
88. Where an account with a tenant billing designate or a grandfathered tenant-held utility account is transferred to the property tax roll due to unpaid arrears, the billing arrangement will be deemed revoked. The Letter of Authorization, if applicable, will be terminated, and all future billing and account correspondence will be directed to the property owner as the sole account holder.
89. Utility accounts with arrears between one hundred (\$100) and three hundred and fifty dollars (\$350) will be issued a past due reminder notice, and an administration fee may be applied in accordance with the City's Fees and Charges By-law. Accounts in this range may also be captured in the next scheduled round of transfer to tax roll, subject to timing and collection status.
90. Utility accounts with arrears exceeding three hundred and fifty dollars (\$350) at the time of review, will be deemed eligible for the transfer to tax roll process.
91. A final arrears notice shall be mailed to the account holder and/or property owner for all accounts identified and included in the review for transfer-to-tax eligibility noted above, advising that the balance will be transferred to the tax roll if payment is not received within twenty-one (21) days.
92. Any outstanding utility arrears remaining after the due date of the Final Arrears notice shall be transferred to the tax roll, along with any applicable administration fees established in the City's Fees & Charges by-law.
93. Transfers will occur based on the City's current transfer-to-tax procedure, which is aligned with the property tax billing cycle to support efficient recovery and account reconciliation.
94. The City's current practice involves two utility arrears transfer cycles per year.
- a. First Transfer: Occurs early in the year after the first interim tax due date and before final tax billing preparation. Final notices are typically

sent in advance to allow ratepayers 21 days to remit payment directly to the utility account.

- b. Second Transfer: Occurs later in the year following the final tax due date. Final notices are issued in advance, and any unpaid balances are transferred to the tax roll to be included in year-end tax arrears processing and pre-authorized tax payment recalculations.
95. Once transferred to the property tax roll, utility arrears are considered property tax arrears and become due in full. Any arrears balances will be reflected in the balance owing on the next scheduled property tax installment date. Arrears should be paid as soon as possible to avoid penalty, arrears and future collection efforts on the tax roll.
96. Any utility arrears transferred to a property tax roll enrolled in a tax pre-authorized payment plan will be incorporated as follows:
- a. For ratepayers on a monthly PAP plan, the transferred amount will be incorporated into future payment amounts based on the City's established pre-authorized payment recalculation schedule, depending on the timing of the transfer.
 - b. For ratepayers on an installment-based pre-authorized plan, the transferred amount will be added to the next scheduled tax installment due date.
97. The City will provide advance notice of any changes to pre-authorized payment amounts resulting from a utility transfer.
98. For any properties changing ownership, all property tax arrears, including transferred utility arrears, are the responsibility of the property owner at the time of closing and should be reflected in the statement of adjustments for the property tax roll. Property owners are encouraged to consult their legal representatives to ensure all outstanding utility charges transferred to the tax roll are addressed prior to or at closing.
99. This transfer process replaces all previous practices, including water disconnection procedures and informal tenant billing arrangements, and is now considered in effect for all utility accounts, regardless of account history. Ratepayers and property owners are expected to comply with the current policy, and owners are encouraged to monitor all accounts associated with their properties to avoid transfer-to-tax action, which is permitted under Section 398(2) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

Recovery Through Monies Owed to the Ratepayer and Credit Balances

100. Where a final bill for an account results in a credit balance, the amount will be refunded to the account holder, unless there are outstanding arrears on the property tax roll. In such cases, the City will apply the credit toward the arrears rather than issuing a refund.
101. If the account holder wishes to transfer the credit to another active utility account or to the associated tax roll, a written request must be submitted to the City. The City's preferred practice is to apply credits to outstanding balances to support timely account collection. If there are no outstanding balances, the credit will be refunded back to the ratepayer.
102. Any unclaimed credit will be held by the City for two (2) years, after which time it will be transferred to general revenue in accordance with standard accounting practice.
103. Credit balances of less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) will not be refunded and will be written off in the current year in accordance with the City's financial procedures, unless the account holder specifically requests a refund in writing.

Run Water Policy

104. City staff will assess conditions to determine when a Run Water Advisory is necessary for specific properties. If it's determined that pipes are at risk of freezing due to prolonged cold temperatures, staff will deliver a Run Water Advisory Notice to those affected properties and will notify the Utilities Collection Clerk of such properties.
105. Ratepayers are expected to comply with all instructions issued by the City regarding the duration and flow rate of water during a Run Water Advisory.
 - a. If consumption is determined to be excessive, the Utilities Collection Clerk or other designated City staff will notify the property owner and instruct them to reduce the flow. If excessive usage continues after one written warning, the property will no longer be eligible for billing adjustments under the Run Water Advisory, and all consumption will be billed based on actual usage.
 - b. Ratepayers who fail to follow Run Water instructions may also be subject to enforcement measures or fines in accordance with the City's Water Management By-law.
106. Where a property has received a Run Water Advisory Notice, the account holder associated with the subject property will be billed based on estimated consumption, as determined above.

107. No billing adjustments will be made for a property subject to a Run Water Advisory where:
 - a. Consumption is zero (0m³); or
 - b. Actual consumption is less than the estimated historical usage or historical account usage.
108. All properties subject to a Run Water Advisory will be added to a Run Water Advisory List maintained by the Utilities Collection Clerk. Once a property is placed on the list:
 - a. A Run Water Advisory Letter will be issued and sent by regular mail to the address on file according to the utility account records; and
 - b. A notice will appear as a comment on the bill for the period, indicating that water consumption has been adjusted to account for the advisory.
109. During a Run Water Advisory, the account holder is responsible for any costs associated with frozen pipes resulting from non-compliance with the advisory. The City will not be liable for damages or repair costs where the advisory was not followed.
110. Where a property subject to a Run Water Advisory changes ownership, the Utilities Collection Clerk will provide a Run Water Advisory Letter by regular mail to the new account holder and place the property on the Run Water Advisory List.
111. When it is determined that a Run Water Advisory is no longer required for a property, City staff will notify the affected property owner that the advisory has ended. At the conclusion of the advisory period, a final meter reading will be taken to support applicable billing adjustments under the Run Water Advisory framework.
112. The Utilities Collection Clerk will note the account with the date that actual consumption is to be used again for billing purposes.

Transition from Legacy Billing Practices

113. Existing tenant-held utility accounts may remain in the tenant's name for the time being; however, this practice is being formally phased out and will no longer be permitted. When a tenant vacates the property or has arrears that are transferred to the property tax roll, the tenant's utility account will be closed, and all future billing will be in the property owner's name in accordance with this policy. No new tenant-held accounts will be permitted after the effective date of this policy (July 21, 2025).

114. Any arrears remaining on a tenant-held account will be transferred to the property owner's tax roll for recovery, as outlined in this policy. This applies despite any provisions or collections framework under previous utility billing policies. This transfer process replaces former practices, such as service disconnection or reliance on tenant enforcement, and ensures consistent, property-based enforcement under the City's current utility billing and collections framework.
115. This replaces previous practices such as service disconnection and ensures consistent enforcement under the City's current utility billing and collections framework.
116. Property owners are responsible for ensuring that all utility balances, whether incurred by themselves, tenants, or prior owners, are paid in full. Where ownership has changed and arrears have transferred to the tax roll, the current owner is encouraged to contact the legal representative who handled the purchase and sale transaction to determine liability and explore any recourse available under the terms of the sale agreement.
117. A \$200 deposit was historically required for tenants of Owen Sound Non-Profit Housing 2150 9th Avenue East in conjunction with billing designate applications. This deposit is applied to the tenant's final bill at the end of their tenancy.
118. While a limited number of deposits may still be held for existing accounts, the City will no longer require or accept new deposits under this policy moving forward, as the City now requires utility accounts to be retained in the name of the property owner. Any remaining deposits will continue to be administered in accordance with the original terms.

Policy review

119. The Manager of Finance will review this policy:
 - a. Every five (5) years to ensure effectiveness and compliance with current business processes; or
 - b. sooner, if required, based on legislative changes.
120. The Manager of Finance is authorized to make such administrative changes to this policy as appropriate to keep the policy current. Any revision to the policy's intent must be presented to Council for consideration.

Related Information and Resources

Internal

- 121. [Records and Information Management Policy](#)
- 122. Letter of Authorization Form

External

- 123. [Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25 | ontario.ca](#)
- 124. [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)

Appendices

- 125. N/A

Revision History

Authority	Date	Approval	Description of Amendment
Council	2025-07-21	By-law No. 2025-091	New combined policy - formerly FS18 and FS21
Choose an item.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Choose an item.	
Choose an item.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Choose an item.	