



Public Facilities Committee Agenda

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

The Public Facilities Committee will hold this meeting as a hybrid meeting on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at 7:00 PM in Room 204. To view this meeting using Zoom use this link: <https://newtonma.gov.zoom.us/j/82175287431> or call 1-646-558-8656 and use the following Meeting ID: 821 7528 7431

Item Scheduled for Discussion:

- #65-24** **Discussion with Public Works about Residential Water Bills**
COUNCILORS KRINTZMAN, ALBRIGHT AND GROSSMAN requesting a discussion with Public Works about what the department has done to prepare residents for unanticipated water bills. The discussion should include actions the city has taken to prepared residents who may receive unusually high bills, actions the city is taking on behalf of residents who receive unanticipated bills, and options that residents have who receive unusually high bills. The discussion may also lead to recommendations of additional actions that the city may take.
- #66-24** **Discussion on non-working water meter transponders and billing issues**
COUNCILORS MALAKIE, KELLEY, WRIGHT, BIXBY, HUMPHREY, LAREDO, OLIVER, FARRELL and LUCAS requesting discussion with Utilities Division on issues related to non-working water meter transponders including past and current billing procedures, and potential improvements for remainder of new meter installation period.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Albright, Chair

The location of this meeting is accessible and reasonable accommodations will be provided to persons with disabilities who require assistance. If you need a reasonable accommodation, please contact the city of Newton's ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairley, at least two business days in advance of the meeting: jfairley@newtonma.gov or (617) 796-1253. The city's TTY/TDD direct line is: 617-796-1089. For the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), please dial 711.

No More Water Bill Surprises!

Sign-Up For the City of Newton Neptune 360 Consumer Water Portal and Take Control of Your Water Usage

Learn more about your water habits and conserve water with the City of Newton Neptune 360 Consumer Water Portal. With your water consumption data at your fingertips, you can find answers to questions about your account without having to call or visit the utility. In addition, the City of Newton Neptune 360 Consumer Water Portal offers the following benefits.

- View and manage your water usage 24/7 with an intuitive dashboard featuring charts and graphs
- Monitor multiple properties from one account
- Set out-of-town alerts to monitor consumption and detect potential leaks
- Manage multiple meters to get a better understanding of your water usage
- Access easily from any desktop, laptop, tablet, or mobile device
- Create water threshold alerts to set a water budget, help save water, and eliminate bill surprises

Activate your City of Newton Neptune 360 portal account today, by going to <https://newtonma.my360-app.com/>

Have your water bill handy. You will need your account number, and either your full name or street address.

- Click create account on the first screen.
- Accept the website terms and conditions
- Enter the bill number without dashes
- Enter the account holder's full name(as it appears on the bill)
- Street address
- Three security questions with answers
- email address
- A link will be sent to the email for account activation (Check your spam folder as the email may be flagged as spam)
- Create a password
- Done



WATER/SEWER BILL

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://WWW.NEWTONMA.GOV>

FOR BILLING INQUIRIES, ADDRESS CHANGES AND SALE OF PROPERTY CALL (617) 796-1040

FOR METER REPAIRS CALL (617) 796-1640

FOR PAYMENT QUESTIONS CALL (617) 796-1330

FOR STORMWATER QUESTIONS CALL (617) 796-1038

TERMS: BILLS DUE 30 DAYS FROM BILL DATE.

Past due balances may be subject to interest charges at 6% per annum.

MAILING ADDRESS	ACCOUNT NUMBER	BILLING DATE
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/24/2023
	METER NUMBER	DUE DATE
	[REDACTED]	12/26/2023

BILLING ACTIVITY FOR	[REDACTED]
PRIOR BALANCE	\$0.01
INTEREST CHARGES	\$0.00

IMPERVIOUS AREA SQ FOOTAGE

*For Non-Residential Property where Storm Water Impervious Surface Area Rates apply, Please visit www.newtonma.gov for details.

CURRENT CHARGES FOR BILL DATE	11/24/2023
WATER	\$38.10
SEWER	\$59.20
STORMWATER	\$28.50
LESS ELDERLY O DISCOUNT	\$0.00
LESS ELDERLY W DISCOUNT	\$0.00
TOTAL CURRENT CHARGES	\$125.80
PLEASE PAY TOTAL AMOUNT DUE	\$125.81

CONSUMPTION	WATER	SEWER	COMBINED
1 to 10 HCF	\$7.62	\$11.84	\$19.46
11 to 25 HCF	\$8.81	\$13.85	\$22.66
26 to 60 HCF	\$10.13	\$14.88	\$25.01
> 60 HCF	\$12.63	\$17.11	\$29.74

Outdoor Meter Rates \$13.92 per HCF

If you have received an ESTIMATED bill, please take a picture of the meter number and meter read and email it to waterbilling@newtonma.gov. If the read is higher, we advise to pay the bill as it stands. If the read is lower you will receive an abatement letter in 5-7 days explaining the amount to take off your bill. You WILL NOT receive a revised bill.

CURRENT CONSUMPTION		CONSUMPTION HISTORY		USAGE ON METER	
READING DATE	READING	READ TYPE	CONSUMPTION	REMOVED	
11/21/2023	19	E	5	0	A-Automatic Reading Transmitted to City Hall
08/24/2023	14				C-Customer Read
USAGE					V-Visual Read By City Technician
Hundred Cubic Feet: 5					E-Estimate
1 HCF (Hundred Cubic Feet) = 750 Gallons					M-Manual Adjusted Read

ESTIMATED READ

BILLING DATE	ACCT #
11/24/2023	[REDACTED]



CITY OF NEWTON
P.O. BOX 9137
NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02460-9137

ESTIMATED READ

DUE DATE	12/26/2023
BILL #	76048067
TOTAL DUE	\$125.81
AMOUNT PAID	\$

In order to insure that your account is credited properly: Please return the bottom portion of this statement, include the BILL NUMBER on your check, and make it payable to: City of Newton.

1 MB *A-01-VZP-AM-03058-11



CITY OF NEWTON
PO BOX 9137
NEWTON MA 02460-9137

01416042024876048067300000125815



WATER/SEWER BILL

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://WWW.NEWTONMA.GOV>

FOR BILLING INQUIRIES, ADDRESS CHANGES AND SALE OF PROPERTY CALL (617) 796-1040

FOR METER REPAIRS CALL (617) 796-1640

FOR PAYMENT QUESTIONS CALL (617) 796-1330

FOR STORMWATER QUESTIONS CALL (617) 796-1038

TERMS: BILLS DUE 30 DAYS FROM BILL DATE.

Past due balances may be subject to interest charges at 6% per annum.

MAILING ADDRESS	ACCOUNT NUMBER	BILLING DATE
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	11/24/2023
	METER NUMBER	DUE DATE
	[REDACTED]	12/26/2023

BILLING ACTIVITY FOR	[REDACTED]
PRIOR BALANCE	\$80.50
INTEREST CHARGES	\$2.35

CURRENT CHARGES FOR BILL DATE	11/24/2023
WATER	\$0.00
SEWER	\$0.00
STORMWATER	\$28.50
LESS ELDERLY O DISCOUNT	\$0.00
LESS ELDERLY W DISCOUNT	\$0.00
TOTAL CURRENT CHARGES	\$28.50
PLEASE PAY TOTAL AMOUNT DUE	\$111.35

IMPERVIOUS AREA SQ FOOTAGE			
*For Non-Residential Property where Storm Water Impervious Surface Area Rates apply, Please visit www.newtonma.gov for details.			
CONSUMPTION	WATER	SEWER	COMBINED
1 to 10 HCF	\$7.62	\$11.84	\$19.46
11 to 25 HCF	\$8.81	\$13.85	\$22.66
26 to 60 HCF	\$10.13	\$14.88	\$25.01
> 60 HCF	\$12.63	\$17.11	\$29.74
Outdoor Meter Rates \$13.92 per HCF			

RIGHT TO DISPUTE YOUR WATER/SEWER BILL: Please go to www.newtonma.gov for the Application for Water Leak Abatement. While in dispute, owner is still responsible for FULL PAYMENT OF THE BILL by due date to avoid interest charges.

CURRENT CONSUMPTION		CONSUMPTION HISTORY		USAGE ON METER
READING DATE	READING	READ TYPE	CONSUMPTION	REMOVED
11/21/2023				0
USAGE				
Hundred Cubic Feet:				
1 HCF (Hundred Cubic Feet) = 750 Gallons				
				A-Automatic Reading Transmitted to City Hall
				C-Customer Read
				V-Visual Read By City Technician
				E-Estimate
				M-Manual Adjusted Read

PAY THIS BILL ONLINE @ WWW.NEWTONMA.GOV INSTEAD OF your personal online bank. It's safe, easy, and secure.

BILLING DATE	ACCT #
11/24/2023	[REDACTED]



CITY OF NEWTON
P.O. BOX 9137
NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02460-9137

DUE DATE	12/26/2023
BILL #	76049736
TOTAL DUE	\$111.35
AMOUNT PAID	\$

In order to insure that your account is credited properly: Please return the bottom portion of this statement, include the BILL NUMBER on your check, and make it payable to: City of Newton.

1 AV *A-01-VZP-AM-01818-5



CITY OF NEWTON
PO BOX 9137
NEWTON MA 02460-9137

01416042024876049736200000111351

Dear Property Owner,

We have good news: the City of Newton is beginning a Water Meter Replacement Program.

This very important project includes the installation of new water meters, new transponders (sometimes called the meter transmission unit (MTU)) and a new data collection system.

This will begin the process of eliminating the estimated water and sewer bills that many Newton property owners have been receiving due to the issues with the meter transponders. Newton's Utility Department has already begun replacing some meter transmission units (MTU) with new ones, resulting in actual water consumption reads being sent to our Billing Division.

Estimated Reads Calculation Explanation

As a result of the Water Meter Replacement project and new transponders being installed, we anticipate some properties that have received multiple water/sewer bills with *estimated* reads will receive a catch-up bill. (In other words, the actual read when the new transponder is installed may be higher (or sometimes lower) than the estimated reads.)

Please know that the *water meters* have been accurately reading water usage throughout your estimated read period; the transponders just have not been automatically transmitting the information to our Billing Division.

If you have received an estimated bill, the city will perform a daily analysis of the water consumption to ensure that any catchup bill accurately reflects the appropriate rate tiers for water through the estimated read period. (The City of Newton charges different rates based on the amount of water used; these are called rate tiers.)

Once your new meter and MTU are installed, your next water/sewer bill will be based on the actual meter read.

If the actual meter read is higher (or lower) than the estimates, the Water/Sewer Billing Division will run a daily analysis of all water/sewer bills for the period that you received estimated bills to ensure that a catchup bill correctly accounts for the rate tier and the price of the water at the time of consumption.

12-Month Payment Plan

If you have a catchup bill because the actual read is higher than the estimates, the City is offering customers two payment options.

One agreement /payment option spreads the balance owed equally over 12 months. The other payment option would allow for minimal monthly payments for 11 months with a final balloon payment in month 12.

Both payment options do not charge interest for that twelve-month period.

Customers can request either option via email at waterbilling@newtonma.gov or in person at the Water Billing Department located in Newton City Hall at 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton.

If your actual read is LOWER than the estimates, the City immediately process a refund.

Customer Portal

One of the benefits of the new water meter system is the addition of a customer portal, which allows all customers to monitor their water usage in real time and set alerts for increased usage. Customers that set alerts in the portal and the City will be able to identify leaks and excessive water usage.

During the appointment when a new water meter is installed, the meter installation technician will ask property owners if they would like to sign up for the portal and will record the associated e-mail address. If you opt not to sign up for the customer portal during the installation of the meter, the City will publicize other options on how to sign up for the customer portal at another time.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during your water meter upgrade.

Water Meter Information

1) History

From 2010 through 2012, the City replaced residential water meters and installed water meter reading transmission units (MTUs) on the outside of each building to streamline the billing process. The MTUs allow Newton's Department of Public Works employees to remotely collect the water usage data for billing without entering homes. The MTUs worked well until 2019 when a number of MTUs began to malfunction and did not transmit readings. The manufacturer of the MTUs was unable to provide the required number of replacement MTUs due to significant supply chain issues and the vendor is no longer supporting the hardware/software.

Despite the MTU malfunctions, the water meters continue to accurately record water usage.

The City made the decision to replace the meter system in every residential and commercial property. In the Spring of 2022 in line with MassDEP's recommendation of meter replacement every 10 years.

The City is using the Houston-Galveston Area Cooperative (HGAC) to purchase Neptune water meters. The HGAC is a nationwide government procurement service that local governments are eligible to purchase through. All contracts available through HGAC have been awarded through a public competitive procurement process.

The meter supplier, Neptune, is a reputable, long-standing national company that all updates to meters and MTUs are backwards compatible.

The City bid and awarded the meter installation contract to Baystate Winsupply Company as they were the qualified and the low bid. The contractor began replacement of the gateways for the new meters in the Fall of 2022. The residential meter/MTU replacements began in May of 2023.

2) Meter Replacement Program information

We are over 28% complete with the meter replacements. The contractor is currently replacing an average of 500 meters per week.

When a meter is replaced, the City takes a photo of the water service pipes, water usage and identification number on the "old" meter, and the newly installed meter. We keep the old meters for two billing cycles.

Customer Portal Information – Please see attached flyer.

Please click the below link for a dashboard of the Water Meter Replacement Project progress:

<https://apexmapping.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/109a19a3a1fe415ea15749f1d862e7a3>

3) Estimated billing protocol:

Estimated bill examples and explanation of our notification (photos) attached.

a. Statistics

- i. # bills per quarter – 29,518*
of quarterly estimated bills – 14,103
of quarterly customer provided actual reads – 179
- ii. # of payment plans – 59*

b. Overestimated

Any customer that provides an actual read and it is determined that they received an overestimated bill will receive a letter stating that the bill was overestimated and that the bill was reduced by the appropriate amount. If the customer has already paid the bill, a credit appears on their next bill. The customer has the option of requesting a refund of the credit balance through the Treasury Department.

c. Underestimated

Notification is sent to every customer that submits an actual read.

PROCESS FOR ACTUAL READS THAT ARE UNDER 50 HCFS:

If the city receives the read within 10 days of the close of the billing cycle, the bill is adjusted to reflect actual usage. If not, the Billing Office notices the customer that for the City to ensure that the customer receives a bill based on actual usage, an actual reading needs to be sent to the billing office of within 10 days of the billing cycle. Instruction on when and how to send the actual read is provided to each customer.

PROCESS FOR ACTUAL READS THAT ARE 50 HCFS AND ABOVE:

Customer is informed that the read is significantly higher, and the City is scheduling the customer for expedited replacement of meter/MTU. It is important to note that the customer will need to make appointment for replacement once they receive notification from the contractor. If there is an issue with the meter replacement, the Utilities Division will replace the meter

transmission unit to ensure that the customer will receive actual reads going forward.

4) CATCHUP BILL/DAILY ANALYSIS

Customers may receive a “catchup” bill once they receive the water/sewer bill that accurately reflects the amount owed for actual water usage. The City performs a daily analysis of the water consumption to ensure that any catchup bill accurately reflects the appropriate historical rate tiers for water through the estimated read period.

5) PAYMENT PLAN

The City offers two options for a one-year zero interest free payment plan for all catchup bills. Property owners may pay in equal amounts over twelve months or wait until the end of the twelve months and pay in full.

If customers are unable to pay the full amount at the end of the twelve-month plan, a municipal lien may be placed on the property, accruing interest until settled by the property owner.

If the city were to offer a payment plan that extends beyond a year, the City would lose the ability to lien the property in order to collect what is owed if a customer is unable to make payments.

6) Actual Bill after Meter Replacement

Please see attached handout that customers receive at time of meter replacement. It provides explanations of the estimated reads calculation, daily analysis, and information on the 12-month payment plan.