



CITY OF FREEPORT  
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## *Welcome to the City of Freeport*

*All utility bills are due on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month.*

### **PAYING A BILL WITH A CARD IN CITY OF FREEPORT OFFICE –**

- If a customer comes into the City of Freeport office to pay their bill with a card, the clerk will ask for the customer's driver's license, which must match the name on the credit card.
- Processing fee for card payments will apply in person, over the phone and on-line.

### **IRRIGATION USAGE –**

Please be advised that City of Freeport Regulations prohibit the use of potable water for irrigation. If you are applying for potable water service from the City of Freeport, you are prohibited from connecting an irrigation system to city water, even if the home you are purchasing has an irrigation system. The City of Freeport is a Xeriscape Community and encourages the use of drought tolerant species for landscaping to reduce the need for irrigation. Should you choose to irrigate, you are required to apply to the Northwest Florida Water Management District for an irrigation well.

### **UTILITY CUSTOMER ACCOUNT SECURITY POLICY –**

Below is the Utility Billing Department policy for opening, closing or making changes to an account.

#### **OPENING/CLOSING AN ACCOUNT –**

- To open a new utility account, the customer must provide a photo ID and their social security number. Per council policy, if a customer does not want to provide their social security number, they must pay double what their deposit will be for that location. A valid ID is required to open an account.
  - If there is a secondary person on the account, and they want to be able to make changes to the account, their social security number and ID must be on file. If there is only a secondary name with no social security number or driver's license, they may make payments and inquire about the account but will not be allowed to make any changes to the account.
- When closing an account (disconnecting service), the customer must come into the office, show their identification and fill out a disconnect form. If the customer cannot come into the office, they can email the disconnect form but must also email a copy of their identification.

#### **ACCOUNT CHANGES OVER THE PHONE OR IN CITY OF FREEPORT OFFICE –**

- If a customer calls in to make a change to their account (i.e. Change phone number or mailing address on the account, go on/come off maintenance), the clerk will ask the customer to verify the last 4 digits of their social security number. If we do not have one on file, we will ask to verify the last 4 digits of their driver's license. If we do not have a social security number or driver's license on file, the customer will have to come into the office to update their information.
- If a customer comes into the City of Freeport office to make any changes to their account, the clerk will ask for identification to verify their identity before making any changes.

#### **UTILITY CUSTOMER DEPOSIT POLICY –**

- Utility Customers who are signing up for new service with the City of Freeport, must provide their Social Security number on the application to receive services.

- If a customer does not wish to provide their Social Security number, they will be required to pay double their deposit for that service address. The rates will be as follows:
  - Residential Inside Water Only: \$100.00
  - Residential Inside Water and Sewer: \$200.00
  - Residential Outside Water Only: \$125.00
  - Residential Outside Water and Sewer: \$225.00
  - Commercial Inside Water Only: \$200.00
  - Commercial Inside Water and Sewer: \$400.00
  - Commercial Outside Water Only: \$250.00
  - Commercial Outside Water and Sewer: \$500.00

**BAD CHECK POLICY - (Effective April 15, 2019)**

The following is the Utility Billing Department policy for bad checks written to the City of Freeport.

- If a check is returned, a service charge is added to the account; \$25 if the face value does not exceed \$50, \$30 if the face value exceeds \$50 but does not exceed \$300, \$40 if the face value exceeds \$300, or 5 percent of the face amount of the dishonored instrument, whichever is greater.
- The service charge is to be placed on the account the same day the payment is reversed.
- Send certified letter to customer (body of letter should state exactly this information from Florida Statute 68.065) Actions to collect worthless payment instruments: attorney fees and collection costs.
  - ‘You are hereby notified that a check, draft, order of payment, debit card order, or electronic funds transfer numbered \_\_\_\_\_ in the face amount of \_\_\_\_\_ issued by you on \_\_\_\_\_, drawn upon \_\_\_\_\_ Bank, and payable to City of Freeport, has been dishonored on Account # \_\_\_\_\_. Pursuant to Florida law, you have 30 days from receipt of this notice to tender payment in cash of the full amount of the dishonored payment instrument, plus a service charge of \$25 if the face value does not exceed \$50, \$30 if the face value exceeds \$50 but does not exceed \$300, \$40 if the face value exceeds \$300, or 5 percent of the face amount of the dishonored instrument, whichever is greater, the total amount due being \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Unless this amount is paid in full within the 30-day period, the holder of the dishonored payment instrument may file a civil action against you for three times the amount of the dishonored instrument, but in no case less than \$50, in addition to the payment of the dishonored instrument plus any court costs, reasonable attorney fees, and any bank fees incurred by the payee in taking the action.’
- If no payment after 30 days (keep copy of letter and certified receipt), turn over to State Attorney at (850) 892-8080.
- If the customer has had three (3) dishonored checks in a one-year time period (either electronic or paper), the customer will have to pay their bill (after all past due amounts and fees are paid), in certified funds (cash, card, or money order)

**Disconnection Policy – (effective November 1, 2023)**

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions apply:

- (A) **Disconnection:** A deliberate interruption of a customer’s water and/or sewer service by the City of Freeport.
- (B) **Delinquency:** Failure by the customer to tender payment for a valid bill or charge by the scheduled due date.
- (C) **Business Days:** Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays and any other time the City of Freeport offices are not open to the public.
- (D) **Dishonored Instrument:** A check or other medium of payment tendered to the City of Freeport of which is denied payment by the payor bank, and which is subsequently returned unpaid or uncollected to the City of Freeport.

**1. General Rule:**

**All bills are due to be paid by the 14<sup>th</sup> of each month unless the 14<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or legal holiday observed by the City of Freeport. If the 14<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or legal holiday observed by the City of Freeport, all bills are due to be paid by the next business day. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month, ANY account with an outstanding monthly balance will be assessed a penalty for late payment in the amount of \$10.00. Once water goes through the city’s meter it is billed, customers are responsible for ALL charges once the meter is checked and verified to be working properly. The city is NOT responsible for theft, hoses, proper functioning of sprinkler systems, internal and/or external plumbing breaks, problems or malfunctions and ANY other type of customer private property issue related to the utility service.**

The Mayor or City Manager or his/her designee shall have the authority to adjust and/or waive any penalty or other fees. City staff will automatically forgive the penalty when the postmark date is on or prior to the current month's due date. The City of Freeport provides a "Leak Adjustment" once per year with documentation of the leak being fixed. The City of Freeport also provides a One in a Lifetime Adjustment for non-leak events once during the lifetime of the customer at that address.

## **2. Time and Notice of Disconnection:**

**In the event the utility bill has not been paid by the close of business on the 27<sup>th</sup>, or if the 27<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday, then by the end of the next business day, the customer's water and/or sewer service shall be disconnected/terminated on the following business day. In no event will termination of services occur for nonpayment prior to the 28<sup>th</sup> of the month.**

**Automated reminder calls (2) will be provided to all customers with an outstanding balance on the 17<sup>th</sup> or next business day and again on the 23<sup>rd</sup> or next business day, a third contact attempt (phone, text or email) will be made the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> AND PRIOR to disconnect. The city will not be liable if a customer does not receive any of the attempted contact methods AND the customer's account will be noted of all of the time/date of contact attempts.**

## **3. Administration Fee:**

A \$25.00 administration fee will be placed on all the utility accounts owing a bill greater than \$75.00 when the disconnect report is printed on the 28<sup>th</sup>/cut-off day. Please note, ANY customers making payments under an approved payment plan will not be charged this fee provided ALL terms of the plan have been followed. Also, customers that have a valid charitable organization provide proof they will pay the customer's bill will not receive this fee nor should their services be disconnected.

## **4. Restoration of Services:**

Services will not be reconnected prior to the customer paying the bill in full. The Mayor or City Manager, his/her designee may allow the current month's late penalty and/or the administrative fee to be paid the following month.

Same day reconnect is only available if a customer pays by 4:30 p.m. on the day of disconnection. Any customer paying after 4:30 p.m. on disconnect day will be reconnected the following business day. Reconnects will begin at 3:00 p.m. on disconnect day.

\*Customers will be charged for any broken or damaged parts, as well as labor charges, if they attempt to break the lock and turn the water back on themselves. Cutting and/or damaging city equipment constitutes Theft of Utilities, and a report will be filed with the Sheriff's Department if this occurs.

## **5. Postponement of Disconnection/Early Restoration for Medical Emergency:**

The City of Freeport will allow for a postponement of disconnection or temporary service restoration for a medical emergency of not more than ten (10) business days past the scheduled disconnection date if the customer, or a member of the customer's household, has a certified medical emergency. A medical emergency would exist if the customer/household member has a condition that will be aggravated by the lack of water service. A medical emergency must be certified by a physician or public health official and provided on their letterhead. Requests for additional postponement are granted only if the certifying physician or public health official state ten (10) days is not sufficient.

Total postponement/restoration shall not exceed twenty (20) days in a twelve (12)-month-period per household. Postponement/early restoration for a medical emergency in no way relieves the customer of its payment obligation to the City of Freeport. Payment arrangements will be made at the time of the extension/early restoration.

## **6. Dishonored Instrument:**

The customer shall be charged a service charge according to §68.065 Fla. Stat. for every dishonored check submitted as payment to the City of Freeport. The City of Freeport will send notice of the return of payment to the customer stating the disconnection date if not paid or suitable arrangement made. Any customer providing a dishonored instrument to avoid disconnection or to have services restored shall have their services disconnected immediately once city staff is notified of the dishonored instrument. The City of Freeport reserves the right to discontinue accepting checks from anyone that has presented three dishonored checks.

## **LEAK CHECK POLICY -**

The following is the Utility Billing Department policy for checking for leaks.

- If the customer receives their water bill and is concerned, they may have a leak, the City will come out and do a leak check at the meter.
- Once the leak check is completed by the water technician, the work order will be sent back to the Billing Department, who will call the customer and let them know if they have a leak or not.
- If the customer does not have a leak and does not agree with the technician report of no leak, they are able to do a Usage Report for a fee of \$50, or, if they are concerned about the accuracy of the meter, an Accuracy Test for a fee of \$120.

- If the customer wants a technician to come back out to the residence and do another leak check within the same billing period, they will be charged a \$25 Service Fee.

## **ADJUSTMENTS:**

### **LATE FEE ADJUSTMENTS –**

- No late fees shall be credited back to any customer unless the error is the fault of The City of Freeport. Payments that have not been postmarked by, made online by, or received in office by the late fee date (the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month) will be assessed a late fee of \$10 per the policy of the City.

### **HIGH CONSUMPTION DISPUTE PAYMENTS/ADJUSTMENTS –**

- If a customer has an unusually high bill and they are disputing findings about a leak, the customer must pay the bill in full and the adjustment, if warranted, will be retroactive.
  - If the bill is over \$500, the Manager and/or Mayor may make an exception to allow for the tests to be done before payment is made.
  - High bills will be checked before bills run to try and avoid any high bills being produced because of a leak and adjusted before the bill is sent to the customer.

### **LEAK ADJUSTMENTS –**

- The customer receives their bill, and the City of Freeport does a work order to check the meter for a leak. If there is a leak at the meter or on the customer side, the bill is adjusted to half the cost of water and half the cost of sewer charges on the bill for the previous month only. This may only be done once per year, and the City must verify that the leak has been fixed by 1) Checking Usage Report to see that leak has stopped, 2) Customer must supply to City copies of receipt (s) for parts, labor, plumber, etc. showing work completed on leak PRIOR to any adjustment being made.
- The Mayor/City Manager will approve all leak adjustments (must fill out and sign form) if the leak runs over 2 billing cycles.

### **ONCE IN A LIFETIME ADJUSTMENT FOR ISSUE OTHER THAN LEAK –**

- If a customer has a water issue (other than a repairable leak or irrigation-related issue), they are eligible for an adjustment of ½ of ONE highest bill per customer, per location. This adjustment cannot be used as an additional adjustment for a leak within a 12-month period. Additional adjustments past the one, will be at the discretion of the Mayor and/or City Manager.

### **POOL FILL ADJUSTMENT POLICY –**

The following is the Utility Billing Department policy for adjusting **sewer only** charges for pool/hot tub fills.

- If a customer is filling their pool/hot tub, they may call the City of Freeport Utility Billing Department to get a pre-fill read on their meter.
- Once the pool/hot tub is filled, the customer must call the Utility Billing Department back for a post-fill reading on the meter.
- Upon receipt of both the pre- and post-fill work orders, the billing department will then credit back the sewer charge only for water gallons used to fill the pool/hot tub.
- These readings must be done during business hours, Monday through Thursday, when the Water Department is open.
- The City of Freeport cannot do pre- or post-fill readings on Fridays, or on the weekends.
  - Customer photos of the meter before and after will not be accepted for the sewer adjustment.
- ❖ Pool/ Hot Tub Fill can only be used 1 time per year.

*Anchor Here, Grow Here*