

Newport Water Division
Plan for Collections Post Moratorium

May 14, 2020

I. Outreach

The Newport Water Division (NWD) is modifying our communication with accounts that are past due. Our goal is to have contact with our customers who are having financial hardship. We also realize our communication needs to be easy to understand so that customers are comfortable with contacting NWD. We also realize some customers are making choices on which bills to pay. The communication includes the following:

- April 2020 included the following message on all bills.

We recognize we are in challenging times. We encourage customers to pay their bill. If necessary please contact us at 401-845-5607 so we can work with you to set up a payment plan to the extent of your financial ability. Newport Water will not be terminating service during the pandemic.

- May 2020 bills included a separate insert (attached) sent to only bills that had a past due amount. The bills to all other customers included the same message from April.
- June 2020 bills, it is proposed that a separate personalized letter will be sent to any account past due, which has not contacted us regarding a payment plan.
- We also plan to add messages on the bills of customers who are paying to thank them for helping NWD to ensure safe and reliable service
- If NWD does begin water shut-offs at some point, we will begin with accounts that were past due as of March 1, 2020, prior to COVID 19 events. This would be the first group to receive shutoff notices. For customers who receive shut-off notices, and who contact NWD, we would try to work with these customers to develop payment plan to avoid water service termination.

II. Payment Arrangements

NWD has suspended the accrual of interest on past due accounts as of May 1, 2020.

NWD is looking at options to make it easy for our customers to pay. The option of NWD absorbing fees currently charged to customers for payments made by credit card is being reviewed. We realize we will need to seek PUC approval for this option. Currently payments (checks and/or cash) in person are only accepted at City Hall at the Collections Office. We will be considering arrangements whereby customers can also make payments at Halsey Street by check or money order for a period of time.

NWD is also offering flexible payment plans that extend beyond three months. We realize each customer's situation is different, and we need to identify what works for each customer. This could include an extended payment plan (6 months) for the amount in arrears with current bills being paid on

schedule or potentially working out a budget plan that meets the individual customer needs. The Deputy Director is developing the methodology to be used for customers requiring a Budget Plan.

NWD has two (2) billing clerks who are the initial contact regarding establishing a payment plan. In addition, the Financial Analyst can assist with preparing payment plans.. For information on payment plans customers are directed to call the office or email. All calls and emails are logged and routed to a Billing Clerk.

We are also sensitive to the to the hospitality industry, which is a significant proportion of our customer base. NWD does not want to encumber their return to operations when the moratorium is lifted. Our goal is to work to establish a mutually acceptable payment plan/budget. Termination of service for the hospitality industry would be considered as last resort at some point in the future.



THE CITY OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND - AMERICA'S FIRST RESORT
DEPARTMENT OF UTILITIES

Julia A. Forgue, PE
Director

May 1, 2020

Dear Newport Utility Customer,

Our records indicate that your account has one or more past due bills. If payment has been made, thank you and disregard this notice. If you have not made a payment please remember that all bills are due within 30 days from the billing date and are subject to interest charges at the rate of 1 ½% per month. Please note, due to the coronavirus outbreak the Department of Utilities has suspended collection activities including service disconnections for all past due accounts.

If you have not made a payment and are experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 outbreak please contact our office to arrange for a payment plan that may help to alleviate some of the financial burden. The payment plan will extend the due dates of your past due balance and avoid a higher balance due later which might be even more difficult to manage.

To discuss a Pay Plan please contact our Customer Service department at 401-845-5600 or by email at utilitybilling@cityofnewport.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'William Yost, Jr.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

William Yost, Jr
Deputy Utility Director - Finance
Newport Department of Utilities