

**NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY COUNCIL
UTILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
COUNCIL CHAMBERS – 6:30 p.m.
TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2021**

To Order:

Chairman Dennis Boose called the Utilities Committee meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Attendance:

Members present: Chairman Dennis Boose and Councilman Clifford Winkel.

Also present: Mayor Kevin Corcoran, President Martin DeVries, Councilman Bruce Abens, Assistant Clerk of Council Shari Ma, Deputy Clerk of Council Lisa Ciofani, Safety-Service Director Jeff Armbruster, Councilwoman Holly Swenk, Director of Public Utilities Tara Peet (via Zoom), and Councilman Jim Maleski.

Minutes:

Chairman Boose asked for any corrections to the minutes of July 20, 2020. No discussion was offered.

Moved by Winkel and seconded by Boose to approve the meeting minutes.

A voice vote was taken and the motion carried.

Yes – 2

No – 0

Discussion regarding T 129-2020

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING N.R.C.O. SECTION 1046.08 *DELINQUENT ACCOUNTS; DISCONTINUANCE OF SERVICE.*

Chairman Boose asked Mayor Corcoran to discuss the proposed Ordinance.

Mayor Corcoran provided the Utilities Committee and other guests with a summary and explanation of the proposed amended Ordinance section 1046.08. Mayor Corcoran introduced the Ordinance to increase the water turn-on fees to cover costs associated with disconnecting and reconnecting residents' water services. He stated that the fees are the charges that the resident has to pay in order to get their water services restored after disconnection due to lack of payment. The fees were originally introduced in an Ordinance in 1982, 1741-82. The original amount of the fee was \$10.00 for the first shut off, \$20.00 for the second, and \$40.00 for the third and thereafter. The decision to present this amendment is the result of several conversations the Mayor has had with others regarding the water disconnection and reconnection costs to the City as well as other City business. The Mayor stated that he believes the request to increase the fees associated with water turn-on violations is justifiable and that fees have not been increased in almost 40 years. The Mayor also informed the Committee that the City does not shut-off residents' water services during the months of November and December due to the holiday season.

Chairman Boose thanked the Mayor for his comments and asked if anyone else had any comments.

Safety-Service Director Armbruster stated that the Utilities Department gives residents more than 3 months and delinquent notices before disconnection. During this time, residents have the option to call and make arrangements for payment and the City is also very lenient because they know that water is extremely important to any resident. In most cases, residents will make arrangements to pay their bill. After the initial three months, residents have the option to make payment arrangement, even after they have received the shut-off notice. Safety-Service Director Armbruster closed his comment by stating that he believes the increase in fees should be considered by Council.

Chairman Boose thanked Safety-Service Director Armbruster for his comment and then asked Director of Public Utilities Peet if she had any questions or comments to add. No discussion was offered.

Chairman Boose opened up the floor to Councilman Winkel for comments.

Councilman Winkel stated that he was initially concerned about increasing the fees for water turn-on because residents who are already struggling with paying their water bill will struggle more, paying an additional charge to get their services restored. At the same time, Councilman Winkel understands that the City's water turn-on fees have not been increased in over 30 years and comparable to surrounding areas the increase is justifiable. Councilman Winkel suggested that the Committee review what the City actually spends on disconnections and reconnections depending on various variables like how much time it takes to locate water valves, hourly wages, etc. Councilman Winkel repeated his initial concern of putting residents who may be already struggling financially in a greater deficit. He went on to explain the research that was provided to the Committee turn-on fees for water violations in Avon, North Olmsted, Grafton, and Lorain vary depending on the city in which you live in. Councilman Winkel reached out to Community Care to find out assistance programs for residents who may need help paying their utility bills. Councilman Winkel stated Community Care provided \$25,000 this year helping residents pay their bills.

Chairman Boose thanked Councilman Winkel for his comments.

Chairman Boose stated that he also had the same concerns as Councilman Winkel and that he had a conversation with Safety-Service Director Armbruster earlier because he wants to make sure residents who already pay their bill are not penalized. Councilman Boose felt that those who choose not to pay their bill should be dealt with; however, the majority of the residents who fall behind in payment do so because of some sort of hardship. Chairman Boose went on to explain his understanding of the City's delinquent notification process and explained how residents are given several delinquent notices. However, Chairman Boose believes that a resident who is already struggling to pay their bills may also struggle with talking to someone about paying their bills because they may be embarrassed and in turn run out of time and then lose water service. Chairman Boose

agreed with Councilman Winkel's comments. Councilman Boose stated, although he is concerned with increasing water turn-on fees, he too understands that the City has not had an increase of fees and he believes the City needs to cover the costs that are associated with disconnection and reconnection. Chairman Boose asked Safety-Service Director Armbruster directly if the City has mapped out resident water valves.

Safety-Service Director Armbruster advised they know where every water line is but are not sure where every actual water valve is. Safety-Service Director Armbruster provided an explanation of variables that will impact the various locations of water valves. For instance, grass, snow level, or standing water will impact the time needed to disconnect and reconnect water services.

Chairman Boose stated that utility workers who are typically responsible for disconnecting and reconnecting a resident's water service make approximately \$25.00 per hour plus benefits and it totals approximately \$35.00 per hour. He clarified the City does not charge to turn-off services, only to turn-on services after they have been shut-off for lack of payment.

Chairman Boose stated that time could be saved because once the City shuts-off services the City knows the location of the valve, so restoring services should be easier.

Director of Public Utilities Peet informed the Committee that it typically takes 30-45 minutes depending on the scenario to disconnect or reconnect water services for non-payment.

Chairman Boose thanked Director of Public Utilities Peet for her comments and asked for further discussion.

Councilman Maleski stated that he agrees with the comments both Councilman Winkel and Councilman Boose made regarding resident hardships. Councilman Maleski advised after reviewing the Public Utilities local rates study that was concluded in July 2020, income rates are projected to increase in 2022. Therefore, 2022 would be a better time to increase the turn-on water fees. Councilman Maleski suggested that council should reconsider increasing rates in the current economy and instead, create targeted legislation that goes after City residents who are frequently delinquent with water payment.

Mayor Corcoran stated that Avon Lake increases the water rate annually in July.

Safety-Service Director Armbruster explained that the City of North Ridgeville does and will continue to work with every resident to keep water service on. The City's objective is to give every resident the opportunity to pay their bill and to stay current. When residents do not stay current, the costs of water falls on the other residents who pay their bill.

Councilman Abens stated he is aware of the many reasons why people are experiencing hardships right now, but emphasized the need to increase the turn-on fees for water. He

acknowledged that when a resident becomes delinquent with paying for the water consumption, the residents who pay are also paying the water costs for the delinquent residents.

Councilwoman Swenk inquired if the water bill follows the individual or address. Chairman Boose stated that the water bill follows the individual.

Councilman Maleski acknowledged the excellent work that Community Cares has done for the residents of North Ridgeville and wanted to make it clear that the residents who receive services because of undue hardships are not the residents who are taking advantage of the COVID-19 prohibit. The City should increase the turn-on water fees to those residents who are frequently delinquent and those who are purposefully taking advantage of the economic situation.

Chairman Boose thanked Councilman Maleski for his comments and opened up the floor for comments.

Councilman Winkel recommended an amendment to charge a flat rate of \$45.00 per occurrence to cover the City’s costs associated with the reconnection of water services.

Mayor Corcoran stated that he believes a gradual increase is necessary as a penalty to residents who are frequently delinquent paying their bill.

Moved by Boose and seconded by Winkel to change the Ordinance to read any occurrence of the turn-on fee due to non-payment shut-off is a flat fee of \$45.00.

Chairman Boose asked for any questions or comments from the Council members. No comments were offered.

Chairman Boose asked for any comments or questions from the YouTube Channel.

Deputy Clerk of Council Ciofani stated there were no comments or questions offered.

A voice vote was taken and the motion carried.

Yes – 2 No – 0

Adjournment:

Chairman Boose adjourned the meeting at 6:59 p.m.

Date Approved: _____

Shari Ma
Assistant Clerk of Council

