



## **CITY OF PUYALLUP UTILITY CUSTOMER SUPPORT POLICY COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework to support customers of the City's water, sewer, and stormwater utilities who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This framework provides guidance for customer notification, support programs, and other resources.

### **2. CUSTOMER NOTIFICATION**

Communication between the City and customers remains vital. The City's goal is to ensure customers maintain access to essential services during the state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **2.1. Utility Billing Notices**

In March 2022, the City will send delinquent notices to inform customers without payment or an active payment plan of pending services shutoff. All delinquent notices will continue to include information for available utility customer support programs.

#### **2.2. City of Puyallup Website**

The following notice will be posted on the City of Puyallup website:

The City of Puyallup is committed to keeping our customers connected to essential services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. If you are experiencing hardship resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be eligible for support, including long-term payment arrangements or bill assistance referral. This Customer Support Policy does not relieve customers from the obligation to pay for utility services.

### **3. CUSTOMER SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

Beginning with the Governor's initial proclamation in March 2020, all service shutoffs and imposition of late penalties were suspended through September 30, 2021. The City of Puyallup has extended suspension of service shutoffs through March 31, 2022 and suspension of late penalties through May 31, 2022. The City of Puyallup offers payment plans, a utility assistance program funded by federal ARPA, and referral to outside organizations for assistance with outstanding utility balances for customers financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **3.1. Payment Plans**

Payment plans are designed to assist customers in bringing utility accounts current by the end of the plan term. Payment plans will be available to residential and non-residential customers under the following guidelines:

- A. Payment Plans will be granted to all customers with accounts in a past due status experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time no late fees or service interruptions would be imposed if the payment plan is in an active status. Customers with a past due balance of \$1,000 or less may request a payment plan up to 12 months. Customers with a past due balances over \$1,000 may request a payment plan up to 18 months. All payment plans will evenly spread out the cost of outstanding balances over the term of the plan. Future bills must be paid by the due date stated on the bill.
- B. The City may choose to accept a payment plan if the customer does not timely sign and return a payment plan agreement consistent with terms specified by the City.
- C. Payments submitted for past due accounts, whether on a payment plan or not, will be applied to the oldest charges first.
- D. The city will resume imposing late penalties on billings dated May 1, 2022 or later, for all accounts that have a past due amount owed and have not arranged a payment plan.
- E. Non-compliance with a payment plan may result in shutoff of services and/or other collection activities as follows:
  - a. Upon timely notification by the customer of a late or missed payment installment, the City may, at its discretion, allow the payment plan to continue.
  - b. Absent timely notification by the customer, a disconnect notice will be issued and, if action is not taken by the customer to remedy the account, services will be shut off in accordance with the disconnect notice.
  - c. Post shutoff, payment plans may be reactivated at the discretion of the City after payment of the \$50 reconnection fee and 25% of the past due account balance.
  - d. The City reserves the right to exercise any and all lien and contractual rights and to collect outstanding utility payment. This may include, but is not limited to, discontinuing payment plans and shutting off service or not turning on service for the customer or future customers until the account is brought into good standing.

### **3.2. Utility Assistance Program (ARPA Funded)**

Customers may be eligible for utility assistance through the City's ARPA funding. Eligibility will be evaluated for all customers who request a payment plan under this policy

- A. To be eligible for utility assistance, the customer account must have been in good standing and not have had service shut off in the 12 months preceding the pandemic (March 2019 - February 2020). New customer accounts established on or after March 1, 2020, with a minimum of six months of service, are also eligible.
- B. Eligible customers will be granted 50% of the past due amount, which will be applied directly to their account.

## **4. OTHER RESOURCES**

If customers require additional resources beyond an approved payment plan and the utility assistance program, the City will refer customers to other organizations, including:

- [WA Department of Commerce](#) – Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program
- [Washington 211](#)
- [Pierce County](#) – Rent & Utility Assistance Program
- Community resources on the [City's website](#)

**5. POST-MORATORIUM TRANSITION TIMELINE**

Send delinquent notices to affected customers and approve payment arrangements for those who respond by Thursday, March 31, 2022. Specific dates:

Delinquent Notices Sent	By Friday, March 4 <sup>th</sup> - responses due March 31 <sup>st</sup>
Phone Call Follow Up	March 21 <sup>st</sup> thru March 31 <sup>st</sup>
Customer Responses Due	Thursday, March 31 <sup>st</sup>

Proceed with shutoffs for past due customers who have not requested a payment plan. Specific dates:

Create Shut Off List	April 1 <sup>st</sup>
Disconnect Notices Sent	April 4 <sup>th</sup> thru April 15 <sup>th</sup>
Shut Off Accounts	8 <sup>th</sup> day after date of disconnect notice

Note: Shut off accounts may still request a payment plan under this policy and may be eligible for utility assistance.

**6. RETURN TO NORMAL OPERATIONS**

Resume normal shut off and late fee processes for billings dated April 1, 2022 or later, for all accounts that have a past due balance and have not arranged a payment plan under this policy.