

Minutes of the Veneta City Council Work Session

January 12, 2015

Present: Sandra Larson, Tim Brooker; Thomas Cotter, Victoria Hedenstrom (left early), and Thomas Laing

Others: Shauna Hartz, Finance Director; Kay Bork, Community Services Director; Kyle Schauer, Public Works Director; and Darci Henneman, Assistant City Recorder

1 CALL TO ORDER

Chair Larson called the Veneta Work Session of the City Council to order at 3:29 p.m.

2. COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND UPDATING OF UTILITY BILLING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Hartz said this project has been on her list for a long time. She said the City's utility billing process was adopted in 1967 and many portions are no longer applicable or relevant to today's world. Resolutions have been updated on a regular basis; however, the majority of them are focused on rates and structure and not policies.

Hartz reviewed the flowchart she created which outlines the process she would like to use to update the utility billing policies and practices. She said the purpose of this work session is to explain the billing cycle and what the ordinance and resolutions say. She said there's no right or wrong way to do this but she wants to simplify the process and keep things consistent.

In response to questions from Mayor Larson, Hartz said currently customers are notified after two billing cycles that an account is delinquent. She said it's a practice that she would like to change. Hartz said she is providing the information tonight and is not asking for Council action.

Hartz said the next step will be for her to bring back a similar chart with possible options for the Council to review. She said a few issues and policies will be addressed at an administrative level which are more efficient for staff to handle. She said one policy included in the original ordinance required the Council to review all account adjustments which is unrealistic in today's world. She said that's an example of why this project has been on her list to complete.

In response to a question from Thomas Cotter, Hartz said a past due notice is sent if no payment is made by the 10th of the second month. If a payment is still not made then a door hanger is placed which gives residents 24 hours to make a payment or payment arrangements otherwise the water is shut off with no further notice. In order to turn the water back on, the City currently requires a minimum payment of 25% of the total bill and that the resident sign a payment agreement.

She said in regard to new policies and practices, it's impossible to anticipate every scenario. Currently some issues are handled on a case by case basis. She said we try to be professional and not get too personal about past due bills.

In response to a question from Mayor Larson, Hartz said Ann does a really good job of working with residents but occasionally she will deal with an upset customer.

Schauer said on average, 40 to 60 door hangers go out monthly.

Hartz said door hangers create a lot of phone calls and extra work for the front desk. She said a day or two after they go out, only six or so residents actually get their water shut off.

Thomas Cotter said it seemed like it would be easier to charge the property owner and not the renter.

Hartz said that will be one of the options for the Council to review.

In response to a question from Mayor Larson, Schauer said meters installed within the last 20 years include two shut off valves; one for the resident and one for the City. He said we provide the resident shut off valve as a courtesy when we do the install but we are not responsible for that valve. He said we shut off on our side if repairs need to be done.

Hartz said the ordinance now says we charge a fee to shut off water and then turn it back on for lack of payment. However, this is inconsistent because we don't charge if a resident wants the water turned off in order to make repairs or when residents call to turn their water off while they're on vacation. If City water is available and residents don't request the water be shut off, the base fees are charged.

In response to a question from Thomas Cotter, Hartz said we can amend the ordinance to decrease the grace period and also remove the language that deems a utility bill delinquent after 30 days.

Hartz said it may lessen staff's workload to require landlords to sign a landlord agreement which could include language addressing when and if the meters are shut off and turned back on which again, we currently don't charge for those types of shut offs.

In response to a question from Tim Brooker, Hartz said customers pay a \$70 deposit; \$50 for sewer and \$20 for water and the average monthly bill is between \$65 and \$70.

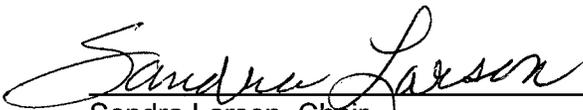
Hartz said the larger apartment complexes and mobile home parks pay the entire utility bills and then individually bill their residents. She said in that case, we don't know who those residents are.

The Council thanked Hartz for the information and agreed the ordinance needs to be updated and be consistent with how the City actually deals with utility billing.

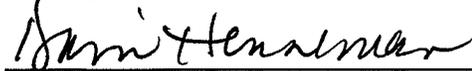
3. OTHER
None

4. ADJOURN

Chair Larson adjourned the Veneta City Council at 4:21 p.m.


Sandra Larson, Chair

ATTEST:



Darci Henneman, Assistant City Recorder
(Minutes prepared by DHenneman)