

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE December 3, 2021

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Past Due Water Accounts and Customer Service Updates**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update to the City Council related to Dallas Water Utilities (DWU) efforts to collect payment and/or establish a payment plan for accounts with past due balances at risk of disconnection. City Council was previously informed via memo on July 30, 2021, that DWU would start a payment plan initiative and resume disconnect procedures effective October 1, 2021.

In in August 2021, DWU began including a special insert in all residential utility bills in August and September informing customers of plans to resume disconnect procedures and information on payment plans to avoid service disruption. DWU also informed the public via press releases and marketing on social media. Residential customers with past due balances started receiving monthly notices on October 1, 2021, informing them that payment of past due balances or establishment of a payment plan is required to avoid disconnection of water service. Approximately 61,000 notices have been sent to customers since the effort started.

Currently, 15% of DWU's residential customers or approximately 45,000 accounts have a past due balance of over 60 days, with total collections owed to DWU of more than \$24 million. **Due to the large number of notices being sent to DWU customers, Water Customer Service (WCS), which is provided by 311 Customer Service (311), is currently experiencing extended wait times and occasional busy signals when circuits are overloaded.**

In an effort to help reduce call wait times, provide additional options for payment arrangements to customers, and provide timely assistance and service, DWU and 311 have implemented the following initiatives:

Custom Mailer

Customers with past due accounts will receive a letter (English and Spanish) communicating their current balance, available payment methods and locations to make payments, instructions to establish a payment plan online, and options to establish a payment plan by mail. Included with the custom mailer is a prepopulated form detailing payment plans currently available. Residents may select the payment plan that best fits their needs, sign, and return the form by mail to establish a payment plan and avoid disconnection.

Online Portal

With the assistance of Information Technology Services (ITS), a temporary website (www.dallascityhall.com/waterpaymentplan) has been created which

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will allow customers the ability to setup and submit the payment plan of their choice. Customers will log into the website using credentials included in the customer mailer. Once a payment plan is selected and submitted, residents will receive a confirmation e-mail and no further action is required to avoid disconnection.

Reopening WCS at Dallas City Hall

In consultation with and approval from the City Manager's Office, a limited portion of the City Hall 1st floor blue lobby will be temporarily reopened effective December 6, 2021. This will allow Customers the ability to meet with WCS agents in person during regular business hours. City Hall Security and WCS support staff will ensure appropriate signage, barriers, and protocols are in place to prevent residents from entering closed portions of the building. Face masks and hand sanitizer will be available and social distancing will be required. City Hall On-the-Go will be stationed outside the City Hall entrance during regular business hours to assist and direct residents as they arrive.

Custom Service Request

311 has created a custom service request, "Water Utilities Payment Plan Request," available online and via OurDallas mobile app, allowing Customers to request a call back from WCS related to establishing a payment plan. Once a resident submits the payment plan service request, disconnection procedures will be halted. Customers may submit a service request to receive a call back in lieu of waiting on hold for a WCS agent.

Dedicated E-mail Address

A dedicated e-mail address has been created for Customers with questions or issues related to payments, payment plans, and disconnections. Customers may e-mail dwupaymentplan@dallascityhall.com with any questions related to the above topics or for additional assistance in making a payment or setting up a payment plan. The e-mail address is monitored during WCS normal business hours.

Customers who do not wish to establish payment plans via the options described above, may continue to contact a WCS agent, Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm, by calling (214) 651-1441.

The aforementioned initiatives should enhance our ability to work with Customers and help them establish a payment plan that meets their budget. Once a payment plan has been established, the Customer will not receive a disconnection or any additional notices.

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Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact John Johnson, Director 311 Customer Service, or Terry Lowery, Director Dallas Water Utilities.



T.C. Broadnax
City Manager

c: Chris Caso, City Attorney
Mark Swann, City Auditor
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Directors and Assistant Directors