

Hamilton
Water Billing Dispute Delegation to Audit, Finance & Administration Committee

Summary

Table 1 on page 2, provides the recent water and wastewater/storm billings for [REDACTED] (the property owner is the account holder). The crux of the owner's water billing issue lies with a high water bill experienced in December 2018 for a significant amount of water consumption that the owner attributes to a running external hose faucet/bib (more commonly known as an outside water tap). Unfortunately, the water supply to the hose faucet was not shut off last fall as typically is done ahead of the winter months to prevent freezing. The owner did indicate to Alectra Utilities that he had found the water running after returning home after a "few days" absence suggesting access to the hose faucet was not secure to prevent unauthorized use, for example, behind a locked gate.

The property owner has sought to obtain financial assistance regarding the December water bill under the City's Water Leak Adjustment Policy. Alectra Utilities who administers this Policy on behalf of the City has denied the request as under the Policy:

1. Under the Policy, a "leak" is defined as an unintentional water loss caused by broken and/or malfunctioning plumbing fixtures and/or pipes within a residence or building so that a leak occurs when there is a failure of the plumbing system to do what it was designed to do. A tap left running does not constitute a leak as there is no plumbing issue to be repaired. Water loss due to unauthorized use (theft), vandalism or construction damage is not covered under the Policy.

City Council has approved an additional water bill adjustment policy; the Extraordinary Circumstance Policy which provides staff the authority to allow bill adjustments under specific circumstances. This Policy provides residential, not-for-profit and institutional customers who utilize City water services the opportunity to request adjustments to abnormally high water and wastewater/storm billings which result from unexplained or extraordinary and unusual circumstances. However, under the Extraordinary Circumstance Policy there are two exclusions that apply to the situation at 36 Locket Street South:

1. Water loss due to unauthorized use (theft), vandalism or construction damage is not covered under the Policy. Resolving these issues is the responsibility of the customer.
2. The Policy does not apply where a dwelling is unoccupied and/or vacant for more than 72 hours. For extended absences, customers should consider shutting off the water supply (except where water is used for heating) and draining all the pipes and appliances.

The City has on occasion received requests for financial assistance related to unauthorized use, albeit these requests are usually associated with newer homes as fences and gates have not customarily been erected when homeowners initially occupy their homes. As the City is not able to corroborate such claims, the aforementioned Council approved bill adjustment policies do not permit staff to provide adjustments related to unauthorized use.

The property owner has also requested that the wastewater/storm fees for the December 2018 bill be waived on the claim that the water did not enter the City's sewer system. The City does not offer wastewater abatements for any water diverted from the City sewer works including for such uses such as ground irrigation or recreation (pools/hot tubs).

TABLE 1

Read Date	Total Bill (\$)	Consumption (m3)	Read From	Read To	Avg Daily (m3)	Billing Days
8/21/18	64.42	17	2054	2071	0.53	34
9/20/18	49.75	14	2071	2085	0.47	30
10/23/18	37.79	9	2085	2094	0.27	33
11/20/18	33.23	8	2094	2102	0.29	28
12/20/18	512.88	163	2101	2265	5.43	30
1/21/19	31.84	3	2264	2267	0.09	32
2/16/19	29.13	3	2267	2269	0.12	26
3/22/19	30.76	3	2269	2272	0.09	35
4/24/19	30.90	4	2272	2276	0.12	33
5/24/19	29.49	4	2276	2280	0.13	30

Alectra Utilities (AUC) Customer Contact Timeline

1/4/19 – Owner calls AUC inquiring of electric/water account balance. Advised of high water read from December for pending bill. Owner advised he was away a few days and found outside tap running. AUC advised owner that he may pursue a deferred payment arrangement however, he would not be eligible for consideration under the Water Leak Adjustment Policy.

1/9/19 - AUC issues bill based on December 20, 2018 water meter reading.

1/7/19 – Hamilton Water (HW) Customer Service contacts AUC following call by owner requesting adjustment due to high water usage. AUC advises HW that account is not eligible under the Policy. In turn, HW contacts owner to advise that an account adjustment would not be forthcoming.

1/24/19 – Owner calls AUC reiterating that someone turned on the outside tap and that the running water was discovered after being away a few days. Owner disputing wastewater/storm portion however AUC advises that the City has no policy that offers wastewater abatement to residences for any water diverted from the City sewer works for such activities as ground irrigation or recreation (filling pools/hot tubs).

4/5/19 - Tax roll transfer of arrears in the amount of \$368.98 plus an administrative fee of \$34.25 has been applied by Taxation.

6/10/19 - Tax roll transfer of arrears in the amount of \$204.87 plus an administrative fee of \$34.25 has been applied by Taxation.