

Notice of Utility Billing Changes

The Mailing of Utility Bills for All Residential Accounts to Property Owner/Manager ONLY and Elimination of Mailing a Duplicate bill to the Tenant, to take effect January 1st, 2021.

November 1st, 2020

Dear Customer,

The City of DeKalb is committed to finding more efficient and economical ways of delivering services to our residents and business community. In 2019, staffing reductions were implemented in several departments to help improve the long-term fiscal health of the City. These staffing reductions have prompted us to reevaluate how certain services are delivered and identify long-term cost savings for the City.

In 2018, the City changed the way utility billing for residential rental properties is managed, which established all utility accounts in the name of the property owner and only mailed a courtesy copy of the bill to the rental property. This change more closely aligned our billing procedures with Chapter 7, Section 15, of the Municipal Code, which states:

- a) Rates: Charges for City water shall be made against the property using said service. Notice of charges for City water service shall be mailed only to the property owner at his place of residence. (05-69)

While this change reduced the workload associated with the frequent tenant turnover, it presented some new challenges. Among the issues the City has experienced is a lack of clarity between property owners and tenants as to who is responsible for the utility bill. Frequently, City staff is caught in the middle of disputes between owners and tenants, which are civil matters outside the scope of the City's authority. This is time consuming for staff and frustrating for our customers. Additionally, there have been unanticipated challenges with the U.S. Postal Service as it relates to the practice of mailing a duplicate bill, addressed to Occupant, to rental properties. As a result, the City will begin strictly adhering to the Municipal Code language cited above and will mail one copy of the utility bill to the property owner and will no longer mail a duplicate copy to the rental property. It is the sole responsibility of the property owner to manage utility billing at their properties. We understand that this change may affect the way some property owners/managers do business with their tenants. The City is providing advance notice of this change so that property owners/managers can establish new practices with their tenants, if needed. This change will go into effect on January 1st, 2021.

Included with this letter you will find a Frequently Asked Questions sheet that should help clarify why this change was implemented and how it will affect the relationship between the City, property owners/managers, and tenants when it comes to utility billing. If you still have questions please contact Utility Billing, in the Finance office at 815-748-2085.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are these changes being implemented?

Staffing reductions have forced us to simplify some services and eliminating tenants from our billing process saves time and money. This change strictly adheres to the Municipal Code, Chapter 7, Section 15.

2. What options do property owners/managers have for managing utility billing with tenants?

Ultimately, this is a business decision for the property owner/manager; however, we are aware of several common practices that could be utilized. 1) Owners may take on payment of the utility bill and pass along the average monthly costs for water and refuse to the tenant through their rent payment. This may require changes to lease agreements. 2) Owners may deliver the utility bill they receive from the City to their tenant and require the tenant to pay the bill.

3. Will tenants still receive a copy of the bill mailed to the property?

No. Utility bills will only be mailed to the property owner/manager at their address of record.

4. Can the tenant still pay the water bill even though the account is in the owner's name?

Yes, it is permissible for the tenant to pay the bill. Ultimately, who pays the water bill is for the property owner and tenant to decide.

5. What happens if the tenant does not pay the water bill as agreed upon with the property owner?

Balances due on water service accounts are the responsibility of the property owner. If a bill remains unpaid, it will be subject to shut-off regardless of any agreement in place between property owner and tenant.

6. Can a property owner turn off the water for nonpayment of rent or utilities?

No. Only the City can shut off water service. The International Property Maintenance Code, which has been adopted by the City, also requires property owners to maintain water service to tenants.

7. How should the property owner determine the correct amount to charge a tenant for final billing?

The property owner and tenant should agree upon this during the move out process. The City will not determine how much the tenant owes on any given date.

8. Can a property owner monitor their water billing accounts online?

Yes. Visit the City's online utility billing portal at <https://bsaonline.com/Home/Index?uid=2666>

9. Can Tenants view and pay their bills online?

Yes. It will be at the landlord's discretion to provide their tenant with the account number. Using this account number, the customer can view and pay their bill online. Please note that account numbers do not change unless a property is sold.

