



April 15, 2020

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **TOWN ADDRESSES RESIDENTS' WATER BILL CONCERNS**

**WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE, ON** – The Town's most recent water/wastewater bills were distributed to residents and businesses in early April. The bills covered a period of three months from mid-December 2019 until mid-March 2020.

The Town has received enquiries via telephone, email and online regarding the billings. These enquiries have focused on several aspects, including the functionality of newly installed water meters, the billing cycles, and water rate increases.

The Town takes these concerns seriously and has provided information below to address many of the recurring questions and to rectify any misconceptions.

The following information pertains to the recent water/wastewater bill:

- The Town has approximately 12,500 account holders and as of April 14, Customer Service has received approximately 141 inquiries about the recent bills.
- The Town has been replacing older water meters since mid-2018. Of the approximately 12,500 old meters nearly over 10,000 (or 79%) were replaced before a recent stoppage due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Town is replacing the water meters because many have reached the end of their typical life-cycle of 20 years. The new meters will also make it easier for the Town to obtain readings wirelessly. These meters do not transmit on Wi-Fi (typically 2.4 GHz and 5.0 GHz) but use 900MHz band radio transmitters.
- Every new meter has been tested for accuracy, following assembly. Therefore, a new meter will have an initial reading when installed (usually about 250 litres). Residents will only be charged for water they use and not this initial reading.
- The Town has full confidence that the new water meters are functioning correctly, and the readings are an accurate indication of the amount of water a residence is using.
- The new water meters will only register usage if water passes through the meter. The new meters display consumption to an accuracy of 1 litre.

- If the Town sees an abnormal water consumption on a resident's bill, we will notify the user.
- All residents that received a new meter in the middle of a given billing period will receive two bills. One bill (the "final bill") will charge for water usage recorded by the old meter and the second bill will charge for the water usage recorded by the new meter, for the given billing period. After this transition period, residents will once again receive one bill. In February many accounts had a reading from the old meter that resulted in a bill that was less than \$10.00. As a result, this bill and a letter will be mailed with their regular bill in April.
- The expected cost of purchasing water and wastewater treatment services from York Region, based on their approved rates to 2022 and forecast thereafter, has increased. In 2020, York Region is projecting an 11.3% increase in their charge for the distribution of water and 7.5% for the collection and treatment of wastewater.
- As a result of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the Region of York, at their April 2 meeting, approved retaining the 2020 water and wastewater rates at their 2019 levels. They also approved the waiving of interest on any portion of tax levy installments not remitted to the Region as a result of a local municipality's COVID-19 tax relief program for a period up to 90 days. Because Whitchurch-Stouffville residents were charged before this action was taken, residents will receive a credit on their next bill. Whitchurch-Stouffville Council recently approved the waiving of interest and penalties on the most recent water/wastewater bills until May 29.
- In March, Whitchurch-Stouffville Council approved a new *High-Water Consumption Credit Policy* which ensured "a consistent application of financial relief and avoid inconsistent determination of relief." The policy provides for an adjustment that is 50% of the excess between the high-water bill and the average water bills in the past. The amount of relief is based on the water rate in effect at the time of the high-water consumption and can only be used once every ten years.

If residents have concerns about the amount of water their meter is calculating, or the amount of their bill, the Town suggests the following:

- If a resident feels they may have a leak or some other issue with their plumbing, the Town recommends they call a plumber to evaluate the situation.
- As a rough test of your meter, take a bucket of a known, metric volume of water (perhaps a 5–10 litre mop bucket with litre markings). Turn off all taps and ensure your meter is not running (the red needle should not be spinning). Take note of all digits of your meter's reading. Fill the bucket to the known volume. Go back and look at your water meter's reading. The dial should have increased by approximately the same volume of the bucket.
- A second test involves turning off your water's main shut off during the evening and take note of the meter's reading. Leave the water off overnight and check the reading again in the morning. If the meter reading has changed, you may have a leak or other plumbing issue.

- If a resident feels that their bill is inaccurate, it can be tested by Public Works for \$323.18. If the meter is found to be broken, the testing charge will be refunded.
- For Town staff to investigate a water account, residents are asked to call Customer Service at (905) 640-1900 or email the Revenue and Taxation Division at [water@townofws.ca](mailto:water@townofws.ca) to open a service request. Each account request will be dealt with in a professional & courteous manner. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this investigation will be delayed.
- The Town would like to remind citizens that there are numerous reasons why a bill may fluctuate, and we encourage residents not to jump to conclusions right away. Each instance is different, and they are handled on a case-to-case basis.
- To reduce water consumption:
  - Use low flow showerheads in regular showerheads which can reduce flow by as much as 40%;
  - Use low flow aerators on all inside faucets which can reduce water flow by as much as 50%. When replacing fixtures insist on water conservation models and look for the WaterSense® label;
  - Fix or replace faucets and toilets that are leaking;
  - Check and fix faulty water softeners;

The Town acknowledges the current concerns that a small number of customers are having. We also ask residents to recognize that due to the current COVID-19 situation, and the fact that families are spending more time at their homes, their next water/wastewater bill may show increases in water consumption.

If you have any questions about your water/wastewater bill, please visit our water/wastewater billing page on our website at [townofws.ca/waterbills](http://townofws.ca/waterbills) or contact the Revenue and Taxation Division, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at 905-640-1910 ext. 2331 or 2242. You can also email [water@townofws.ca](mailto:water@townofws.ca).

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