

**MUSTANG CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 1, 2012**

The Mustang City Council met in a Special Session on Thursday, March 1, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. at the Mustang Police Department. Notice of the meeting was posted on the Bulletin Board outside the Mustang Municipal Building on Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 2:15 p.m. in compliance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, 25 O.S., Section 301, et. seq.

A. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Landrith called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Councilmembers Present:	Adams
	Grubbs
	Green
	Jones
	Hagan
	Mount
	Landrith

Councilmembers Absent:	None
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C. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. **Discussion, Consideration and Possible Action** Regarding Sewer Billing Issues and Inquiries Raised by Mustang Residents, Understanding of Existing City Sewer Calculations and Billing Methods, and Practical Limitations on Existing Billing Methods, and Potential Alternative Sewer Billing Methods.

Rutledge explained that there have been some questions and newspaper articles regarding our billing cycle for the yearly sewer calculations. He stated that Mr. and Mrs. Roop are here tonight. They were the ones that sent the e-mail to the paper regarding this matter. He then introduced Heather Campbell, Finance Director, to explain this issue.

Councilman Adams asked that before they get started with explanations he would like the City Attorney to read off the Ordinance in its' entirety.

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City Attorney Miller read the Ordinance Section 118-135 for total calculations of residential charges. It is in the sub-paragraph of that title.

Heather Campbell explained the Utility Billing Procedures. The City implemented Cycle Billing and bills in four (4) cycles per month. The City is divided into four (4) zones and each zone is billed one time per month. Sometimes there are five weeks in a month so we do not bill out on that fifth week because some people would be getting two bills in a month. So there will be a variation in dates due to this fact. This cycle billing was passed by Council in 2001. She explained that the winter consumption base is for the consumption based on November, December and January usage.

Campbell stated that she spoke to the City of Moore Finance Director in regards to the cycle billing. Their practice is similar to ours and they still practice the cycle billing.

Landrith stated that Monte James was billed for 102 days and **Campbell** replied that our billing cycle for sewer is for 100 days. His November, December and January bills had a snow delay. These things are totally out of our control. There was an additional three days for that zone but it was nothing that the City can control.

Landrith commented that there was three (3) more days consumption read for that billing cycle. The other zones did not have those three extra days consumption on their calculations.

Councilman Adams stated that if there were three extra days on one month's reading, then there would be three less days on the next month's reading.

Landrith commented that the months with three less days on it may not have been in the calculation months. So that person would still have three more days of consumption being considered for the yearly sewer calculations.

Campbell stated that there will be variations. It would be impossible for all 6,800 meters to be read the same day and the same time each month. We do have policies in place to help people out when extraordinary circumstances happen in the winter time. For example, if someone fills their pool in the winter, they can come and talk with us and we will try to help them with the sewer rate. If they have a major leak all they have to do is bring in a receipt showing that there

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was a leak and it was fixed and if their consumption goes down then we can make an adjustment.

Landrith asked what about people that do not have city water but are on city sewer. Campbell responded that we take meter readings on their wells during the three winter months.

Adams stated that he went back and took calculations on his own bill. He also looked at doing a monthly sewer calculation and he found that his bill was considerably higher than just doing the three month calculation. It was almost \$10.00 higher.

Rutledge stated that this whole system was put into place to lower the cost of the utilities. When you look at the savings by doing the three month calculation versus a monthly calculation, the savings outweighs the difference between 100 days versus 102 days calculations.

Campbell stated that there are some Cities that calculate per month. Yukon does it this way.

Mr. Roop stated that Nichols Hills has a flat rate.

Campbell stated that there were lots of hours spent running reports trying to look at all the different scenarios. The cycle billing is not on a 30 day schedule but just one time per month. The cycles run anywhere from 27 days to 30 days.

Adams talked about what causes these differences. He researched his bill and the only time there was an inconsistency was when his 30th day was on a weekend or a holiday. These are things that cannot be helped.

Campbell wanted to point out that there is an issue with re-reads. If we see a reading that is way off we will send the meter reader back out to re-read the meter again to get a good reading. This may not happen until the next day or so. There are so many factors that can affect the cycle dates. We have approximately 200 to 300 re-reads a month.

Campbell stated that when there is extremely high consumption, extreme low consumption or no consumption at all the software system will flag these accounts and we will go out for re-reads on these accounts. High consumption in our system is 5,000 gallons over what the average use is. The low

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consumption is anything that is lower than what their average consumption is. The staff does this every day of every month and they are very good at what they do.

Adams asked if we note or track these re-reads. Campbell stated that "Yes" we have log sheets. We keep these log sheets for future reference and also Severn Trent has copies of these log sheets and we keep the log sheets for ten (10) years.

Landrith asked why Monte James' bill was 102 days instead of 100 days.

Campbell replied that it was 100 days. The first two months were exactly as the cycle called for. The third month, January, did have an additional six or seven days due to the snow storm.

Landrith asked if Severn Trent has ever estimated the readings.

Campbell stated not under her watch.

Rutledge stated that we have not been able to confirm that it has ever happened. To his knowledge this has never happened.

Landrith asked if there was a way to respond to the customers that would be easier to understand.

Rutledge stated that they do respond but most of the time what we tell people they do not believe us. Some people will not listen to reason even when we try. We have spent several months researching this issue. We will leave no stone unturned here. We have looked at this in all different directions to try to find a solution to make it come out differently.

Landrith stated that he is asking for something in writing, maybe an example of these calculations, so that people may be able to understand more easily.

Campbell replied that we do have it in writing. We have a new customer sheet that is given to every new customer when they set up their utility account. We also have them out in the open in the lobby for anyone to pick up at any time.

Mayor Landrith stated that it needs to state the variance in the days and the reasons why.

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Adams stated maybe it needs to have a short paragraph stipulating here is what we mean by winter consumption and then explain how the sewer is calculated.

Campbell stated that this is all stated on the new customer sheet.

Landrith stated that he gets calls all the time that people do not understand this explanation.

Mrs. Roop asked what is a good number of days that most people's bills are based on.

Campbell answered that different people throughout the time, depending on when their meter is read, will have a different number of days in their cycle because every meter cannot be read at the same time.

Mr. Roop stated that in 2009- 2010 there were 90 days exactly in his three billing cycles. In 2010-2011 there were 98 days in the billing cycle. Now this year there is 95 days. He understands that there will be times that they cannot get out and read the meter, but just looking at this last bill it looks like it should have been read on the 13th of February. The meter did not get read on this date or the day after. It was not read until February 21st because the 20th was a holiday, therefore, that gave him the extra five days on his bill.

Campbell responded that the current way of calculating is still better than calculating sewer each month. We are saving the citizen's money by doing it this way. The Ordinance states the calculations would be made by consumption during this **period** not by the **number of days**.

Campbell pulled random accounts from Moore, Yukon, Ada, Norman, Edmond. She was looking at people with the exact same billing software for compatibility. By doing what we are doing now, our customers are getting the lowest sewer rate possible.

Mr. Roop agreed and commented that the winter consumption is probably the most fair way to do it. He went on to give everyone a little information regarding his personal background.

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Adams asked if the City had four (4) meter readers instead of contracting this out to Severn Trent, could the readings be done with more accuracy and in a timely manner.

Campbell replied that she is not experiencing any problem with timeliness. The issue is the calendar is put out there and the meter readers follow the calendar. This is already planned around weekends, holidays and weather. For example, Book 18 has 600 houses in it. Your house may be one of the first houses read but by the end of this book it may be a day or two later.

Adams stated that using the billing cycle that we have now he does not see where more meter readers would be advantageous to the City. But maybe with a few more readers we could fill the gap of the day or two difference in reading a Book.

Campbell stated that if there are six readers that bring in more books, then you have to have more staff to process this work. We could sit down and create any cycle that we want but we still only want to bill people once a month.

Rutledge stated that he has worn Campbell out with all of these questions. There is no magic button that will fix every scenario.

Mayor Landrith asked why Rutledge did not respond to Monte James' e-mail after January 17th.

Rutledge replied that he is not going to put something out there that he cannot verify and cannot confirm. Based on Monte's rejection to Rutledge's first response and feeling that this was conspiracy, he felt that he wanted to make sure and we have not been able to get an easy answer for all of this.

Landrith stated that he understands but if any citizen asks for a response to an e-mail then he deserves this respect, even if it is just an e-mail saying we are still looking into this. The citizen still deserves a response.

Councilwoman Hagan asked Mayor Landrith if he has spoken to Monte James and informed him of this meeting. Landrith stated "yes" that Monte knew about this meeting. Hagan asked if Monte decided not to attend this meeting and Landrith answered "that is how it appears".

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Adams stated that he did not respond because the Mayor was in contact with him.

Landrith stated that Council cannot give an answer for the official City answer. It is the responsibility of the City to respond.

Adams stated that he would like to recommend that in a future situation like this that if we are still looking into it, then maybe respond again by telling them we have not forgotten about you but we are still researching this issue.

Rutledge stated that he understands and will do this in the future.

Landrith stated that he has spoken with Rutledge every week about this matter and asked Rutledge to send a response. Why was this not done?

Rutledge replied that he just did not do it. He just did not get it done.

Landrith stated that his response is not acceptable.

Mount stated that he does not know what would be a response to a question when the City is confronted with articles in the newspaper that are two pages long and they are full of charges against the City, how do you respond to that?

Jones asked what more the City Manager could have done outside of responding each week with the fact that they are still researching this. It is in the City's best interest and the Public's best interest to respond on any issue. The fact that Monte James is not here tonight speaks volumes. He does not think that the Mayor has a case regarding this issue.

Landrith disagreed with Jones because he does not expect the City Manager to give a full response like he did tonight, but he still should have gotten back with him.

Mr. Roop stated that he appreciated the fact that they were invited to this meeting, just as Monte James was invited.

Landrith stated that he brought this up to the City Manager multiple times and still there was no response. Council can accept that or not, that is fine. He would not be doing his job if he did not bring this up.

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Rutledge apologized for this and said that it was his responsibility to do this. He will do better in the future. He will be more than happy to send a response.

Jones stated that the City cannot revolve around one person. There were other people that had issues and their issues have been represented.

Landrith stated that he was just saying that it has just been too long without a response from the City.

Adams commented that he has received numerous calls regarding this issue. The issue is not actually the bill itself, but what he was hammered on really hard was the lack of response. What they see is what is in the paper and what they have heard at the Council Meeting but they were concerned as to why the City did not respond.

Landrith asked why it took a special meeting and a couple of months to get a response. He should be able to go to the City and say that he does not understand the bill and the City should not have to go and research the answer for a month or two.

Jones stated that we have important things to respond to tonight so let's move on with it.

Mr. Roop asked how you can be fair across the board. The answer is you cannot but you are doing the best that you can. How can you get the number of days closer together?

Adams stated that it is based on the consumption, not the number of days.

Campbell asked what is most important, that every single citizen have the same number of days or do we follow the process that keeps it at the lowest cost for our citizens and **Landrith** stated that we should keep the costs down for our citizens.

Mount thanked the Roops' for being here tonight. He stated that we need more people like you to come to these Council Meetings.

Jones asked if there is a difference on a bill between people that live side by side. Can the City negotiate this?

Campbell stated that she has an open door policy. If someone has a problem with their bill we will send out for a re-read immediately. We will never bill someone if they call us until we know the answer to the problem. We will also provide a consumption history if they request so. The customer has the ability to track the three months. Our system can provide a bar graph if they have an on-line account. It will show the historical consumption and what months it was used. If they do not have that access they are welcome to call us for information.

Jones just wanted to get this on record.

Landrith asked what it costs for an extra 1,000 gallons of water for the sewer?

Campbell responded that the current sewer rate is \$4.26 per 1,000 gallons.

Mr. Roop stated that he moved into Mustang in 2009 and he was shocked at how high the water and sewer bills were.

Campbell stated that Mr. Roop has very high water consumption compared to others. It is not the rate that is high, it is the consumption.

Landrith stated that it might be a good thing to show the comparisons in the newspaper.

Jones stated that they would continue to find the best way to deal with this matter.

Mr. Roop commented that we need to become customer focused. If the City will work with people, people will work with them.

D. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION was made by **Councilwoman Hagan** and seconded by **Councilman Adams** to adjourn.

AYE: Adams, Grubbs, Green, Jones, Hagan, Mount, Landrith

NAY: None

Meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk