



A message from Councilwoman Kimball.
June 20, 2013

Water Bills

Often residents have questions concerning the bill they receive each month from the City. Staff at City Hall will make every effort to be helpful and courteous in answering your questions. Perhaps you can also find some answers here.

Am I being fairly charged? The answer to this question begins with thoroughly understanding your city utilities bill. The bill includes three monthly charges for three different services: disposal (refuse, trash pick-up), sewer (toilets), and water. There is also a line for the utility user's tax, which helps repair roads damaged when sewer and water lines must be dug up and fixed or replaced, and when garbage trucks cause wear and tear. There is a flat fee to provide each of the three services. For a typical single family home, disposal (refuse) is \$21.59, sewer is \$30.00, and water is \$19.97 for the first 500 cubic feet (3,740 gallons) for a 5/8" water meter. These fees do not change even if no one takes out trash, flushes a toilet, or turns on water all month, as long as the service is connected. In addition, our water is metered, and we are charged for any water used over and above the 500 cubic feet allocated for the flat fee. So you could be paying much more, but will never pay less, than \$19.97 for water alone. The number of people in your home, the landscape watering you do, and whether or not you have leaky pipes all make a difference in your costs.

I always paid my bill on time. Now I'm being told I'm delinquent. What happened? There has been a recent change to the due date on the city bill. Previously they were not delinquent until several days into the following month. Payment is now due by the end of the month in which we receive our bill. This means it needs to be paid before we get our next bill—which is how all the rest of the world does it. We had an odd system and it was confusing and needed to be changed. In fact, we were required to change it. City Hall understands this has thrown some people off, and has been making allowances while everyone adjusts to the new system.

Why do we pay more for water than some neighboring cities? Other cities have historically had an abundant supply of clean well water, which is inexpensive to provide. Therefore many cities have not metered water use, and charge only a flat monthly fee. This is changing in most places as the need for conservation grows, and as dropping water tables concentrate contaminants in the water—requiring both deeper wells and water treatment facilities. Costs of water are going up and becoming more similar to Lindsay's. Lindsay is not blessed with abundant well water. Most of our wells have been closed due to high levels of contaminants such as nitrates. Some years back we bonded to build a water treatment plant so that we could accept water from the Friant-Kern canal to supplement the two usable wells west of town. We are still paying off costs for the water treatment plant and large storage tank on Towt's Hill, and this is reflected in our baseline water charges. We must also pay for the water purchased from Friant (and hope, in dry years like this, that enough for our needs is available!), and the costs of treating it. We must continue testing our existing wells, blending and treating as needed to keep that water within safe drinking water standards. Our costs are higher, so our bills have to be higher than other places.