



Winter Quarter Averaging

CITY COUNCIL POLICY & VALUATION COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 7, 2026

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Background

- At the August 10, 2026 City Council meeting, a resident raised concerns regarding the City's Winter Quarter Averaging (WQA) methodology and its impact on new residents.
- Staff's review found that WQA resulted in a lower wastewater charge for the resident than using actual water consumption. However, the concern provided an opportunity to review the City's current policy and practices.
- Staff is presenting the review to the Policy & Valuation Committee to discuss the current methodology and receive feedback on any potential changes.

Wastewater Billing

Residential wastewater is not separately metered.

Unlike water consumption, residential wastewater is not typically metered. Wastewater flows by gravity and contains solids and debris, making it impractical to meter at the individual household level.

Wastewater service still has a cost.

Although wastewater volume is not directly metered, wastewater from the home enters the sanitary sewer system and must be collected and treated. Cities need a reasonable method to estimate each customer's wastewater volume for billing purposes, and metered water consumption provides a practical basis for that estimate.

Common Billing Approaches

Residential wastewater charges are generally based on winter water usage or current monthly water usage.

	Winter Averaging	Current Water Consumption
How it works	Uses water consumption during designated winter months to establish wastewater billing volume for the year.	Uses each month's metered water consumption as the basis for wastewater billing.
Characteristics	• Designed to better reflect typical indoor water use • Limits the impact of irrigation, pools, and other outdoor use • Provides more predictable monthly wastewater charges	• Reflects the customer's current water usage • Adjusts as household consumption changes • Does not require an annual averaging period
Considerations	• Based on historical rather than current consumption • Unusual winter usage can affect charges for the year • Requires an alternative for customers without an established winter average	• May include irrigation, pool filling, and other water that does not enter the sewer • Charges may fluctuate from month to month • May require a percentage adjustment or cap

Peer City Comparison

City	Billing Method
Arlington	Winter Averaging (as maximum)
Burleson	Winter Averaging
Cedar Hill	Winter Averaging
Coppell	Winter Averaging
Eules	Actual Water Consumption
Fort Worth	Winter Averaging
Grand Prairie	Winter Averaging
Grapevine	Winter Averaging
Hurst	Winter Averaging
Keller	Winter Averaging
Mansfield	Actual Water Consumption
Midlothian	Winter Averaging
North Richland Hills	Winter Averaging
The Colony	Winter Averaging

Key Takeaways

- Winter averaging is the predominant approach among cities with a confirmed methodology.
- Arlington uses its winter average as a maximum; actual monthly use is billed when lower.
- Eules uses 90% of current monthly water consumption, capped at 12,000 gallons.

How Burleson Calculates WQA

For established residential customers, the City averages water consumption billed during January, February, and March.

**JANUARY + FEBRUARY + MARCH ÷ 3 = WINTER QUARTER
AVERAGE**

- The calculated average establishes the customer's monthly wastewater billing volume for the year.
- Residential wastewater billing volume is capped at 12,000 gallons.

Billing Example: Established Customer

How an established WQA compares with actual monthly water consumption over the course of a year:

Month	Actual Water Use (gallons)	WQA Billing Volume (gallons)	Sewer Charge – WQA	Sewer Charge – Actual Use
January	5,200	3,500	\$42.90	\$53.17
February	3,700	3,500	\$42.90	\$44.11
March	3,800	3,500	\$42.90	\$44.71
April	3,600	4,233	\$47.33	\$43.50
May	3,200	4,233	\$47.33	\$41.09
June	9,000	4,233	\$47.33	\$76.12
July	19,500	4,233	\$47.33	\$139.54
August	13,900	4,233	\$47.33	\$105.72
September	11,200	4,233	\$47.33	\$89.41
October	9,800	4,233	\$47.33	\$80.95
November	11,300	4,233	\$47.33	\$90.01
December	6,900	4,233	\$47.33	\$63.44
12-Month Total	101,100	48,597	\$554.67	\$871.77

Based on the monthly amounts shown above, WQA results in \$317.10 lower wastewater charges over the 12-month period.

When a Customer Does Not Have a WQA

If a residential customer has not established an average for January, February, and March, the customer's wastewater volume is based on the citywide residential average for those months.

- The citywide residential average is applied until the customer can establish an individual WQA.
- The calculation is not based on the prior occupant's WQA at the property.
- The same citywide average applies regardless of household size or the customer's actual monthly consumption.

Billing Example: New Customer

How the citywide average applies when a customer has not yet established an individual winter-quarter average:

Month	Actual Water Use (gallons)	WQA Billing Volume (gallons)	Sewer Charge – WQA	Sewer Charge – Actual Use
March	2,800	4,700	\$50.15	\$38.67
April	5,100	4,700	\$50.15	\$52.56
May	3,400	4,700	\$50.15	\$42.30
June	3,900	4,700	\$50.15	\$45.32
July	8,400	4,700	\$50.15	\$72.50
August	9,500	4,700	\$50.15	\$79.14
September	8,900	4,700	\$50.15	\$75.52
7-Month Total	42,000	32,900	\$351.05	\$406.01

Over these seven months, WQA results in \$54.96 lower wastewater charges than billing on actual monthly consumption.

Customers Without an Established Winter Average

Peer cities use different approaches until a customer can establish an individual winter average.

Approach	How It Works	Peer Examples
Citywide Average	Applies an average based on residential customers citywide.	Burleson, Coppell, Arlington, Midlothian
Default Volume	Assigns a predetermined wastewater billing volume to new customers.	Cedar Hill – 7,000 gal.
Current Consumption	Uses current water consumption until an individual winter average can be established.	Grand Prairie – 80% of monthly use, max. 12,000 gal.
No WQA / Current Use	Uses current water consumption as the regular wastewater billing basis.	Euless – 90% of monthly use, max. 12,000 gal.

Staff Findings & Recommendation

A resident raised concerns regarding the application of WQA for customers without an established individual average. In response, staff reviewed the resident's billing history, Burleson's methodology, alternative billing approaches, and peer-city practices.

Findings

- Winter averaging is the predominant methodology among the peer cities reviewed.
- Burleson's use of a citywide average for new customers is also used by several peer cities.
- For the resident who raised the concern, the City's current methodology resulted in lower wastewater charges than billing based on actual monthly water consumption.

Recommendation

Based on the review, staff recommends continuing the City's current Winter Quarter Averaging methodology and citywide-average approach for customers without an established WQA.

Questions
