

## **DISCUSSION ON AMENDING SEWER WINTER AVERAGING TO ALLOW CHURCHES TO PARTICIPATE**

Recently, one of the churches expressed concern about a very high water and sewer bill and thought there was a mistake. Detailed hourly readings were pulled from their water meter and it was apparent that the high usage was due to daily use of their sprinkler system. There was nothing staff could do to help with their water bill. The church said it will be reducing the use of its sprinkler system to lower future bills.

Because their sprinkler system is on the meter that serves all of their facilities, their sewer bill was also very high. We know the bulk of the water the church used didn't go into the sewer system, but the way our system works, they are billed for it just the same. Some businesses avoid these high sewer costs by installing separate meters for sprinkler systems. Due to physical conditions at the church, it will be difficult and expensive for the church to install a separate sprinkler system meter. A rough guess of the costs involved is about \$2,000.

There is another possible solution which could be implemented without creating extra expense for the church. Residential customers avoid the situation the church is faced with because their sewer bills are based on winter usage. Winter averaging doesn't work for many commercial accounts, because their wastewater usage is seasonal and is higher during the spring to fall tourist season. If they were allowed to use winter averaging, they wouldn't be paying for their fair share of wastewater collection and treatment expenses. Use by churches, however, is fairly consistent throughout the year. Administrative and utility billing staff believe it would be fair to allow churches to participate in winter averaging. Staff has been told there is at least one other church in town which also doesn't have a separate meter for its sprinkler system.

While working on the Ordinance to amend the sewer winter averaging provision in the City's Code of Ordinances, staff wondered if rather than focusing on creating a solution for churches with sprinkler systems, it might be better to focus on creating a solution for all businesses with sprinkler systems which have a pattern of consistent sewer usage throughout the year. An ordinance to that effect has been drafted for the City Council's consideration.