

M E M O

RE: Donna Morris Community Concern

At the January 20th City Council Meeting, Donna Morris expressed concerns over an unpaid final utility bill from one of her renters at 1003 3rd Ave. SW. Donna stated that she felt she was not responsible for the renter's outstanding bill because when she had called to have the water turned off at the property for her tenant having a past due bill and city staff informed her that the renter had a payment agreement in place. Past Administration advised staff to never turn off water to a property if a payment arrangement was in place.

Following the incident, there has been a utility disconnection form created and it is available at city hall to allow property owners at any time to have their water disconnected by signing off on the form acknowledging their request to disconnect the water service and pay the \$70 on/off fee. The purpose of this new form places the liability on the property owner who is making the request and it also ensures that the renter does not end up responsible for the \$70 fee when they did not make the request.

Concerning Donna's complaint, staff have investigated the billing situation and it was found that staff regularly sent shut off notices to the renters and Donna when their bill became 30 days past due. When shut off letters are received, the person holding the bill has the option to pay the bill or make a payment agreement. The former renters of this property had held a payment agreement with the city nearly every month while they resided at the residence, which resulted in the renters being behind on average approximately one month, each month. When the renters moved out, their final bill was added to the amount already past due along with late fees.

Over the past few months, the city has attempted to bill both Donna and the renters, who now reside at another location in Pipestone. The city has yet to receive the outstanding amount of \$544.66 that is due. If the renters made an attempt to put their current utility bill in their name, the city would require them to pay their past due amount; however, the former renters do not have the utility bill in their name so the city is unable to collect from them.

This is not the only property Donna owns where a renter has left their final bill unpaid with the city. According to city code, if a renter leaves an outstanding bill, the city will assess the amount to the property owner's taxes to recover the cost. If these bills remain unpaid, they will be assessed to the property taxes.