

# TOWN OF PINE LEVEL



# UTILITY CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY HANDBOOK

## **INTENT**

The intent of this policy is to establish uniform procedures for providing services to all Town of Pine Level utility customers, in a fair and equitable manner. These procedures are adopted and duly approved by the Pine Level Board of Commissioners and kept on file in the town's administrative offices.

## **RATES AND FEES**

Rates and/or fees for all utility services are established by the Board of Commissioners. The Board meets in regular session on the second Monday night of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the Pine Level Town Hall and on other nights as may be established by the board. All meetings of the board are open and the public is always welcome to attend. Rates and/or fees are subject to change by the board without notice.

## **ACCEPTABLE FORMS OF PAYMENT**

The Town accepts cash, personal checks, money orders, certified checks, payment by bank draft, online ([www.pinelevel.org](http://www.pinelevel.org)) and debit/credit cards as payment for bills. Only VISA, MasterCard, and Discover cards are acceptable.

## **APPLICATION FOR SERVICES**

Persons requesting utility services will be required to complete an application in person at the Town Hall between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. No service will be connected until all proper application procedures have been completed and payment has been made in full. Payment for new services must be made by cash, certified check, money orders or debit/credit cards. No personal checks will be accepted for new deposits.

All persons requesting utility services will be required to provide one form of photo identification. The following types of photo identification are acceptable:

NC driver's license/permit	Valid US passport
NC identification card	Military or Veterans identification card

The applicant must provide the service location, a mailing address, a start date for services, and the name of a relative or reference for emergency contact purposes. The applicant must also sign the application in person at the Town Hall.

## **TYPES OF ACCOUNTS**

**PROPERTY OWNERS:** Property owners must provide a closing statement or deed to verify home ownership. Property owners may have utilities connected at more than one location as long as all accounts remain current.

**RENTERS:** Renters must provide a copy of their lease agreement and will be limited to one service location at any given time. The renter utility account will be established in the name specified in the lease agreement. In the event that any renter named in the lease has an outstanding bill with the Town, that bill must be paid in full before service is provided.

**COMMERCIAL:** Persons establishing accounts for commercial utility services shall be required to complete an application, provide a lease or proof of ownership of the property, as well as a contact person who will be responsible for payment of the account. The contact person will be required to provide one form of ID as listed above and a home address.

**TEMPORARY SERVICE:** Persons requesting temporary services in order to show, paint, clean or repair a residence shall be billed for all utilities and refuse collection. Habitation is not permitted under temporary services. The applicant must provide a connect date and a disconnect date at the time of application. Temporary accounts may not exceed 30 days. At the end of the 30-day period, an extension may be requested for an additional 30 days. If there is no existing structure (such as a new home), only services that are available (and requested) will be charged.

**LANDLORD ACCOUNTS:** No landlord will be allowed to turn on utility services (either in their name or the tenant's name) if they have a past due balance on any property that they own. If a landlord (or a real estate company) owes at ANY address, services will not be turned on for them, OR for the tenant, until the delinquent account(s) is paid. Delinquent account balances must be PAID IN FULL before utility services are turned on.

**ACCOUNT CHANGES:** Any changes of account information, such as mailing address, account holder's name, telephone number, transfer of service or disconnection must be requested by the primary person in whose name the account is listed.

## **CUSTOMER DEPOSITS**

At the time of application, any delinquent bill with the Town must be paid in full prior to connection of services. Homeowners requesting residential service are exempt from paying a deposit. Renters requesting residential utility services shall be required to furnish a deposit guaranteeing payment of utility charges. The total deposit amount shall be \$225.00, which includes a \$50.00 service fee and a \$175.00 deposit. The service fee is a one-time, non-refundable amount, which covers account set-up and connection.

## **REFUNDING DEPOSITS**

Upon account closing, the deposit will be applied toward the customer's utility account. Remaining funds will be used against any amounts on any accounts the customer may have with the town. A refund check for any remaining balance will be mailed to the customer's forwarding address, if provided when disconnection is requested. The Town bills for utility consumption used prior to the actual billing date, so customers disconnecting service will usually have at least one bill for a full month's services and a final bill for a partial month's service.

## **UPDATING DEPOSITS**

Any customer without the minimum deposit on file, whose service has been involuntarily terminated, either for nonpayment, returned check, meter tampering, or any other such reason shall be required to pay the full deposit or update the existing deposit to the minimum requirement as specified above prior to reconnecting services. Deposits will not be refunded after termination of services until all final bills are paid.

## **CREDIT HISTORY**

The Town shall maintain a confidential credit history of all utility customers. A customer's credit shall be classified as "good" unless the customer has paid late penalties during the prior 12 months, been disconnected for nonpayment, or presented a check that has been returned. Letters of Credit shall be issued, based upon the customer's credit history, when requested by the customer.

## **DEBT SET-OFF PROGRAM**

Delinquent balances will be submitted at least annually to the state's Debt Set-Off Program. The NC Department of Revenue will then withhold unpaid amounts from the customer's state tax refund and return the funds to the Town. The funds are then applied to unpaid customer balances on file with the Town.

## **SERVICE CONNECTION**

When the application has been completed, deposit requirements met, and service charges paid, the Town will connect utility services. The Town does not guarantee same day service, but will make every effort to connect utility services as soon as possible once all requirements have been met.

## **TERMINATION OF SERVICES**

All requests for termination of service must be made by the accountholder. The customer will be responsible for all service usage until Town personnel disconnect the service and get a meter reading for final billing. Customers must provide notice of disconnection to the town or they may be responsible for utilities used after they have already moved out.

## **TRANSFERRING SERVICES**

Utility customers wishing to transfer their service from one location to another must provide a copy of the new lease, an updated form of identification, update the application information, and pay the connection fee. The customer will also be required to update the deposit at this time. When transfer paperwork is being completed, a connect date at the new address and disconnect date at the previous address must be given. Services at two addresses may not overlap for more than 30 days. The customer is still responsible for any outstanding balances at the previous address. Failure to pay these bills will result in involuntary disconnection at the new utility address.

## **ACCESS TO METERS**

Access to meters is essential in order to obtain accurate readings. The Town requires customer cooperation in allowing access to meters and ensuring that obstructions such as vehicles, shrubs, fences, and domestic animals do not interfere with the reading process. Access to each meter base is also necessary for safety reasons in case of emergency, such as a fire. An obstruction that is not removed (following a warning by the meter reader) will result in an involuntary disconnection of utility services. Fees may apply for restoration of services.

## **GARBAGE AND TRASH COLLECTION**

All customers will be billed a garbage collection fee on their monthly utility bill. Garbage fees apply as long as utilities are connected. Exceptions are only allowed for businesses that wish to use a private dumpster service, once they have made application to the town and have been approved by the board for non-payment of garbage fees. Customers that are physically unable to roll their garbage cart out to the street may provide a doctor's note to the Town certifying that they are unable and the town will provide back-yard pick up for them. All other customers are provided with a 90-gallon cart which must be rolled out to the street for pick up on the appropriate day of the week. Garbage carts should be pulled back from the street side once garbage has been collected. Garbage carts are provided for use by the account holder only. Under no circumstance should anyone be allowed to bring garbage from out of town and place it in the town's garbage carts for collection.

## **IRRIGATION METERS (SECOND METERS)**

Separate water taps for irrigation purposes shall be allowed when the customer has met the following requirements:

- (1) Customer must pay a water tap fee (see current rate schedule).
- (2) Customer must specify that meter will be used for irrigation purposes only.
- (3) Customer must pay for consumption monthly.
- (4) NO ADJUSTMENTS are allowed for water used on irrigation meters.

Meters will be read each month and any unusual consumption will be investigated. This service is not available for any purpose other than outside irrigation.

## **SWIMMING POOLS**

Customers may avoid paying sewer charges on initial pool fill-ups if they fill the pool from a garden hose and provide proof of the pool capacity to the Customer Service Department at Town Hall. Meter readers will not read meters for pool filling purposes. Adjustment for only one pool fill-up will be allowed each calendar year.

## **ADJUSTMENTS/WATER LEAKS**

Adjustments will be made ONLY on leaks that do not cause water to go into the sewer system. Before an adjustment is made, town personnel must verify the type of leak and the fact that it did not go into the town's sewer system. The method for calculating an adjustment will be as follows:

- The average usage is computed by averaging 12 months usage prior to the leak.
- The sewer consumption will be adjusted down to the average usage.
- The water consumption will be adjusted down to the average usage, plus one/half of whatever is over average.

Customers may receive only one adjustment in any six-month period. NO ADJUSTMENTS are allowed for water customers on the county water line or for irrigation (second) meters.

## **INVOLUNTARY DISCONNECTION OF SERVICES**

The Town reserves the right to disconnect utility services without further notice for any customer due to one or more of the following reasons:

- Failure to pay bill for utility services as required by current disconnection policy
- Failure to pay or update deposit as required
- Upon evidence of meter tampering or attempt to defraud the Town
- Refusal of legitimate access to premises, or damage to or loss of Town property on the customer's premises for which the customer is liable
- Excessive water usage not repaired in a timely manner
- Failure to pay for returned check once notified by the Town
- Failure to fulfill terms of a payment or extension agreement

## **RECONNECTION POLICY**

When it becomes necessary for the Town to disconnect services for any of the above-referenced reasons, services will be restored only after payment of:

- Delinquent utility bills
- Any deposit or deposit update, as required
- Non-payment fees
- Any meter tampering fees
- Any materials and labor costs, if required

Services will be reconnected during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## **BILLING REQUIREMENTS**

The Town's billing cycle is defined as the period between meter readings. Water meters are read once each month, normally around the 20th of the month. The billing cycle normally reflects a 30-day period; however, holidays, inclement weather, or other circumstances may cause a fluctuation in the number of billing days. The Board of Commissioners sets the rates for all utility services. The current rate schedules are available at the Town Hall.

## **PAYMENT REQUIREMENTS**

All utility bills are due by the Town's due date, which is the 15th of the month, to avoid late penalty. Any customer who fails to receive a bill is not relieved of payment responsibility. Utility bills may be paid by bank draft, paid in person by cash, certified check, personal check, money order, on line at [www.pinelevel.org](http://www.pinelevel.org) or debit/credit card at the Town Hall, 306 East Brown Street; by placing cash, certified check, personal check or money order in the night deposit box beside the drive-through window; or by mailing a certified check, personal check or money order to the Town at P. O. Box 328, Pine Level, NC 27568. Customers utilizing the night deposit box should be aware that the drop box is opened once daily at 8:00 a.m. every business day. Therefore, payments dropped after 8:00 a.m. will be credited the next business day.

All certified checks, personal checks, and money orders are to be made payable to the Town of Pine Level. Two-party checks ARE NOT an acceptable form of payment by the Town. Also, NO CASH CHANGE will be given for checks written for an amount greater than the utility bill; any overpayment will be credited to the customer's account. The Town reserves the right to verify funds on any check presented for payment on account before accepting such payment.

## **LATE PAYMENT PENALTY**

Payments not received in the office by 5:00 p.m. on the due date are considered late and will accrue a 10% penalty on the account balance, with no minimum or maximum. If the due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the next business day will be considered the due date.

## **DISCONNECTION POLICY**

All utility bills are due and payable at the Town Hall by the last day of the month or they will be subject to disconnection. If payments are not received prior to 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the month, on the next business day, services will be disconnected and a \$75.00 non-payment fee will be added to the bill. NO SECOND NOTICES will be mailed. Prior to reconnection of services, all delinquent utility charges must be paid in full, plus any reconnection fees, deposits, deposit updates, or charges for materials or labor, which may apply.

If service has not been restored within 30 days following disconnection, the account will be permanently closed and all deposits on file will be applied to the account. In order to have services restored, a new application must be completed, along with a new lease, all balances paid, and a deposit paid before connecting services.

## **DISPUTED BILLS**

Any customer subject to disconnection for non-payment may appeal to the Town's Customer Service Department. If a customer believes the Town has made an error calculating a utility bill, or otherwise disputes the obligation to pay the bill, the customer or the customer's authorized representative may arrange a meeting to discuss the matter. Any dispute of a utility bill must be expressed to the Town within 10 days after the mail date of the bill.

## **RETURNED CHECKS**

Returned checks are defined as any check or bank draft returned unpaid for any reason by the financial institution on which the check was drawn. When a check is returned by a bank, the customer will be notified of the returned check either by phone or by a hand-delivered letter, and they will be given 72 hours to pay for the check plus a returned check service charge by cash, certified check or money order. If not paid within the 72 hours, utilities will be disconnected and a non-payment fee will be charged to the account. After the return of one check for any reason, the Town requires the customer to pay all utility bills by cash, certified check, or money order ONLY, for a period of ONE year. A customer in "cash only" payment status will be allowed to present checks again after twelve months. After the return of two checks for any reason, the Town will require the customer to pay all utility bills by cash, certified check or money order and all check writing privileges will be permanently revoked. If a check is returned to the Town due to a bank error, the returned check service charge may be waived if the customer provides written documentation from a bank official taking responsibility for the returned check.

## **EMERGENCIES**

Should an emergency arise concerning utility services, customers should contact Town Hall at 919-965-2284 during normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. After 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday or on weekends and holidays, customers should contact 9-1-1.

## **CHRONICALLY ILL AND LIFE SUPPORT CUSTOMERS**

The customer has the responsibility to notify the Town of any person in their household who is chronically ill, on a life support system, and/or wears a medical alert device, by providing a doctor's letter of certification. It is the responsibility of each customer to update certification letters annually each January. If such certification renewal is not received, the customer will be removed from the program.

## **RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- The Town has the responsibility of helping the customer to understand its rate schedules, informing the customer of how meters are read and billing takes place, and to furnish additional reasonable information.
- The Town has the responsibility of responding to questions or complaints from its customers. The Town accepts responsibility for providing prompt and courteous service to all customers.
- The customer has the right to have the Town provide a copy of the customer's billing information for the past 12 months. The town will provide this information upon request, once every 12 months without charge.
- The customer has the right to contact the Town's Customer Service Department concerning any questions or complaints regarding service.
- If the customer questions the consumption listed on a bill, the customer has the right to request that the Town recheck the readings for accuracy.

## **SUMMARY OF FEES**

Certain fees may be charged to customers for the purpose of recovering costs associated with supplying utility services and are not refundable. Except in emergencies or unusual circumstances, no new service connections or restoration of delinquent accounts will occur outside of normal working hours.

• Late Penalty (applied day after due date)	10% of account balance
• Transfer fee (for moving account)	\$20.00
• Connection fee (after temporary cut off)	\$20.00
• Non-payment fee (after last day of month)	\$75.00
• Returned check fee	\$25.00
• Water meter tampering fee (1X)	\$300.00
• Water meter tampering fee (2X or more)	\$500.00
• Replacement of garbage cart or recycling bin	current price for replacement order

*\*\*additional charges may apply for replacement of damaged equipment\*\**

## **UTILITY THEFT AND DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT**

NC General Statute 14-151.1 states the following with regard to meter tampering, utility theft and fraud:

- (a) It shall be unlawful for any unauthorized person to alter, tamper with or bypass a meter which has been installed for the purpose of measuring the electricity, gas or water, or knowingly to use electricity, gas or water passing through any such tampered meter, or use electricity, gas or water bypassing a meter provided by an electric, gas or water supplier for the purpose of measuring and registering the quantity of electricity, gas or water consumed.*
- (b) Any meter or service entrance facility found to have been altered, tampered with, or bypassed in a manner that would cause such meter to inaccurately measure and register the electricity, gas or water consumed or which would cause the electricity, gas or water to be diverted from the recording apparatus of the meter shall be prima facie evidence of intent to violate and of the violation of this section by the person in whose name such meter is installed or the person or persons so using or receiving the benefits of such unmetered, unregistered or diverted electricity, gas or water.*
  - (1) It is unlawful for any unauthorized person to reconnect electricity, gas or water connections or otherwise turn back on one or more of those utilities when they have been lawfully disconnected or turned off by the provider of the utility.*
  - (2) It is unlawful for any unauthorized person to alter, bypass, interfere with, or cut off any load management device, equipment or system which has been installed by the electricity supplier for the purpose of limiting the use of electricity at peak-load periods; provided, however, if there has been a written request to remove the load management device, equipment or system to the electric supplier, and the electric supplier has not removed the device within two working days, there shall be no violation of this section.*
- (c) Whoever is found in a civil action to have violated any provision hereof shall be liable to the electric, gas or water supplier to triple the amount of losses and damages sustained or five hundred dollars (\$500.00), whichever is greater.*
- (d) Any person violating any of the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not more than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) or imprisoned not longer than two years, or both fined and imprisoned, at the discretion of the court.*
- (e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to apply to licensed contractors while performing usual and ordinary services in accordance with recognized customs and standards.*

The Town reserves the right to prosecute all cases of meter tampering, utility theft and fraud to the fullest extent of the law. Should any Town personnel find a water meter reconnected after being turned off, whether during utility disconnection or normal meter reading cycles, a meter tampering charge will be added to the customer's account, which will be subject to the Town's current payment policy.

**OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION:**

**ANIMAL CONTROL**

Town ordinance requires that animals remain on their owner's property at all times. Animals are subject to impoundment, and additional fines if picked up by animal control.

**ZONING ORDINANCE**

No building or land, or use thereof, may be changed or altered without a zoning permit. Regular zoning permits, which are available at the town hall, cost \$50.00.

**POLICE INFORMATION**

In all situations where you need to contact the police department, **dial 9-1-1**. If it is not an emergency situation, simply tell the dispatcher you do NOT have an emergency, but you need to contact the Pine Level police officer on duty. The dispatcher will contact the officer on duty and get them to contact you. If you see anything that looks suspicious, do not hesitate to call the police department. If you are going out of town, come to the town hall and complete a *house check form* for the police department to keep a check on your residence while you are away.

**TAX LISTING**

Property taxes are billed and collected by Johnston County Tax Department. Be sure to list your taxes each January with the county office, and check that you reside within the city limits of Pine Level. That way, you will avoid penalties for not listing your taxes.

**DISCRIMINATION**

In accordance with Federal Law and US Dept. of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, religion, sex, familial status, sexual orientation, and reprisal. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to:

USDA, Asst. Secretary for Civil Rights  
Office of Asst. Sec. for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 9410  
Washington, DC 20250-9410

Or call toll free at (866) 632-0002 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish).  
USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**HELPFUL PHONE NUMBERS**

TOWN HALL	919-965-2284
POLICE DEPARTMENT	919-965-2045 OR DIAL 9-1-1
PL POST OFFICE	919-965-2622
PL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	919-965-3323
TOWN MARKET	919-965-5271
SOUTHERN BANK	919-965-5721