

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****March 7, 2023**

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SUBJECT: WATER ACCOUNT TRANSFER PROCESS

Fort Worth Water is committed to expanding payment options and promoting convenience for its customers, while also seeking the most cost-effective service delivery. In June 2020, the utility transitioned all payment processing to a single third-party payment transaction manager, Paymentus. This represented an interim change in the City's online bill payment presence, as the City worked to provide faster, more secure, and cost-effective functionality. It also represented an initial step in the process of launching new features that enhance digital engagement tools for Water customers. At that time, all online bill pay customers were required to register in the new system and re-establish payment methods, including auto-pay.

Although Paymentus remains the payment transaction manager, the customer portal launched in May 2022 through the MyH2O program now serves as the primary online bill payment system for all residential accounts. The launch of the MyH2O customer portal has enabled customers' direct access to account and payment services. To make the transition as seamless as possible, customers going online to make a payment are redirected to the new portal where their accounts are migrated, along with their individual wallets with saved payment information. Customers only need to reset their passwords to protect their payment information to begin using the new portal.

Since auto-pay customers do not log in to make payments, their accounts are only migrated to the new portal when they are updating payment information or choosing to make a one-time payment. While the utility has encouraged customers to register for the portal, it is not required and customers can continue to pay via auto-pay and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) using the Paymentus platform. Approximately 23% of residential customers remain on the Paymentus platform using the auto-pay option. Conversely, over 90,000 water customers (35%) are currently registered users of the MyH2O portal, with almost 20,000 using the mobile applications. The rapid adoption of the new portal exceeds industry norms and continues to grow each week. Customers who are neither registered users for the MyH2O portal nor auto-pay users within Paymentus pay water bills through other available methods including by mail, IVR, or in person either downtown or at third-party pay stations across the city.

Account Transfer Process

Although existing accounts are easily migrated, changes to a customer account may require customer action. When customers need to transfer their service to a new location, they must either call or email the utility's Contact Center to request a change of address. As a part of the account transfer process, the customer will receive a new account number. This is necessary due to the coding structure of the current billing system's account management feature that includes a location identification. At that time, the contact center agents will inform the customer that they must register their new account number in the residential portal if they wish to make payments online or to establish auto-pay. This requirement is due to federal rules and guidelines regulating Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS). This process ensures compliance with the requirement and protects the customer's banking and credit card information. These standards apply to all entities that store, process, and/or transmit cardholder data.

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As the Water utility moves forward with enhancements to the portal, customers will be able to request move in, move-out, and account transfers online, eliminating the need to call for services. Within the portal customers can enroll in Smart iQ Analytics that provide alerts to identify leaks, high use, and watering restriction compliance, as well as home water use reports. They will also be able to enroll in conservation programs and compare their water use to usage of other customers by neighborhood or zip code. That functionality, along with the release of the enterprise portal for commercial and industrial customers, is currently in testing and expected to be available in late spring or early summer. This enhanced functionality will be promoted through various mediums including a mailer to commercial and industrial customers, a bill insert, City News stories and active social media campaigns and advertising. Targeted communications will be used to encourage auto-pay customers to move fully into the MyH2O portal.

Finally, the utility is in the planning stages for replacement of the current nearly 30-year-old billing system, which will take several years. It is expected that the next generation billing system will offer state of the art payment features and advanced account management functionality that will further enhance the customer's online experience.

Should you have any questions, please contact Chris Harder, P.E., Water Director, at 817-392-8207 or Jan Hale, Deputy Water Director, at 817-392-8438.

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City Manager