

City of Woodland's Water Meter Plan
Frequently Asked Questions

General

1. Q: When and why must water meters be installed in Woodland?

A: As of January 1, 1992, a California law requires all new water service connections include the installation of water meters. In 1992, the State did not require that these meters be used for billing, just that they be installed. However, per Assembly Bill 2572, signed by Governor Schwarzenegger in September 2004, the State is requiring that water customers with meters be billed on their consumption, and that all water users located within the City's service area, be billed on consumption.

2. Q: Do I already have a meter?

A: All homes built in 1992, or after, should have a meter installed on the property. Most homes built prior to 1992 will need to have a meter installed by the City.

3. Q: What if I don't have a water meter yet?

A: The City is planning to complete the citywide metering in Fall of 2011. Since 1992, state law has required water meters as part of all new construction. As a result, about a third of the homes in Woodland already have water meters. Eventually, every water customer in the city will have a water meter. Currently, there are three types of residential and commercial service conditions: 1) those who already have water meters; 2) those with meter boxes that only need a meter placed inside (meter-ready); and 3) those who do not have anything in place for metering installation (needing a full installation). All three of these water service conditions will need to have the radio read automated feature added or incorporated into their water meter. Meter retrofitting and installation will take place on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. The order of work will provide for an orderly and efficient implementation.

4. Q: When will the City start reading the meter?

A: The City will begin meter reading soon after the installation in order to supply you with consumption data. The information collected will also give the City historical data for use in long-term planning as well as aid in leak detection for both the City and residents.

Metered customers will not be billed for their consumption until they have received 6 months of sample bills. For Phase 1 customers November 2010 is when metered rate become effective.

5. Q: What are the benefits of metering?

A: All water service customers will benefit from water metering. Metering will help the city better manage its water supply, foster efficient water use among customers, reduce the number of costly wells that are needed and ensure that customers enjoy a reliable supply of water. Water meters are also an efficient tool for detecting water leaks in your service line. An additional benefit is a more equitable charge for water service. Meters, along with a rate based on usage, will allow customers to pay for what they actually use. Customers can then benefit from conservation measures they choose to implement.

6. Q: Will the City meter its facilities too?

A: Yes, the City of Woodland parks and buildings will be metered. Some landscape medians are already metered and the rest of the medians will be metered as part of Phase 2 work.

7. Q: How can I determine how much water I am using?

A: For six months prior to paying metered rates, your sample utility bill will show how much water you use and compare your flat rate versus the new metered rate. The purpose of providing this information to our customers is to encourage customers to enact water conservation measures that are consistent with their life style and to help in identifying leaks in their plumbing system that may need to be repaired.

8. Q: What happens if the meter breaks? Am I responsible?

A: The City is responsible for the water service line up to, and including, the water meter and the meter box. Customers are responsible for the plumbing from the house to the water meter box. A broken water meter is generally the responsibility of the City, as it is part of the city's water system.

9. Q: How will my meter be tracked? Will someone read my meter?

A: The City will use radio-read technology which allows all meters in the city to be read within a day or two. Data is electronically recorded and logged. While city staff will manage the meter reading, radio-read capabilities will help avoid human error and reduce the number of City employees needed for the meter reading and billing process.

10. Q: Are other areas in the Yolo/Sacramento region being metered?

A: Yes. These metering requirements are statewide. Many other cities in the state, and throughout the country, have already been metering water customers for years. For example, the City of Davis began metering its customers in the mid-1990s. The City of Woodland and others in the Sacramento region are some of the last cities in the state to begin metering.

11. Q: Are there things I can do now to conserve water?

A: Yes. To help you use water more efficiently, the City has a program for low water use plumbing fixture retrofits which aids water conservation. You can also cut back on simple things like shower length and landscape watering and wash

full loads of laundry and dishes to maximize efficiency. Click on the link below for more water conservation tips. www.cityofwoodland.org/waterconservation

Billing/Costs

12. Q: How will water meters affect my utility bill?

A: After a six month sample metered billing period, customers with meters will be charged for the amount of water that they use rather than paying a flat rate. In general, if you use a small amount of water, your bill will be less than those who use more water. The more water you use, the higher your bill will be. The City is working to ensure that rates are reasonable and the transition to metered billing will be smooth. The City set metered water rates so the total annual amount paid by the average meter customer is similar to that paid by the average flat rate customer.

13. Q: How is the current flat rate calculated for my water bill?

A: The City of Woodland's residential flat rate for water is based on lot size. Any single family residence is charged based on the size of their property (house and surrounding land). Based on the size of your lot one of three monthly flat rates applies:

	Effective 1/1/2010	Effective 7/1/2010	Effective 7/1/2011
Lot less than 5,000 sq. ft	\$23.85	\$28.60	\$34.30
Lot 5,000 to 10,000 sq. ft	\$29.40	\$35.30	\$42.35
Lot greater than 10,000 sq. ft	\$34.75	\$41.70	\$50.05

14. Q: When will I begin to be billed on a metered rate?

A: All customers with water connections installed after 1991 will receive six months of sample water bills until November 2010 when they are switched to a metered rate. All other customers will be billed on a metered rate after their water meter is installed and have received six months of sample bills. The City anticipates all meter installations to be complete by 2012. By law, everyone in the City must be billed on a metered rate.

15. Q: How much will my metered bill be?

A: A metered rate was adopted by City Council and complied with State law (Proposition 218) in its implementation. Below is a link to the water rate information website.

http://cityofwoodland.org/gov/depts/pw/water_rate_info/default.asp

The City had a water rate study to decide on the metered rate structure. Those who utilize modest water conservation measures will pay a similar annual total for water as those who will still be on the flat rate (who eventually will be on a metered rate structure, too). In order to minimize the financial burden on the

City's water customers a water conservation program is available that can help you reduce water use and consequently lower your water bill.

The City will provide each customer a six months of water usage data before they are switched to a metered rate. This data will help customers assess their monthly water usage and help plan for future metered billing. Water usage may be more significant during the summer months than in the winter, so summer bills will likely be higher than those in the winter.

16. Q: Will assistance be provided to low-income water customers?

A: The City is seeking low interest loans and/or grants to minimize the financial impact to all customers. To assist low-income customers who require a water meter, the City is researching if it is allowed under State law to develop a low-income assistance program. The program would provide for a yet to be determined percent reduction in the monthly surcharge for qualified applicants. In addition, the Finance Department can be reached at 530-661-5831 for more information.

17. Q: What should I do if I think the consumption recorded on my bill is inaccurate?

A: Water meters are flow tested to meet national standards before they are installed. Meters must comply with the American Water Works Association standard C700 which prevents a meter from reading higher than one percent above the actual water usage and not less than 95 percent of the actual water used. This standard puts any errors in accuracy in favor of the customer. Furthermore, as meters age or wear it records less water than what is actually used which again favors the customer. The under recording of water usage is reduced when a meter is replaced which is on average every 10 -15 years.

Please call the City at (530) 661-5831 to obtain more information about your water usage for the billing period.

18. Q: I have a pool. Will this cost me more money?

You will be billed for the amount of water that you use. With proper maintenance, pools should rarely have to be drained and refilled. To reduce the amount of water you'll need to add to your pool, use a pool cover to prevent evaporation, check for (and fix) leaks and manually clean pool filters. Depending on the size of the swimming pool it would cost approximately \$35 to replace the water in the pool.

19. Q: What is the difference between metered rates and flat rates?

A: Customers on a flat rate will pay one fee, regardless of the amount of water used. Those on a flat rate do not have meters so their flat rate covers both a monthly base charge and a flat fee for the amount of consumption based on their parcel size.

Customers on metered rates will pay based on how much water they use. Their rate will include a monthly base charge plus a cost based on the actual amount of water used as recorded in the water meter.

The homeowner on a metered rate will have more monthly variation in their water bill since water usage is normally higher in the summer and lower in the winter months. Some metered customers will pay less than the average customer if they use less water than the average customer. The City of Woodland will strive to have the total annual cost to homeowners on meters be similar to the total annual cost of those still on a flat rate.

Eventually all customers will be on a metered rate.

20. Q: What is the monthly base charge part of the metered rate?

A: The monthly base charge is a fixed portion of metered customers' water bills. The base charge covers the City's cost of constructing and maintaining the water system so that it is always available for you to use. The water base charge applies to all users. Even if a customer doesn't use a drop of water during the billing period, the base charge will still be assessed for your service connection. Your monthly bill is the total of the base charge and the consumption portion of your water bill.

21. Q: Will my base rate on my bill change once the meter is installed?

A: No, customers in Phase 1 (those who had homes built after 1991 and those who currently have meters) will remain on a "Flat Rate" until November 2010 and then will be billed a monthly base charge and consumption (usage) rate. Customers in Phase 2 (all other customers not included in Phase 1) will also remain on a "Flat Rate" until after their meter is installed and residential water users have received six months of sample bills.

22. Q/A: What is the automated radio read meter system and how does it work?

The City of Woodland will be using what is called an Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system to minimize the operational cost for meter reading. Years ago communities with water meters had to hire several meter readers to go around and read the meters. Today it is typical for communities to install AMR capable meters with transmitters that daily send out water usage information. The AMR capable meters come with small transmitters that are strong enough to send a signal to a receiver mounted on antennas at existing community facilities. The data is gathered and bills are then prepared and distributed.

The Automated Meter Reading system greatly reduces staffing requirements, increases water conservation, helps the City evaluate hourly, system-wide water use demands for future planning and helps homeowners to identify when leaks occur.

23. Q: Is there any way to lower the base charge?

A: All residential customers will pay the same residential base charge. Some types of non-residential customers may find that downsizing their meter size is a viable alternative based on the users required flow rates. Those desiring to change the size of their meter would pay for the cost of the work, applicable fees and the new rates associated with that size meter. Meter downsizing will lower the base charge; however it will not affect the usage rate. However, the meter size must be sufficient to meet the operational requirements of the property and be within the operational requirements of the meter.

24. Q: How much does a water meter cost?

A: When a water meter is installed during new home construction, the cost of meter installation is about \$400. In a retrofit situation (where there currently is no meter) the cost is much higher because the service line must be located, excavated and cut into, and meter boxes, lids, re-setters, shutoffs and meters installed. Sometimes old service lines may need to be replaced. The average cost for a full retrofit installation is estimated to be \$950. The average cost to install a meter on a meter-ready service is about \$160.

25. Q: My house already has a water meter. Am I paying for my water meter twice through water rates?

A: No, most of the costs for the water meter retrofit project are for project design and providing the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) System, not meter installation. Very few businesses and homes don't have meters already installed in Phase 1. A rate study was done to address these concerns and provide an effective and equitable water rate for all customers (Phase 1 & Phase 2).

26. Q: Will I be required to pay for my meter/AMR installation?

A: This meter installation project is one of several required major capital construction projects that will be paid for through the City's Water Enterprise Fund. All capital construction projects that serve existing water customers are paid for with Water Enterprise Funds. These Water Enterprise Funds are generated through the collection of water rates paid by the customers.

Installations

27. Q: Will I be notified about my meter installation or retrofit?

A: Yes. One to four weeks prior to installations in your neighborhood, you will receive a letter mailed to your home. You will also be notified 24 hours in advance of the meter installation or retrofit with a door hanger at your home. An exact time is not feasible to provide but if you need to schedule a specific time please call the number on the notification letter you received in the mail. You will be notified in advance of when you will start paying for water services based on how much water you use.

28. Q: Will my landscaping or property be impacted by meter installations or retrofits?

A: No, if your landscaping is not covering or obstructing the meter box your landscape should remain in the same condition as found. However, any landscape covering and/or obstructing access to the meter box will be removed. (Article VII Sec.23C-7-10.C --- “obstructing access to a water facility prohibited”) The water meter and meter box is city property and must be accessible to city staff for any maintenance needed to city property. City contractors will photograph landscaping prior to beginning any work and again when the work is completed to ensure successful landscape restoration on your property. The area near your sidewalk will be marked by various utility companies so that the meter installation crews can avoid damaging other utilities in the ground near where your meter will be installed. The installing contractor will ultimately remove most of the marking paint.

29. Q: What can we do to help things work smoothly and reduce operational costs?

A: We ask that those with water meter boxes (marked with “WATER” on them) please keep the surface of them uncovered, generally clean and accessible. When new meter boxes and the automated radio system are installed it will be necessary to also keep them uncovered, generally clean and accessible. The automated radio read water meter box cover will look the same as the existing conventional meter box except it will have a transmitter located on it which looks like a 4 inch wide by ¾ inch high black button on it. It is important that this transmitter “button” be kept uncovered so it works properly which will help keep citywide operational cost to a minimum. We appreciate your help.

30. Q: How long will the installation take? How long will a retrofit take?

A: Typical installation time is approximately 4 hours. A simple retrofit may take as little as twenty minutes, while more complicated retrofits may take significantly longer than 4 hours.

31. Q: Do I need to be home during the installation?

A: **Customers do not need to be home during the install.** One to four weeks prior to installations or retrofits in your neighborhood, you will receive a notification letter in the mail. You will also be notified 24 hours in advance of the meter installation or retrofit with a door hanger at your home or business.

32. Q: How is the location of the meter determined?

A: Installation of the meter will be in the same vicinity of the existing water service line and generally near the sidewalk. Conditions may arise that prevent the meter from being installed in the same spot as the service line such as trees and retaining walls. Efforts will be made to keep the meter as close as possible to the original water service line. Please do not remove the flags placed around the site.

33. Q: Will the water pressure or flow go down after the meter is installed?

A: Typically the water pressure is not noticeably affected. Due to the configuration of the meter a minimal amount of pressure is lost. However, **checking and cleaning your faucet screens of any debris might solve why your water pressure has suddenly been lower.** The City of Woodland is taking steps to improve citywide water pressure that will more than offset any possible pressure loss due to the water flowing through the water meter. You will retain the same approximate flow capability of water through the meter as you currently have.

34. Q: Why are there paint markings on my sidewalk? When will the paint be removed?

A: Water meter installations require digging. State law requires that before you dig, the area must be marked and allow other utilities (i.e., PGE, WAVE) the opportunity to see if any of their pipes/cables/electrical lines are running through your planned dig site. The paint markings will be removed by the Contractor within a few weeks after the meter install has been completed. The markings will not be immediately removed just in case any follow up work is needed at the meter.

35. Q: Why does the water meter installation in my driveway have black asphalt around the meter instead of cement?

A: The Contractor will **TEMPORARILY** fill in the area around the water meter with black asphalt for driveway installations but will come back once enough work has been done in the area to replace the asphalt with permanent concrete (that matches) around the water meter to restore the driveway to its similar look and conditions.

36. Q: I recently bought my house and already have a water meter. How does this new City-wide program affect me?

A: State law has required the installation of water meters on all homes built since January 1, 1992. As a metered connection you are or soon will be receiving six months of sample water bills. In November 2010 you will start receiving consumption based water bills.

37. Q: Where is my meter/meter box located?

A: Your meter/meter box is located on your property either in the front yard, driveway, park strip, or walkway. The meter is inside the meter box below ground level. Here are some examples of what you might see if you investigate your property.

For additional questions, please contact utilities engineering at 530-661-5945.

