



City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: JUNE 14, 2022**
FROM: RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES **WARDS: ALL**
SUBJECT: PUBLIC UTILITIES BILL APPEAL PROCESS - WATER RULE 17, ELECTRIC RULE 21, WATER RULE 6, AND WATER RULE 6 - RESOLUTION

ISSUE:

Adopt a resolution approving the changes to Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 for the Disputed Bill Appeal Processes and Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6 for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council adopt a resolution approving the changes to Water Rule 17, Electric Rule 21, Water Rule 6, and Electric Rule 6 as described herein.

BOARD RECOMMENDATION:

On February 28, 2022, the Board of Public Utilities (Board) conducted a public hearing to receive public input and consider changes to Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 for the Disputed Bill Appeal Processes and changes to Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6 for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills; and unanimously voted to recommend that the City Council adopt the resolutions approving the changes to Water Rule 17, Electric Rule 21, Water Rule 6, and Electric Rule 6 as described herein.

Due to a staff error with the February 28, 2022 agenda package, the Board considered the items on April 25, 2022, and unanimously approved the needed Board Resolution that was inadvertently omitted from the February 28, 2022 meeting.

BACKGROUND:

The Riverside Public Utilities Bill Dispute Appeal Rules are adopted by the Board of Public Utilities (Board) and approved by City Council. The current processes for Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 were adopted by Board of Public Utilities on October 16, 2009, Board Resolution No. 2009-03.

In 2018, the Board considered billing appeals from customers related to RPU billing issues. As a result of those hearings, changes to Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and

Adjustments of Bills were approved to reduce the time periods used to calculate billing of undercharges for non-residential accounts from three years to six monthly billing periods, change the terminology of the time period used to calculate overcharges from one year to twelve monthly billing periods, and change the period used to calculate billing of overcharges for fast meters to be consistent with the monthly billing period for general overcharges.

On May 13, 2019 and June 4, 2019, the Board of Public Utilities and the City Council respectively approved changes to Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6, both for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills.

DISCUSSION:

The billing dispute process follows the process determined in Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process, and is used in coordination with Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills. The Rules & associated actions are outlined generally below, inclusive of recommendations, **blue bold font** for new text and ~~blue strike through~~ for removed text.

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Section A (partial):

Customers who believe their utility bill is in error must first contact the Customer Service Division by telephone, in writing, ~~or~~ in person, **by electronic mail, or on any Utility mobile or webpage form** within ~~five~~ **ten calendar** days after receiving their bill **to dispute the bill.** ~~and initiate a complaint or request an investigation concerning the bill.~~ **Unless stated otherwise herein, the contact information is as follows: 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501 or CallCenter@RiversideCa.gov, or (951) 782-0330.**

The Customer Service team will review summary information of the account and seek any potential matters that could be resolved by the corresponding Rules for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills and advise the customer of the results.

Water Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Section A (partial):

1. Whenever the corrections of any bill for water service is questioned, the Utility shall investigate it. The Customer has **ten calendar** ~~five~~ days after receiving a bill to question its correctness **as described in Rule No. 21.** After that period the bill is considered payable as rendered.

Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Section A (partial):

1. Whenever the correctness of any bill for electric service is questioned, the Utility shall investigate it. The Customer has **ten calendar** ~~five~~ days after receiving the bill to question its correctness **as described in Rule No. 21.** After that period the bill is considered payable as rendered.

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Section B:

If, after contact with the Customer Service Division, the Customer believes the bill is still incorrect, the Customer must, within **10 calendar** days after receiving the explanation from the Customer Service Division, contact the Customer Service Manager, Collections Supervisor, ~~or Customer Service Supervisor by phone or send a written statement by~~ **telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or any Utility mobile or webpage form** regarding the **disputed bill.** ~~billing dispute to the Customer Service Manager, 3460 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501.~~

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section C:

A Review Manager will be designated to conduct an investigation of the Customer's billing dispute. The Review Manager will be the Customer Service Manager or Customer Service Supervisor, and the investigation may involve other staff at a higher level in the ~~organization~~ **Utility**. The investigation will include consideration of whether the Customer may amortize the unpaid balance over a reasonable period of time, not to exceed twelve months, but usually over a shorter time period. **The results of this determination will be communicated to the Customer in writing within 10 calendar days.**

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section D

~~If the disputed bill is not resolved, the~~Any Customer, ~~whose complaint or request for investigation regarding a bill for utility service results in an adverse determination by the Review Manager, may appeal such determination, after receiving the explanation from the Review Manager,~~ **by telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or on any Utility RPU mobile or webpage form** ~~sending a written statement within 10 calendar days following of mailing the results of the investigation. the explanation setting forth the reasons why the Customer believes the investigation is incorrect.~~ The Customer must send this **appeal statement** to the Assistant General Manager, **Customer Service/Business Services** ~~Finance of Public Utilities, 3750 University Avenue, 5th floor, 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501, or CallCenter@RiversideCa.gov, or (951) 782-0330.~~

Upon timely receipt of the written **appeal statement**, the **Director, or designee**, ~~Assistant General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities or his/her representative~~ will determine if the Review Manager's investigation was thorough and complete, addressing the aspects of the billing dispute. The results of this determination will be communicated to the Customer in writing **within 10 calendar days of receipt of the appeal.**

Water Rule 17 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Section D and Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Section E

~~If the billing dispute is not satisfactorily resolved with the Assistant General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities or his/her representative, the Customer may request a review by the Public Utilities Director by sending a written statement within five days of mailing the Assistant General Manager, Finance determination to: Public Utilities Director, , 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501. Upon timely receipt of this written statement, the Public Utilities Director will make his determination and communicate said determination to the Customer in writing.~~

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Section E F

If the Customer is not satisfied with the **determination** ~~findings~~ of the ~~Public Utilities Director, or designee~~, the Customer may appeal to the Board of Public Utilities. The appeal must be submitted **by either telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or any Utility mobile or webpage form** ~~in writing~~ to the ~~Public Utilities Director, as Secretary of the Board of Public Utilities, together~~ with the reasons for the dispute within ten **calendar** days following mailing of the Public Utilities **Director's determination response**. In the absence of a timely filed appeal, the **decision of the** ~~Director's determination~~ will be final. Upon receipt of a timely appeal, **a hearing will be held** ~~the matter will be reviewed~~ by the Board of Public Utilities within **45 calendar** days of receipt. **The customer will receive notification of the hearing date, time and location. The Board's decision will be made at the public meeting and the customer will receive** ~~A~~ a written decision of the Board of Public Utilities ~~of Public Utilities shall be delivered to the Customer by personal delivery or by certified mail within 15 calendar days following the~~

appeal hearing. ~~The decision of the Board of Public Utilities is subject to appeal to the City Council pursuant to Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code.~~ **"The City Council has designated the Board of Public Utilities as the appropriate governing body to decide on the appeal pursuant to Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code. The determination of the Board of Public Utilities will be the final decision."**

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The Bill Dispute process contributes to **Strategic Priority No. 5 - High Performing Government** and **Goal 5.3** to Enhance communication and collaboration with community members to improve transparency, build public trust, and encourage shared decision-making.

These processes align with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – The appeal process is transparent and reflects how decisions are based on sound policy, inclusive the involvement of City Boards & Commissions. The efforts to improve this policy include ensuring timely and reliable information.
2. **Equity** – This appeal process ensures that all customers have equal access to process and therefore shares in the benefits available to all customers.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The appeal processes are designed to allow the customers a method to dispute Water and Electric bill charges inclusive of all investigative measures to ensure fiscal responsibility for ratepayers.
4. **Innovation** – The appeal process recommendations are inclusive to new communication technology and the team will continue to use the approved process to provide innovative options to improve the experience to meet the community's changing needs for faster and more convenient methods of communicating.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – The process recommendations include the allowance for digital customer communication which reduces the carbon footprint of requiring paper copies or mailed documents thereby contributing towards sustainability.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with approving the updated recommended changes to the Water and Electric rules. Any billing disputes that are brought before the Board of Public Utilities will include a fiscal impact for the request.

Prepared by:	Todd M. Corbin, Utilities General Manager
Certified as to availability of funds:	Edward Enriquez, Interim Assistant City Manager/Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer
Approved by:	Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form:	Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Water Rule 17 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Redlined
3. Water Rule 17 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Clean
4. Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Redlined
5. Electric Rule 21 Disputed Bill Appeal Process Clean
6. Water Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Redlined
7. Water Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Clean
8. Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Redlined
9. Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Clean
10. Public Utilities Code 10010
11. February 28, 2022 Public Hearing Notice
12. Presentation