

City Council
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For Immediate Release

June 1, 2020

Contact: Laura Morris
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City Utility Billing Update

Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, the City of Lincolnton has been working hard to support residents and utility customers. Residential utility disconnections for failure to pay billing have been suspended since April 1st consistent with the NC Governor's Executive Order 124. Effective today, and consistent with NC EO 142, utility disconnections are now suspended until July 29. The City of Lincolnton will not disconnect residential water, wastewater, and/or electric service due to late or non-payment until July 29 or EO142 is modified. In addition, the City will continue to waive penalties including late and default fees in addition to suspending residential utility disconnects.

It is important for all City of Lincolnton utility customers to know that they are still responsible for paying all utility usage billed between March 31 and July 29, which includes bills issued in the months of April, May, June, and July. Customers should continue to make payments on their accounts to avoid accumulating large balances, even if they cannot pay in full. Utility account balances will not be forgiven, only deferred, and customers having trouble paying utility bills in full or on time are strongly urged to make incremental payments during this time.

All city utility customers are encouraged to use the online payment system, and online convenience fees are currently waived.

The City will have payment plans available for customers that are unable to pay their bills in full by July 29. Customers will have six months from July 29 to make required monthly payments to pay all overdue balances and bring the account balance current. Details about payment plan options will be released later and customers can contact the utility billing office for more information or to establish payment plans now.

In its continuing efforts to assist those utility customers with genuine hardships, the city is actively pursuing grant and relief funds to help residents pay overdue utility bills. If any grant funds are received, they will be dispersed according to customers' ongoing efforts to pay their bills on time, including partial payments. The city faces significant budget shortfalls because of the pandemic. The utility billing department reports that current past due residential billing accounts have tripled to almost 500 each month since March. These accounts represent approximately \$215,000 in monthly operating revenues for the city, or about a 6.5% rate increase for paying customers. The city continues to work hard to deliver essential services for all citizens despite this budget impact, including the possibility of using reserve funds to balance the city budget.

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The NC Phase 2 “Safer at Home” advisory is in effect until June 26, and residents are reminded to take appropriate precautions and use the 3W’s – **Wear** a mask, **Wait** 6’ apart, and **Wash** your hands regularly. The order also bans gatherings to less than 10 people indoors and less than 25 people outdoors. Everyone should practice responsible social distancing. Additional guidance, Lincoln County Health Department Updates and resources are available on the City website at www.LincolntonNC.org/Covid.

All city services are operating as regularly scheduled and city employees are taking precautions to protect themselves and the community as appropriate. Some additional information regarding Phase 2 city operations:

- The Parks & Recreation Department:
 - Park & Trail restrooms are now open with limited capacity
 - Outdoor pickleball courts at Betty Ross Park are open 8a-5p
 - Outdoor basketball court at Betty Ross Park is open 8a-5p (shooting only)
 - Pool at Betty Ross Park is open with restrictions and limited to 36 people for 2-hour sessions twice daily to allow for sanitary cleaning between sessions (see the [Lincolnton Parks & Recreation website](#) for more details)
 - Playgrounds, First Federal Park Splashpad, Lentz Recreation Center indoor gym and racquetball courts remain closed until Phase 3.
- The Water Resources Department:
 - Please do NOT flush wipes, paper towels or other items in toilets. Only flush toilet paper so our wastewater pipes and pumps do not become clogged.
- The Public Works Department:
 - This Friday, June 5, is First Friday Recycling. Roll all blue recycling bins to the curb on Thursday evening for recycling collection on Friday morning.
 - Yard waste is being collected on a rolling basis
- Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency; call **704-735-8202** for non-emergency assistance.

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