

# Frequently Asked Questions

## City of Moorhead (City) Charges in General

Why do I have to pay City charges when I live in an apartment?

I lived in an apartment in Fargo and did not have to pay these charges.

The current fee structure was established based on customer classes, which include tenants rather than apartment building owners. If the fee structure was changed and the charges placed on building owners instead of tenants, as is done in the City of Fargo, those owners would pass the charges on to tenants through rent adjustments.

Why do I have to pay the same amount in City charges whether I live in a one-bedroom apartment or a four-bedroom apartment?

The current fee structure does not distinguish between the number of bedrooms in an apartment--this is comparable to the single-family home fee structure.

Why do I have to pay City charges when I live in an apartment and my lease says I only pay for electricity?

This issue should be addressed with the owner of the apartment building.

## Wastewater

What am I paying for when I pay a wastewater charge?

Construction, operation, and maintenance of sanitary sewers, pump stations, and the Wastewater Treatment Facility. These systems collect and treat wastewater and associated byproducts to conditions acceptable for return to the environment in accordance with permits issued by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

How are the flat fees and volume fee for the wastewater charge calculated? How are the flat charge and volume charge amounts determined?

Flat fees cover fixed costs (those that do not vary with the volume of wastewater treated). Volume fees cover those costs that vary with the volume and/or strength of wastewater treated. All costs associated with wastewater collection and treatment are allocated to fixed or variable categories. Using those allocations, fees are computed using data for the total number of customers, water or wastewater volume generated, and wastewater strength. Fees distribute the costs equitably to all customer classes and customers served.

# Frequently Asked Questions

[Why do I have to pay a wastewater charge when I live in an apartment where the landlord pays for water?](#)

For apartment buildings, tenants each pay the flat fee (for each living unit) and the building owner pays the volume fee for the entire building. This is comparable to a single-family home where the owner pays both the flat fee and the volume fee.

[Why do I have to pay for wastewater charges when I water my lawn and/or my garden or fill my swimming pool?](#)

Wastewater is billed based on water use since most water use enters the sanitary sewer as wastewater. Similar to water use, wastewater volumes can vary seasonally, particularly for residents that may spend a significant amount of time away from their home (for example, winters in warmer climates). To account for this seasonal variability, summer water use is capped at 1.5 times the average winter water uses for the purpose of computing wastewater volume charges. Because it generally is not economical or practical to separately measure outdoor water use, and to ensure that customers are not under- or over-charged, this measure is used to minimize charges for water that does not enter the sanitary sewer system.

[How does the “1.5 times winter average” determine how much of my water goes to wastewater when I know I do not use any more water in the house in the summer than I did in the winter; in fact, I probably use less water due to going to the lakes on the weekends.](#)

See the answer to the previous question. Seasonal variability in water use (and wastewater charges), and the reasons for that variability, are different for different customers. The 1.5 factor was developed based on a detailed analysis of water use history for all customers. While no measure (other than directly monitoring non-sewered/outdoor water use) is perfect, the analysis indicated that this factor was reasonable to ensure that customers are not significantly under- or over-charged and to ensure that normal water use variation does not trigger the cap.

## Stormwater

[What am I paying for when I pay a stormwater charge?](#)

Construction, operation, and maintenance of storm sewers, pump stations, and ponds that serve to collect and treat stormwater to conditions acceptable for return to the environment in accordance with permits issued by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Stormwater fees also pay for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the City's flood mitigation infrastructure.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why do I have to pay a stormwater charge when I live in an apartment where the landlord should be responsible for the gutters in the street?

The current fee structure was established based on customer classes, which include tenants rather than apartment building owners. If the fee structure was changed and the charges placed on building owners instead of tenants, those owners would pass those same charges to tenants through rent adjustments.

## How is the flat fee for the stormwater charge determined?

Impervious surface area is used as a surrogate measure for runoff contributions to the stormwater system. The total cost to operate the stormwater system is allocated to the total impervious surface area in the City to develop a rate. This rate is applied to the average impervious surface area for residential properties to develop the base charge applied to all residential properties. For non-residential properties, the residential base charge is scaled up proportionally based on the actual impervious surface area of the property to develop a property-specific charge.

## Pest Control

### What am I paying for when I pay a pest control charge?

The City contracts mosquito control services with Cass County Vector Control (CCVC) to coordinate efforts in the F-M Metropolitan area. They provide the following mosquito control services:

- Adult mosquito surveillance (trap collection and specimen identification)
- Data reporting
- Pesticide application to include larvicide and area ultra-low volume (ULV) spraying
- City-wide, truck-mounted ULV spraying
- Technical direction, coordination of activities, and public relations
- Administration, mapping, training, operational supplies, field supervision, data management, and product procurement
- Coordinated recommendation on aerial spraying

### Why do I have to pay a pest control charge when I live in an apartment and do not have animals?

Pest control charges are related to City-wide mosquito control. Issues like barking dogs are handled by the Moorhead Police Department's Animal Control Unit.

### How is the flat fee for the pest control charge determined?

Many years of data collection balancing the expenses to revenue reflecting a nominal monthly fee for all residents.

# Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the flat fee for the pest control charge the same for me as a sole tenant in an efficiency or one-bedroom apartment as it is for multiple renters who live in a three- or four-bedroom apartment?

The current fee structure does not distinguish between the number of bedrooms in either apartments or single-family homes.

## Forestry

What am I paying for when I pay a forestry charge?

The forestry charge pays for the maintenance, upkeep, and replacement of the trees, along with adding new trees to the urban forest. Urban forests help to filter air and water, control storm water, conserve energy, and provide animal habitat and shade. They add beauty, form, and structure to urban design.

Why do I have to pay a forestry charge when I live in an apartment and therefore do not own land with trees or a forest?

The Moorhead urban forests include public trees only (the City does not maintain private trees), which includes boulevard trees, trees in parks, and soon-to-be-introduced edible forests that benefit the entire community.

How is the flat fee for the forestry charge determined?

Balancing the expenses to revenue reflecting a nominal monthly fee for all residents.

Why is the flat fee for the forestry charge the same for me as a sole tenant in an efficiency or one-bedroom apartment as it is for multiple renters who live in a three- or four-bedroom apartment?

Urban forests go far beyond boulevard trees to include parks and soon-to-be introduced edible forests that benefit the entire community beyond the single-family dwellings.

## Recycling

What am I paying for when I pay a recycling charge?

The cost to pick up, haul, and manage the materials before it can be used in new products.

Why do I have to pay a recycling charge when I live in an apartment and do not have a recycling bin?

Recycling is available to all city residents. Some high-contamination sources have had the recycle dumpsters removed; however, the City operates source-separated sites for use to those who wish to utilize them.

# Frequently Asked Questions

Why do I have to pay a recycling charge when I live in an apartment and the apartment complex does not have a recycling bin?

Recycling is available to all city residents. Some high-contamination sources have had the recycle dumpsters removed; however, but the City operates source-separated sites for those who wish to utilize them.

Why is the flat fee for the recycling charge the same for me as a sole tenant in an efficiency or one-bedroom apartment as it is for multiple renters who live in a three- or four-bedroom apartment?

The current fee structure does not distinguish between the number of bedrooms in an apartment. This is comparable to single-family homes. The current fee structure does not distinguish between the number of bedrooms in single-family homes.

## Sanitation

What am I paying for when I pay a sanitation/garbage charge?

To ensure the protection of public health and to avoid the establishment of a public nuisance and to render safe, sanitary service to all residences.

Why do I have to pay a sanitation/garbage charge when I live in an apartment and my lease states my landlord pays for garbage?

Apartment residents are charged at the rate of our smallest container; lease agreements should be discussed with your landlord.

How is the flat fee for the sanitation/garbage charge determined?

We implement a pay-as-you-throw volume-based structure offering three different-sized containers priced incrementally according to customers' sizing requirements.

Why is the flat fee for the sanitation/garbage charge the same for me as a sole tenant in an efficiency or one-bedroom apartment as it is for multiple renters who live in a three- or four-bedroom apartment?

Apartment residents are charged at the rate of our smallest container.

## Streetlight Utility

What am I paying for when I pay a streetlight utility charge?

There are currently more than 3,200 street lights in the city of Moorhead. The streetlight utility charge pays for the electricity costs to power them, as well as the maintenance costs.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why do I have to pay a streetlight charge when I live in an apartment?

The current fee structure was established based on customer classes that include tenants rather than apartment building owners. If the fee structure was changed and the charges placed on building owners instead of tenants, those owners would pass those same charges to tenants through rent adjustments.

## Why do I have to pay a streetlight charge when I do not have a streetlight in front my house?

In accordance with City Code, the streetlight system is intended to provide for public safety on City streets and City-owned property. Spacing standards have been developed to achieve that intent. The City's streetlight standards do not provide for a light in front of every property. Spacing streetlights that closely would provide an excessive level of lighting. The streetlight charge represents each properties' contribution to maintaining the system of streetlights. Although streetlights also provide some degree of lighting and safety for private property, that is not the intended purpose. Private security lighting is recommended to address property-specific concerns.

## Payments

### Why is there a processing fee assessed if I choose to make a payment using my credit card, debit card, or an eCheck?

The payment processor who processes debit/credit card or eCheck payments assesses and retains a processing charge. The current charge is \$2.95 for transactions up to \$300.00. It is not unusual for not-for-profit governmental entities to pass the high processing costs for debit/credit card transactions back to the payor (local examples would be the Minnesota Department of Motor Vehicles and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for license renewals, Clay County to pay your local property taxes, and the City of Fargo to name a few). This is different than the for-profit entities (banks, credit card companies, retail stores, etc.) that do not pass the processing fees directly back to the payor.

Unfortunately, debit credit card transactions are significantly more expensive to process than paper checks, automatic recurring payments (ACH), and even payments made using the customer's bank's bill pay service. Because the percentage of payments made using debit/credit cards is low, it is not fair to require those that use other low-cost payment methods to subsidize debit/credit card payers through higher utility service rates. The \$300 threshold was determined by taking the average monthly bill amount for residential customers and multiplying it by 2. When the agreement was signed in 2018, the average residential bill was just over \$150.00, and over 90 percent of all monthly bills were under \$300.00. If the threshold was increased from \$300 to \$400 to accommodate 10 percent of the customers, the other 90 percent of the customers would have been required to pay \$3.95 per payment instead of \$2.95 per payment. As with the other vendors who provided bids, there was not an option to provide tiered fees based on payment amounts. As a result, and as with most decisions made in the government sector, the \$300.00 threshold was selected because it met the needs of the vast majority of the

# Frequently Asked Questions

customers/constituents that would be affected. It should be noted that the utilities do not receive any of the \$2.95 processing fee. The third-party processor uses it to cover their processing costs.

Please note that payments can be made for no extra charge if made in the following forms:

1. By enrolling in Moorhead Public Service's (MPS') Automatic Payment Plan (ACH) where you authorize MPS to initiate and make your monthly payments through an ACH deduction from your personal checking or savings account.
2. By check or money orders.
3. With cash.
4. Through payments set up by you when using your bank's bill pay program.

## How are my payments applied to past due balances on my account?

If your account has a past due balance, payments are automatically applied to your account in the following order:

1. First to clear any water charges (if any),
2. If additional funds remain, they are applied to electric charges (electric and Minnesota Sales Tax),
3. If additional funds remain, they are applied to City wastewater charges (wastewater, storm water, streetlight utility), and finally,
4. Any remaining funds are applied to City sanitation charges (sanitation, Minnesota Solid Waste Tax, recycling, pest control, forestry).

Payments are automatically applied in this order to ensure that services that might be disconnected (electric and water) are paid first to prevent a service interruption. If the amount of your payment is greater than your total outstanding balance, the remainder is carried as a credit to be used to pay future water and electric charges.

## General Questions

### Who do I talk to at the City if my landlord does not fix an issue that might cause me to get sick (i.e., mold, water damage)?

As a first step, put the issue/s you're having in writing. Specify the issue/s you are having and date by which you want the issue addressed. A form is available on the City's website ([www.cityofmoorhead.com](http://www.cityofmoorhead.com) – search “rental registration” and check out the FAQs under “what do I do if my landlord isn't maintaining the property” for the form). If the issue is not addressed, contact Neighborhood Services at 218.299.5434

### Who do I talk to at the City if my neighbor is plugging an extension cord into an outlet that I am paying for in my electric charge?

It seems to me that if it is your property, you can unplug it. If it is a trespassing issue, they could call the Moorhead Police Department.