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DeKalbCountyGa.gov

Manuel J. Maloof Center

1300 Commerce Drive

Decatur, GA 30030

My Fellow Citizens,

Thank you for welcoming me back to office as your CEO. As I complete my term, which ends on Dec. 31 at midnight, I have pledged to continue to make your priorities the priority of your county government, and to keep you informed of those critical issues which impact your quality of life.

Upon returning to office, I immediately began working on a resolution to our water billing crisis. Some of you have received inordinately high water bills, and others have received no bills for several months. There are a number of reasons we have identified for these problems, which are summarized in this letter.

DeKalb County has some inaccurate data in our billing software. The inaccurate data stems from our transition from outdated meters to newer technology. In many instances, the data which was supposed to identify newer technology meters was lost, causing the billing software to “misread” information from the traditional meter. Before August 2016, our staff had been making thousands of manual adjustments in every billing cycle to restore statement accuracy. By August 2016, the number of accounts with data issues exceeded the ability of staff to correct them in time for billing. As a result, DeKalb County began withholding all statements that may have had data issues. The root causes of those data issues have now been identified, and those previously withheld bills *will now be mailed out*.

Customers who have been affected will be treated fairly. The majority of water billing accounts will be unaffected as they have received timely and accurate statements. However, we recognize that for those customers whose statements have been withheld, this creates a hardship. Therefore, the bills of those customers whose statements were withheld, or accounts that have been otherwise identified as containing questionable information, will be released to these customers beginning Friday, Dec. 30. These bills will include an estimate based upon the average usage over the past 12 billing cycles (discarding the highest and lowest statements in this period). During this period of estimated bills, customers will not be back-billed if the actual usage amount exceeds the estimated amount. Customers will also be given 12 months to pay any bill that was withheld from a normal statement mailing by DeKalb County from September-December 2016. (This does not include any outstanding balance that was billed prior to September, or any bill that was mailed as scheduled).

Also, there are approximately 5,700 customers who are self-enrolled in the Dispute Resolution process. Of these, 1,300 customers who have been identified as containing questionable information will receive statements as explained above, and move into that program. The remaining customers will continue to be serviced via Dispute Resolution, and will not deviate from that process.

The county has implemented a verification process to ensure future accuracy. All accounts that have been identified as questionable are being verified by field technicians. Field technicians will prioritize the accounts with questionable data first, before eventually verifying every water meter. A team of auditors are being trained to monitor irregularities in accounts and begin corrective actions immediately and autonomously. All 184,000 accounts will be visited and verified within a year.

- Chief Executive Officer
Burrell Ellis
- Board of Commissioners
 - District 1
Nancy Jester
 - District 2
Jeff Rader
 - District 3
Larry Johnson
 - District 4
Sharon Barnes Sutton
 - District 5
Mereda Davis Johnson
 - District 6
Kathie Gannon
 - District 7
Gregory Adams Sr.

In addition, a water and sewer billing advisory committee of DeKalb County citizens will be empaneled. This committee will receive regular updates on the progress of the field verification process and provide insight and guidance with customer engagement moving forward. The Board of Commissioners is expected to advance this issue in January 2017.

All high water bills are not the result of county error. Aside from inaccurate data, a high water reading may be the result of a leakage on your property, higher consumption due to irrigation (particularly during the ongoing drought), or because of our higher water rates which were mandated by a federal consent decree. Also, as we replace older meters with newer technology, we can expect more accurate meter readings. Any of these could result in higher water bills.

In conclusion, DeKalb County is committed to providing the best possible customer service to our citizens. We apologize for any inconvenience and hardship this issue has caused and we appreciate your patience, understanding, ideas and support as we work through this challenging issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Burrell Ellis". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Burrell Ellis
DeKalb County CEO