

Kelly Smith

From: Raymond Noble <noblumpkin@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 23, 2025 4:03 AM
To: ksmith@threeforksmontana.us
Subject: Zoning regulations

To Whom It May Concern,

As the former City of Three Forks Zoning Official and former landlord of property in Three Forks, I strongly agree with the provisions of landlord responsibility in the new regulations. The City should not be doing the job for landlords by collecting deposits from renters and all things connected to that issue. I agree with all 4 items for the resolution.

Sincerely, Ray Noble

110 N 7th Ave E

City of Three Forks,

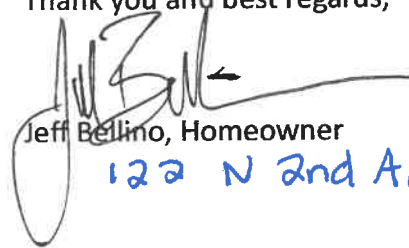
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I am a homeowner in Three Forks and find it very surprising that the City is saddled with the responsibility of (and costs associated with) managing rentals for the landlords of this town. I don't ask the city to manage my contracts, clients or any other business expenses/responsibilities I manage as part of the business I own. Additionally, as a homeowner, I would not ask a tenant or the city to step into this role. I believe the city should do what is best for the majority of residents and not cater to a small group that benefits financially from an outdated policy. We all know this community is changing and I believe the city should make the changes necessary to provide an equal opportunity to all residents and business owners, as well as considering the cost-benefit of the current, and similar, outdated policies.

I fully support the following changes being made...

1. Stop collecting Security Deposits on rental accounts
2. Refund nearly \$11,000.00 in deposits the city has collected
3. Moving forward, put all water/sewer accounts in the property owners name
4. Continue to send copies of late letters or disconnect letters to property owners with accounts in the tenants name

Thank you and best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Bellino', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeff Bellino, Homeowner

122 N 2nd Ave E



David Hanson

10/26/2025

City of Three Forks

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing a letter in support of keeping the city water bills in the name of the owners. It is my belief that this would simplify the collection of the payments for these services. I am certain that collecting from the many tenants can be a time consuming and costly process and this would save the city and the taxpayers the expense. The landlords would simply add it to the amount of the rent each month and it would ensure that payment is made. It seems to me that this has not been happening and it can cause a shortfall which would later need to be made up by the others that depend on the water system, many of which can not afford to shoulder this extra burden.

Warm regards,

David Hanson

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Hanson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

123 East Adams Three Forks, MT 59752



To: Three Forks City Council

From: Matt Jones

Date: October 27, 2025

Subject: Water/ Sewer Accounts

It has come to my attention that the City of Three Forks is spending a great deal of time and expense in the handling of water & sewer bills, of current rental properties. I did indeed reside on the council in 2008 when the topic last came up.

I believe the intention of the council at the time was to deal with the existing problem of delinquent bills, not to create more work for the city staff.

Looking back now I realize we did perhaps solve the overall delinquency issue to a degree, but increased the overall expense to the City of Three Forks. As new owner of rental property in Three Forks, I would have no issue in keeping the water and sewer bills in my name, and charging for it in the rent payment from my tenant.

I strongly encourage the council to take action and amend the 2008 decision we made. I am in favor of keeping all w&s bills in the land owners name. Land owners can simply collect the additional deposit money directly from the renters at the time of leasing the property. This simply eliminates the need for the City of Three Forks to be involved what should be part of the agreement between the renter and landlord.

It would also be my recommendation to return current deposits back to the tenants and end the needless tracking of the collected money.

As a resident of Three Forks, and a investment property owner, I alone decided to acquire additional property. It would be unfair of me to assume the City of Three Forks would assume my responsibility in making sure the water bill is paid and current.

Thank you for your consideration

Matt Jones

20 3rd Ave E

Kelly Smith

From: Kristin Dantagnan <kdantagnan@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 22, 2025 11:41 AM
To: ksmith@threeforksmontana.us
Subject: Letter of Support of Three Forks

Dear City of Three Forks,

As a current Three Forks resident, I found it very surprising that the city is paying staff to do the job of property managers/owners. As a home owner myself, I would never ask a renter to put the city bills in their name and have the city manage their deposits/payments on my behalf. There are many reasons for this, besides the obvious.

So, again, I reiterate your question:

Why is the City paying staff to help property manage these 144 rentals? The City should do what is best for the MAJORITY of citizens, not the MINORITY that profit from City staff continuing these undocumented practices.

Therefore, I am in complete support of *all* of the following:

1. Stop Collect Security Deposits on rental accounts:
2. Refund the almost \$11,000 in Deposits the City has collected to Tenants
3. Going forward only put water/sewer accounts into the Owner's name, Tenants can still pay the bill, and get an emailed bill
4. City Staff continue to send copies of late letters and/or disconnect letters to Owners with accounts in the tenant's names?

Our city is growing. City officials and staff have priorities and need to change some things as a matter of keeping up with that growth for the greater good. Eliminating the role of the city needing to do the above tasks, is a good, necessary and timely change.

Best,

Kristin Dantagnan
Homeowner; Three Forks, MT

3 N 1st Ave

City of Three Forks
Attn: Members of the City Council
PO Box 187
Three Forks, MT 59752

October 24, 2025

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE THREE FORKS CITY COUNCIL:

Recently, I was quite alarmed to learn how generous the city has been to private property owners of rental properties.

Why is the City of Three Forks in the business of "managing" rental properties for private property owners...for what it appears free of charge to the property owners? Why is the City of Three Forks holders of the security deposits for water/sewer charges of these rental homes?

Why are the citizens of Three Forks, through their taxes, paying for city employees to do the work of private property owners regarding their rentals? Shouldn't these owners of rental properties be at least reimbursing the city for the time and talents the city employees spend on managing the owners rental properties?

Absurd as this whole situation sounds...why hasn't the city council passed a resolution or ordinance correcting this misuse of city employees for a few private property owners of rentals?

I would support the city council in passing a resolution/ordinance that clearly lists the responsibilities property owners must follow regarding the payment of water/sewer charges and any other charges owed to the city on the rental properties that are located in Three Forks. I also agree that the water/sewer usage accounts should be in the name of the owner who has the ultimate responsibility for payment of water/sewer usage for each of their properties. If tenants have agreed to pay the water/sewer utility charges on the home they are renting, the city can provide an account number associated with that property so payments made by the tenants are applied properly.

Regarding the holding of security deposits by the city...WHY? The rental properties are not owned by the city; they are owned by private individuals. Let them collect the security deposits and place them in their own banks accounts.

I believe the members of the city council of Three Forks have a civic duty to immediately rectify this misuse of city employees. My taxes should go to the city for their employees to perform official tasks required by the city for the benefit of all residences of Three Forks. The private property owners of rentals are getting special privileges, for free, and that needs to stop.

Respectfully,

Patricia Blazick
PO Box 202, Three Forks, MT 59752
623 W Adams St

Wally Ziegler

From: rickvallamb <rickvallamb@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 21, 2025 2:24 PM
To: Wally Ziegler
Subject: Putting water bills in property owners name

We support putting all water bills in the property owners name instead of all the transferring back and forth. It works great for us at the Three Forks RV parks and apartment. Way less problems for the city and for the property owner. City has us set up on auto pay each month and works great. All we do is add a little extra on to the monthly rent.

Thank you,
Ricky and Valerie Lamb.

602 E Oak St

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Melissa Steingruber
11 N 2nd Ave East
Three Forks, MT 59752
Soberandslay@gmail.com
Three Forks Resident

Three Forks City Council
City Hall
206 Main Street
Three Forks, MT 59752

Subject: Letter of Support for City Utility Account Reforms and Policy Changes

Dear Mayor and Members of the City Council,

I am writing as a resident of Three Forks to express my full support for the City's proposed updates regarding rental property utility accounts, as outlined by City Treasurer Kelly Smith. I believe these changes represent a responsible and efficient improvement to city operations that will ultimately benefit the majority of residents and property owners in our community.

Specifically, I support the following measures:

1. Ending the collection of security deposits on rental accounts;
2. Refunding existing deposits to tenants;
3. Placing all water and sewer accounts in the property owner's name (with tenants still able to pay directly); and
4. Continuing to send late or disconnect notices to property owners as a courtesy.

These steps make sense both administratively and financially. With the City managing over 800 residential accounts—many of which are rental properties—the current system places an unnecessary workload on staff without any ordinance or regulation requiring them to do so. By moving rental utility accounts into the property owners' names, the City will reduce redundant administrative work, prevent confusion between tenants and landlords, and free up valuable staff time to focus on other priorities and essential public services.

Moreover, ensuring consistency in how accounts are handled promotes fairness and transparency for all residents. Other communities, large and small, have already transitioned to this system with great success. It's a common-sense policy that aligns with best practices and supports the long-term growth and efficiency of Three Forks.

I appreciate the City's thoughtful approach to this issue and the effort to streamline outdated procedures. Thank you for your dedication to keeping city operations fair, efficient, and accountable to the community as a whole.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Steingruber
Three Forks Resident

11/4/25

To: The City Council & Mayor of 3 Forks

As a property owner, taxpayer, and resident of The City of 3 Forks, I encourage you all to support the office staff in their request and recommendation to adopt a resolution to adjust the present handling and format of water and sewer billing for all rental properties.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to handle all of the involved portions of the services that are now provided by the city; i.e. - (deposits, collections, transfers, overpayments, etc.) Therefore I encourage the adoption of the four actions now being considered and discussed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dorothy Nelson

I am writing this letter in support of the proposed changes that the City of Three Forks wants to implement on its water and sewer utility accounts. I am not a landlord or tenant, so I am viewing this from an outsider's perspective, which, I feel, allows me to look at these changes with an unbiased perspective.

Per the resolution, the city is proposing six items:

1. Tenants moving out between 11/1 and 12/31 will have their deposit applied to their outstanding balance and the account will revert to the property owner's name.
2. Starting 11/1 the city will no longer require a deposit on any new water/sewer accounts.
3. On 12/31 The City will apply all held deposits to the outstanding bills of remaining tenant accounts.
4. Starting 1/1/2026 no new tenants will have the account moved into their name and no deposits taken.
5. Starting 1/1/2026 City staff will no longer send copies of late and disconnect notices to property owners where the account stays in the tenant's name.
6. At any time, the property owner wishes to switch the "customer" part of the account to their name, the City will switch the account over. Tenants may provide their email address to receive a copy of the bill via email.

These changes are administrative, and their effects on tenants and landlords are cosmetic at best. However, due to what I presume is the spreading of fear, uncertainty, and doubt, many people are vehemently opposed to these changes.

Let us start by looking at how it works today. The property owner/manager leases out a residence to a tenant. In that lease it defines the responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord. For the sake of argument, we will say that it defines paying the water and sewer to the city as the tenant's responsibility. So, they go down and sign up. The city takes a security deposit of about \$100. The city staff changes the name on the property's account to the tenant and sets up an address for billing.

It seems innocuous, except that there are two key issues that the city must deal with. First is the maintenance of that security deposit. It is a liability in the city accounting ledger and provides little to no benefit to the city. Second is the labor to change the name back and forth on the account. This takes time and changes little as it is cosmetic. The property owner is responsible for unpaid municipal utility bills per Montana law. Because Three Forks is growing, the time burden of switching accounts back and forth will only increase going forward, and eliminating inefficiencies like this will become more important.

I would also question the authority of the city to even collect deposits as per MCA § 7-13-4304(1) "The governing body of a municipality operating a municipal water or

sewer system shall fix and establish, by ordinance or resolution, and collect rates, rentals, and charges for the services, facilities, and benefits directly or indirectly afforded by the system, taking into account services provided and benefits received.” Since the deposit is not codified in ordinance or resolution, it is questionable if the city can collect a deposit at all. Additionally, it is questionable to me whether the city can under Montana’s equal protection charge a tenant a deposit when a property owner is not charged a deposit for the same type of account.

Those opposed to this change repeat several talking points that I would like to address:

1. If this goes into effect, we will have to increase the rent we charge to our tenants.
 - a. This is false. Nothing in this code would require any change to how a landlord/tenant manages the water bill and would put zero extra administrative load on the landlord and therefore should not change rent at all.
2. I would have to charge <insert exorbitant price here> to ensure that what I charge covers the bill because the tenant will not be able to see the bill and will be wasteful.
 - a. Again, nothing is stopping the tenant from getting the bill or paying the bill, so it follows that they would not change the way a landlord manages the water and sewer utility for the tenant. As to being wasteful, this is weird to assume a tenant would just run water down the drain just because water is included in their rent. However, to make it clear, nothing about this change would require a landlord/property owner to include this utility in the rent.
3. I will have to pay the bill if the tenant does not, so I will just always pay the bill to prevent disconnection.
 - a. This is true now, and nothing is changing in this. The procedure for non-payment is that the tenant is notified and given a grace period to pay the past-due amount plus a late fee and interest. If the bill is not paid after the grace period, a disconnect/reconnect fee is added and a shutoff occurs, the bill and account are reverted to the property owner/manager’s name, and they are responsible for the bill. Per MCA § 70-24-303(1)(f) a landlord “shall supply running water and reasonable amounts of hot water at all times and reasonable heat between October 1 and May 1, except if the building that includes the dwelling unit is not required by law to be equipped for that purpose or the dwelling unit is so constructed that heat or hot water is generated by an installation within the exclusive control of the tenant; and” Therefore, to stay compliant with Montana law the landlord would be required to pay the bill and get the water turned back on. Then they would have to manage the breach of lease (assuming

paying the utilities is included in the lease) according to §70-24-4XX and §70-25-2XX. The only thing that would change is updating the name on the utility account, this change is only cosmetic as the landowner is responsible for the bill per § 7-13-4309, MCA, which gives the municipality the power to recover the unpaid utility from the property owner via tax-lien.

4. The city is a utility like Northwestern Energy (NWE), and they do not keep the bill in the landowner's name.
 - a. There are fundamental differences between the city and NWE. NWE is a multistate entity, and your bill can and will follow you to your next residence within their sphere of influence. I have also seen other utilities require a reference from your old utility to get service or they charge a hefty deposit if no reference is available, which means NWE is substantially more likely to get paid by the old tenant than the city which has exactly zero influence outside of city limits. If a tenant skips out on a bill, the city only has the landowner to hold responsible via tax-lien according to Montana law. The city is a municipal government, and NWE is a public utility. The rules that each must follow are different and the remedies that they can pursue are defined and controlled by different laws and agencies.
5. I must treat all my tenants the same, so I would have to pay the bill and charge a massive uplift to cover all contingencies and wasteful users.
 - a. It is true that landlords must treat their tenants the same. It is not true that the property owner/manager would have to pay the bill and administer it. I am not a lawyer, and this is not legal advice, but in my opinion a simple clause in the rental agreement such as:
 - i. "Tenant shall be responsible for payment of all water and sewer charges related to the premises. Tenant shall obtain or confirm the monthly bill amount and remit payment directly to the utility provider by the 20th day of each month. If Tenant does not pay on time, and the Landlord receives a delinquency notice, the landlord may pay the outstanding amount to prevent interruption of service. Tenant shall reimburse Landlord for the amount paid, plus any late fee or interest charged by the utility, and an administrative fee of \$50 to cover processing costs. Failure to reimburse Landlord within 10 days after written demand shall constitute a material breach of this agreement and may be grounds for termination after proper notice and opportunity to cure as required by § 70-24-422, MCA."
 - b. This could be in every tenant's lease thereby treating every tenant the same and still leaving the onus of paying the bill on the tenant the same way it is today.

6. This will be unfair to my long-term tenants that have had the water in their name for years and will force them to be dependent on the landlord to get/pay their bill.
 - a. This is another straw-man argument. The city is proposing to change the current tenant account names through attrition. Meaning that if an account is in a person's name now, it will not change until they move out or they have 2 disconnect notices, at which point it will transfer back to the landowner's name as always, but not transferred into the new tenant's name going forward. The only change current tenants would see is the application of their deposit to their bill.

Herbert White

415 W. Adams St