



## Residents irate over new fees

By Sonny Turner

— A city ordinance that was put on the books more than 20 years ago has stirred up a hornet's nest and could lead to a lawsuit against the City of Athens.

"It's outright ridiculous if you ask me," said Athens businessman Steve Bauer. "It's costing me a lot of money and I'm not going to stand for it."

According to John Stockton, who is over the Athens Wastewater Department, the root of the problem is an ordinance that was put on the books 20 years ago when Tom Craven was the general manager of Athens Utilities.

The ordinance, intended for new developments in the city, says that if a water meter does not stay on continuously for 12 months at a home or business, the service will be terminated. When that happens, Stockton said usually the meter is removed.

In order to get service restarted, the owner must pay a tab fee and an impact fee, which must be paid when the meter is set. Those fees run \$880.45.

Bauer is not the only property owner in Athens upset about the matter.

"It was quite a shock when I was told they had removed the meter on my property," said Billy Cannon. "It would have been nice to have been notified about it, especially when we had just given the city a 10-foot easement on that property. They flat told me what the law was and the next day I had to pay \$874 to put back the meter."

Stockton said since the ordinance was adopted years ago, only a few water meters have been removed. But he said of late, the city has had three removed in one week.

"The problem is the impact fee, but I can't and Mayor Dan Williams can't sit down and rewrite a city ordinance just for these people," Stockton said. "We will look at it and see if can be rewritten in the future."

Stockton said the ordinance was created for new developments and the impact fees were not intended for people who are redeveloping property. But he said, "that is the way the ordinance is written."

Mayor Williams said the ordinance was set up to stop people from stealing water. He said it was for "economics" when the ordinance was adopted.

Bauer said he believes the ordinance is unfair.

"It's like we never had a meter. We are having to pay for it just like we were setting up a new house," he said. "I've talked to my lawyer about it, and I think we are going to fight it in court if we have to. It's just not fair."

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