



Town of Bristol

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November 26, 2025

Summary of Changes: Bristol Water Use Ordinance (2020 to November 2025)

MAJOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES:

1. Enhanced Legal Compliance (24 V.S.A. Chapter 129)

- Added comprehensive consumer protection provisions for water service disconnections
- Implemented uniform pink disconnect notice requirements
- Established strict timelines: 30-day payment period, 14-20 day disconnection notice
- Added physician certificate protections for health emergencies
- Prohibited disconnections during declared state emergencies (§5152)

2. Credit Supervisor Designation (Section 2.15)

- Town must now designate a trained credit supervisor per 24 V.S.A. §5142(10)
- Required training in Chapter 129 requirements and consumer protection procedures

3. Ethics Compliance (Section 2.17)

- Water Commission members must comply with municipal ethics requirements under 24 V.S.A. Chapter 60 (effective January 1, 2025)

BILLING AND COLLECTION CHANGES:

4. Revised Non-Payment Procedures (Section 13.4d)

- Defined delinquency as bills unpaid within 30 days
- Delinquent amounts must exceed \$15 to trigger disconnection
- Uniform pink notices required with abatement information
- Reconnection fees specified: \$25 normal hours, \$37.50 overtime
- Collection fees capped at \$25 regardless of attempts

5. Payment Agreements and Appeals (Section 13.8)

- Mandatory reasonable payment agreement offers before disconnection
- 30-day appeal window for billing disputes
- 15-day hearing requirement for Water Commission
- Payment plans must consider ability to pay and be documented

OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS:

6. Fire Hydrant Seasonal Maintenance (Section 10.1e)

- Water Operator responsible for year-round hydrant access

- Snow/ice removal within 3-foot radius during winter
- Vegetation trimming during growing seasons
- Enhanced visibility and emergency vehicle access requirements

7. Emergency Access Rights (Section 2.16)

- Town may access property immediately during emergencies without prior notice
- Applies to water line breaks, contamination, or threats to public health/safety

ENFORCEMENT FRAMEWORK:

8. Dual-Track Disconnection System (Sections 14.8-14.10)

Track 1 - Non-Payment Disconnections:

- Only permitted under strict Chapter 129 compliance
- Cannot disconnect if: delinquency \leq \$15, disputed charges under appeal, valid physician certificate on file, or no payment agreement offered
- Limited to 8 AM-2 PM on business days
- Tenant protection provisions included

Track 2 - Safety/Compliance Violations:

- Immediate disconnection allowed for public health/safety threats
- 10-day notice required for: meter tampering, unauthorized connections, fire hydrant obstruction, access denial for emergency repairs
- Chapter 129 restrictions don't apply to safety violations

9. Emergency Disconnection Prohibitions (Section 14.10)

- No disconnections during state emergencies (unless necessary for public safety)
- 90-day payment period after emergency declaration ends
- Temporary maintenance disconnections still permitted

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES:

10. Transfer of Water Service (Section 4.9)

- Current owner must notify Town 15 days before property transfer
- Final meter reading required
- All charges must be paid before transfer
- New owner must apply within 30 days
- Town inspection required before transfer approval

11. Enhanced Notice Requirements

- Disconnection notices must include abatement information
- Multiple communication channels required
- Escalating surcharges for repeated access denial

TECHNICAL CLARIFICATIONS:

12. Seasonal Protection Framework (Section 14.11)

- Town may adopt additional seasonal restrictions
- Follows Vermont Public Utility Commission guidance
- Protects residents during extreme weather

The 2025 ordinance represents a significant modernization, primarily focused on:

- **Consumer protection** through Chapter 129 compliance
- **Due process** with clear appeals procedures
- **Public safety** through enhanced access and emergency provisions
- **Operational clarity** separating billing issues from safety violations
- **Transparency** with detailed notice and timeline requirements

These changes bring Bristol's ordinance into full compliance with recent Vermont statutory updates while maintaining the town's ability to protect public health and water system integrity.