1.0 PURPOSE

This policy outlines a Hydrant Meter Program that balances protection of the community’s water supply and access to that supply. It is essential to ensure our water system has a reliable flow for fire suppression while still protecting against water theft, misuse and abuse, and intentional contamination in a post 9-11 environment. Fire hydrants are vulnerable points in a water system due to the ease in which they can be accessed and the quantity which can be used.

This SOP outlines the Hydrant Meter Permit Policy of Prince William County Service Authority (the Authority):

- Allowable and Unallowable Use of Fire Hydrants
- Fire Hydrant Restrictions
- Hydrant Meter Permit Overview
- Issuance of Hydrant Meter Permits
- Operating Instructions
- Meter Inspections
- Violation of Terms and Conditions

2.0 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE USE OF FIRE HYDRANTS

The primary purpose of hydrants is to provide fire protection. Hydrant meter permits shall be issued at the Authority’s discretion and shall only be issued for temporary connections, where permanent service is not available. Permits shall only be issued for use during construction activity, temporary landscaping, filling water trucks or tanks, and emergency purposes (with prior approval from the Authority). An Operator must be on-site at all times while the meter is connected to a fire hydrant.

Hydrant meters shall not be used:

- as a permanent connection, such as for a permanent irrigation system;
- to connect directly into the water distribution system or an irrigation system;
- when resulting effluent requires discharge into the public sanitary sewer system;
- by homeowners for any activities, including filling pools. Pool owners may use their garden hose and outdoor spigot to fill their pool or hire a service; and
- for fundraising activities.

A temporary connection at a specific location shall not exceed a period of six months, without written approval from the Engineering Department. Access to a water supply for a permanent
purpose must be achieved through other means, such as procurement of a permanent meter or groundwater well. The Authority may restrict the length of a permit based on the purpose of use.

Within water distribution systems, points of cross-connection exist where nonpotable water can be connected to potable sources. These cross-connection points can be a source of backflow or backsiphonage. The most common cross-connections are from irrigation systems, fire systems, garden/wash down hoses, and boilers. Unintentional cross-connections can occur through illegal and unprotected taps and raise potential health risks, system risks, and security concerns. Any cross-connection issues must be reported to the Authority immediately. All Authority issued hydrant meters have a built-in check valve; however, it is the responsibility of the permit holder to provide proper back flow prevention in accordance with the Virginia Department of Health.

Permit holders must use an Authority issued hydrant meter to access water from a hydrant and must follow the operating instructions outlined below. Authority issued meters may not be used in other jurisdictions. Tampering with a meter device or diverting service through an unauthorized connection is prohibited under Virginia Law. Tampering with an issued meter or unauthorized use is grounds for confiscation of the meter, penalties, deposit forfeiture, permit revocation, and legal action.

3.0 FIRE HYDRANT RESTRICTIONS

The hydrant permit indicates which hydrants in the Authority’s service area are available for use by permit holders. Designated hydrants are identified by the O&M. This list shall be reviewed and updated by O&M as needed. An address list and map will be provided to all permit holders. Updates can be obtained on-line or requested from the CS Department. Hydrants are designated to minimize the effects that large withdrawals can have on the system as well as neighborhood disruptions and safety hazards that fill-ups can cause.

In order to protect the water supply in times of emergency, permits shall be temporarily suspended when the County Administrator declares a Drought Warning or Emergency or when the Authority’s General Manager declares a heightened alert. Such communications shall be effective upon public notice and/or direct mailing. The Authority reserves the right to suspend or revoke permits at anytime. No water withdrawals from hydrants are permitted during these times, except by the Fire Department for fire suppression. Continued usage, is prohibited by law (Class 2 Misdemeanor under Section 18.2 – 162.1 of the Code of Virginia).

4.0 HYDRANT METER PERMIT OVERVIEW

Fire hydrants opened by any individual other than employees of the Authority or Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue must have a hydrant meter attached. The Authority has two types of meters available for rental. A deposit shall be required to cover any costs resulting from damage to the hydrant meter, its attachments, and any other equipment or facilities damaged by the permit holder. The deposit shall be refunded when the hydrant meter and hydrant wrench are returned and payment is made on all outstanding charges or damages.

The permit holder shall be responsible for utilizing the proper equipment and tools to operate the hydrant and meter safely and without damage. The permit holder is responsible for any damage to the fire hydrant, the hydrant meter, and the adjacent areas resulting from unauthorized or improper use. Permit holders must use an Authority issued hydrant meter and hydrant wrench to
access water from a hydrant and must follow the Operating Instructions outlined below. All hydrant meters must be returned to Authority headquarters as requested for reading or inspection.

5.0 BILLING

The Hydrant Meter Program is administered by the CS Department. An application fee shall be charged at the issuance of a permit. The charge for water obtained through a hydrant meter shall be per 1,000 gallons used with a 5,000 gallon minimum charge per month.

Those who keep hydrant meters for more than one month must fax or email meter readings to the CS Department on a monthly basis. Readings shall be due by the date stated in the permit. On-site readings shall be required at least once during each year, as requested by the Authority. The permit holder may also make an appointment with the CS Department to physically bring the meter to be read on-site by Authority personnel. If the reading is not reported, a penalty shall be assessed per occurrence. Failure to report reads consecutively shall result in deposit forfeiture and permit revocation.

Any person opening a fire hydrant, excluding Authority and firefighting personnel, without a valid hydrant meter permit, inspection, or metering device shall be subject to an Unauthorized Use Charge. Penalties shall be assessed upon notification to the Authority. See Violation of Terms and Conditions below.

Current rates are disclosed in a published rates and fees booklet that is available through the Customer Service Department, as well as on-line at www.pwcsa.org. Rates and fees are subject to change.

6.0 ISSUANCE OF HYDRANT METER PERMITS

Applicants wishing to obtain a hydrant permit and meter must come to the CS Department located at Authority headquarters. The permit holder must provide a valid Virginia business license and Federal tax ID number. The CS Representative shall contact the employer to verify the business address as well as the employment of and authorization of the individual to act on behalf of the company. A check for the deposit in the name of the company shall act as authorization. The applicant shall read the Hydrant Meter Permit Policy as well as the Hydrant Meter Permit and indicate agreement by signing the permit. The permit shall be reviewed by the CS Department and if accepted signed by CS management. The CS Department shall keep all active permits and copies of identification papers on file for the life of the permit.

7.0 OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

Meter-hydrant connections must be made according to the operating instructions listed below:

• Meters must not be left unattended.
• Meters must not be left attached to a fire hydrant when not in use.
• All public and private property must be protected while the hydrant is in use.
• Meters must be protected from freezing and thus can not be used when the temperature is below 32 degrees Fahrenheit.
• The main valve located in the street is not to be used without the express permission of the Authority.
• An issued hydrant wrench must be used to open and close the hydrant valve.
• All hydrants and valves must be opened and closed slowly to prevent damage.
• The hydrant valve must be in the full open position when in use. A separate valve on the hose must be used to control the flow of the water.
• The customer is responsible to flush the fire hydrant prior to connecting or installing the hydrant meter. Flushing prevents damage by removing any grit or sediment in the hydrant. A hydrant should be flushed until the water runs clear.

Users must not alter the meters in any way. Lost or stolen meters, as well as any damage to a fire hydrant or equipment, must be reported immediately to the Authority. Failure to comply with any of the operating instructions may result in confiscation of the meter, penalties, deposit forfeiture, and/or revocation of the permit.

8.0 METER INSPECTIONS

Meters are inspected by the Meter Department at Authority Headquarters. Meters shall be inspected prior to issuance, during a customer’s possession of the meter, and prior to closing an account to determine final balances due and any applicable deposit refund. While in a customer’s possession, meters must be inspected at least annually. Notification of on-site read and inspection schedules shall be mailed to the permit holder by the Customer Service Department.

The Meter Department shall secure a current inspection tag to each meter. This tag must not be removed from the meter or tampered with. Removal of this tag equates to meter tampering. Failure to comply with inspection requests shall result in immediate forfeiture of the held deposit, revocation of your permit, confiscation of your meter, and account closure.

Broken or damaged meters must be reported to the Authority immediately. The permit holder will be charged for any necessary repairs to the meter based on labor and materials.

9.0 VIOLATION OF TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Any violation of the terms and conditions of the permit shall result in the forfeiture of the deposit or revocation of the permit without notice. Meters must be immediately surrendered to the Customer Service Department at Authority Headquarters. The Authority reserves the right to not reissue a hydrant meter to any permit holder who has violated any of the terms or conditions of the permit.