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NEWS RELEASE: For immediate release January 9, 2008

The Jamestown Board of Public Utilities recently sent out mailings entitled “Owners Notice” to several hundred customers in the City of Jamestown and surrounding municipalities which receive BPU utility services.

An “Owners Notice” related to unpaid water, sewer and garbage bills in the City of Jamestown is sent on a regular, routine basis and the practice has always been a part of the utility operations. Such delinquent bills are considered liens on the properties and the amount of an unpaid bill may be placed on the City property tax bills for collection.

Unpaid water and sewer bills for properties in other municipalities served by the BPU may be placed on the tax bills for collection if costs were incurred after 2005.

The mailings serve as a legal notice to the property owners of the unpaid utility bills, provide the opportunity to pay the outstanding amounts before they are re-billed on a tax bill and provide the opportunity to contest the amounts due through an established hearing process.

Mike Anderson, Business Manager of the BPU, stated that, “This recent round of notices was sent to all customers for whom the BPU did not have records showing that a previous notice had been sent. For some customers,” he said, “this was the first time that a notice was sent. For others, this was a duplicate notice.”

“We take notice to customers very seriously,” said Mike Anderson. “If there is even a chance that unpaid utility charges will be re-billed on tax bills, we want to make sure that property owners are aware of this, and that they have the opportunity to contact customer service to discuss the unpaid amounts. We also want to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions or the right to a hearing if they believe that the charges are unwarranted.”

For City of Jamestown customers, unpaid utility charges are a lien on the property served pursuant to the City Charter. Outside of the City of Jamestown, unpaid utility charges on properties may be collected on the tax bills for those municipalities pursuant to the contractual agreements with those municipalities.

According to Anderson, “Many property owners outside of the City received the “Owners Notice” for the first time, and many were for old unpaid bills.” Stating that several non-Jamestown property owners expressed concern that they would be held responsible for bills that they knew nothing about, sometimes even including costs that were incurred by previous owners of the properties, Anderson reiterated that liens only apply to properties within the City.

“Our agreements with the non-Jamestown municipalities only require the collection of recently unpaid accounts. If an “Owners Notice” applies to charges more than two years old, it is not a lien on the property, and the municipality is not required to collect the debt,” said Anderson.

“These notices were meant to provide non-Jamestown customers with an awareness of past unpaid bills which are connected to their properties,” stated Anderson.