

To: Mayor and Members of Council

February 7, 2011

Re: Water Utility Meter Reading Report

Background

At the April 12, 2011 Council meeting, Council passed the following motion:

“THAT Council approves in principle, a quarterly billing process that involves one actual meter reading per year in December and three quarterly meter readings provided to the Town Office by residents. Council would reserve the final approval of the billing process pending the Administration’s evaluation of residents participation in the new billing process and report to Council in January 2011; and

Council authorizes that Administration negotiate a contract with Synrevoice Technologies Inc. to provide a message delivery system to White City residents.”

In 2010 there was an actual water meter reading in April for the first quarter. The second and third quarter were estimated billings and then an actual meter reading at the end of December for the fourth quarter.

Discussion

The last billing of 2010 was an actual reading and resulted in approximately 10 homes with extraordinarily high water billings. When we received these high water meter readings, Debi contacted public works to go back to the high reading houses and check to see if there was an error in reporting. Rod also talked to each of the home owners that had high readings and each of the residents informed Rod that they had laid sod this summer, which would explain the higher than normal readings.

Once we were assured that the readings were correct, and we had spoke to each resident that had high readings, we issued the water bills. The high readings resulted in water bills as high as \$1,400. This was not well received by the residents with high water bills.

Estimates were based on an average of past water consumption. All of the properties that were exceptionally high were newer properties and all had put in new sod. Therefore the average water usage did not account for the watering of grass.

The cost of performing an actual water meter reading is approximately \$1,100. This is solely the labour involved to do the meter reading.

The policy of performing only one actual meter reading is not enough for a growing community like White City. With the lack of water usage history on new residents, it is hard to estimate water usage. The Synrevoice message notifying residents to call in their water meter reading only resulted in approximately 50 people calling the office to report the number.

The best way to avoid unexpected water bills would be to perform actual readings each quarter. However that would come at a cost of over \$4,400 per year for the readings. The other option would be to perform two actual meter readings/ year and two estimate readings per year.

One of the residents of White City that experienced a high water meter reading in the final quarter of 2010, raised a couple of concerns of not reading the meters for 9 months. This particular resident had a usage reading of 365 cubic meters for the final quarter.

- This resident installed underground sprinklers this summer and assumes that he has a valve leaking. If regular readings were done, especially in the summer months, the leak would have been identified earlier and would have not wasted so much water.
- The water rate bylaw has a higher rate for usage over 150 cubic meters, therefore he was charged a higher rate on 215 cubic meters. He feels that if actual readings were done, then less water would have been charged at the higher rate.

Budget Implications

\$2,200/year for two actual meter readings, or \$4,400/year for four actual meter readings. This will be included in the 2011 Budget.

Conclusion

There are two issues that Council has to deal with in this report.

- 1) Set policy for Water Meter Readings
- 2) Decide whether concessions will be made for residents with exceptionally high water readings

Recommendation

Administration recommends that actual water meter readings be done on the new development areas:

- McKenzie Point



- Garden of Eden Estates
- Fairway
- Emerald Creek
- Bower West

The remainder of the properties within White City will have actual water meter readings in the first quarter and third quarter, March and September, respectively, and estimate billings for the second and fourth quarters.

There were approximately 10 properties that were affected with exceptionally high water billings, due to high water meter readings. All of these properties, with the exception of one, had planted new sod and were watering their lawn more than usual. Some of the residents with the high water billings have not yet paid their utility bill, due to the fact they are waiting for Council decision on this subject.

Some residents also expressed concern with the lateness in which they received their water bill, which resulted in penalty charges for unpaid utility accounts.

Administration recommends cancelling the penalty charged on all unpaid utility accounts for the month of January, which amounts to approximately \$670.68.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shauna Bzdel'.

Shauna Bzdel,
Town Manager