DATE: November 8, 2021

TO: Council Sustainability Committee

FROM: Director of Public Works

SUBJECT: Hayward Water Bill Redesign – Selection of a Design Option

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council Sustainability Committee (CSC) reviews, comments on, and selects a Hayward water bill design option.

SUMMARY

Staff is currently implementing an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) water customer portal with bill payment functionality. As part of this effort, the City will soon be partnering with a new external-bill printing and distribution vendor, InfoSend, Inc. (InfoSend). With this new vendor, the City has an opportunity to redesign the bill distributed to utility customers. In this report, staff present three bill design options for the CSC's review, comment, and selection.

BACKGROUND

Since Fall 2019, staff have been working to implement an AMI water customer portal that would enable customers to view details of their water consumption, sign up for leak alerts, and pay their bills in one, online, user-friendly location. At their May 18, 2021[1] meeting, the Council authorized the City Manager to execute an agreement with WaterSmart, Inc. (WaterSmart), for implementation of this customer portal platform. WaterSmart was selected following an extensive Request for Proposals and Pilot testing process, which is further detailed in the reports delivered to the CSC on March 9, 2020[2] and March 8, 2021[3].

In order to provide bill payment functionality within the WaterSmart customer portal, staff have entered into an agreement with third-party bill payment vendor Invoice Cloud., Inc. (Invoice Cloud), who will embed a range of payment services directly within the portal, effectively replacing the City's current utility bill payment vendor, Tyler Munis' Hayward

[1] https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4955269&GUID=10EF9795-0805-4832-BAFC-666221A843E9&Options=&Search=
[2] https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4389832&GUID=F46CB11A-247F-400F-AE74-907A02B58D6C&Options=&Search=
[3] https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4816829&GUID=09108CFF-23E6-4179-8AD1-5A0C4732D469&Options=&Search=

Self Service (HSS). Partnering with Invoice Cloud was authorized by Council at their September 28, 2021 meeting[4].

The third critical component to providing customers a robust water customer portal and bill payment experience is the ability to provide customers with copies of their bill PDFs through the portal. This functionality is not currently possible through Tyler Munis. As such, with the authorization provided by Council at their September 28, 2021 meeting[5], staff have also entered into an agreement with the bill print and distribution vendor InfoSend, Inc. (InfoSend). InfoSend can perform all of the City's physical bill distribution functions, like bill printing, sorting, and mailing, in addition to the necessary PDF archiving and water customer portal integration services, at lower rates than those currently paid to four vendors to provide limited versions of the same services. InfoSend can also provide pre-sorting, forwarding, address verification, and bill redesign services, which are not possible with the City's current bill production and distribution vendors.

DISCUSSION

As part of the transition from Tyler Munis bill generation to InfoSend bill generation, the City has the opportunity to design a new billing template should it desire to do so.

Customers frequently request assistance from frontline customer service staff in identifying such basic information on their Tyler Munis-generated bills as the amount owed and their account number. Redesigning the water bill would provide an opportunity to draw more direct and clear attention to these basic components of the bill, while also providing an opportunity to draw special attention to the new payment options that will soon be made available to customers with the launch of the water customer portal and its Invoice Cloud payment features.

Staff have identified three bill design options for the CSC's consideration. It is important to note that Design Concept A and B, further described below, feature information about payment methods, which will not be available until *after* the water customer portal has launched. If staff are able to implement a new bill design *before* this launch takes place, the information presented in these concepts will be replaced with current bill payment options and information.

- <u>Option 1 – Continue using Current Template: Not Recommended</u>

  The City has the option to continue using the existing bill format (Attachment II) once the transition to InfoSend's billing services takes place. However, this is not recommended due to the template's lack of clarity in the display of certain key details, excessive amount of information, and its design inflexibility.

[4] https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5149124&GUID=EFDEBD1F-1340-4DA0-BB07-405A14419566&Options=&Search=
[5] https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5149124&GUID=EFDEBD1F-1340-4DA0-BB07-405A14419566&Options=&Search=

- Option 2 – Design Concept A: Not Recommended

  The City also has the option to simply update the current bill template with a new look and feel. This Design Concept A (Attachment III) has the advantage of familiarity to the current template. However, staff do not recommend proceeding with it due to the fact that it does not address the existing concerns regarding clarity and volume of information included in the bill.

- Option 3 – Design Concept B: Recommended

  Staff have also mocked-up Design Concept B (Attachment IV) in an effort to improve the look, feel, and clarity of the information presented in the Hayward water bill. Particular attention has been paid to improving clarity related to the frequently received questions and comments cited above. This bill concept also has the added benefit of including a space for custom image-based promotional materials on the front and back. Due to its improved look, feel, clarity, and wide range of presented information, it is staff's recommendation that a bill design similar to this concept be pursued.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The customer portal, once fully implemented, will provide customers greater control over their water consumption, as they will have on-demand access to their water use metrics, their estimated water spending at any point in a billing period, and prompt leak notification and reduced water loss. The Portal will also likely aid the community in achieving greater water conservation over time.

FISCAL IMPACT

Partnering with InfoSend is anticipated to cost approximately $137,000 annually, or $411,000 over three years, which is $25,000 less per year than the City currently pays for equivalent services. There are sufficient funds in Water Operating Fund 605 to support partnering with this vendor.

STRATEGIC ROADMAP

This agenda item supports the Strategic Priority of Improve Infrastructure. Specifically, this item relates to the implementation of the following project:

Project 13, Part 13.a: Develop and launch Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) customer portal.

SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

The AMI Customer Portal and larger AMI Project promote efficient water use and water conservation. The water consumption data provided by AMI technology will aid in the City's efforts to measure the overall effectiveness of targeted conservation initiatives, and will also be used to inform customers about potential leaks or overly high consumption. Additionally,

improving paperless billing enrollment with the launch of Invoice Cloud and InfoSend will have paper-saving and many other indirect environmental benefits by eliminating six bill production, mailing, and transportation/delivery service requirements per enrollment per year.

PUBLIC CONTACT

During Spring 2020, staff sought approximately 100 Pilot customer volunteers to participate in a Water Customer Portal Pilot Program. Staff also regularly engaged with the Pilot Customers for the duration of the four-month Pilot from October 2020 to February 2021. When the WaterSmart Customer Portal, Invoice Cloud, and InfoSend integration is complete, additional outreach will take place leading up to and following the Portal launch to maximize Portal signups, enrollment in paperless billing, and utilization of all the various electronic payment options that will become available to them.

NEXT STEPS

If the CSC concurs with staff's recommendation, staff will pursue a bill redesign similar to that presented in Recommended Design Concept B (Attachment IV) and will incorporate any additional feedback received by the CSC.

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Approved by:

Kelly McAdoo, City Manager