



DATE: September 11, 2023

TO: Council Sustainability Committee

FROM: Director of Public Works

SUBJECT: Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Water Customer Portal – Information and Discussion

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council Sustainability Committee (CSC) reviews and comments on this report.

SUMMARY

This informational report summarizes the first year of city-wide implementation of the online water customer portal. Staff will also provide a video demonstration highlighting the features of the online customer portal at the CSC meeting.

BACKGROUND

Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) technology, which was installed at every water meter location in the City, transmits periodic meter reads to a Utility over a fixed network, enabling the Utility to view and manage its City-wide consumption data from an internal-facing software provided by the AMI vendor. In 2020, the City initiated a pilot program to test two online customer portal options that allow Hayward Water customers to view hourly water use, receive automated notifications of leak patterns, and pay bills. Based on participant's feedback, Council selected WaterSmart Software, Inc., as the vendor¹ and staff implemented the online portal to expand access to all Hayward Water System customers in June 2022.

DISCUSSION

Within the first two months of launching the online customer portal, 25% of over 36,000 eligible customers registered. As of August 2023, 48% of all eligible customers have registered for the online portal (17,764 customers). Instructions for registration are included in several places on each water bill.

¹ <https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?From=RSS&ID=4955269&GUID=10EF9795-0805-4832-BAFC-666221A843E9>

The online customer portal allows three core functions:

1. Usage reports: Registered customers can view hourly water usage, compare their current usage to past usage, and compare their usage to other similar customers. They can also customize their account profile to receive personalized water- and bill-saving recommendations based on their usage history, and sign up to be notified when their consumption is on trend to exceed personal budget thresholds.
2. Automatic leak notifications: Customers also automatically receive notifications for water use patterns associated with potential leaks such as continuous water usage, spikes in water usage, and unusually high water usage. Over 11,700 automatic notifications have been sent to customers to date by email, phone, text, and mail. Of the customers who received notifications, 11% responded and reported the results of their leak investigations. An estimated 131 million gallons of water savings have been realized as a result of customer response to receiving a leak notification. Additionally, almost 100 customers who have not received notifications have used the Leak Diagnosis and Investigation tool within WaterSmart to initiate leak checks.
3. Fee-free bill payment options: Water customers can view their current balance on WaterSmart and pay their bills using the Invoice Cloud online bill payment system at no extra cost. Online payment options include credit/debit card, electronic funds transfer (EFT), online bank payments, PayPal, or Venmo. The Invoice Cloud online bill payment system processes an average of \$3.9 million in transactions per month.² The majority of online payments are completed using credit/debit card (54%) or EFT check (34%).

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The online customer portal introduces new opportunities for customer engagement to help conserve water and save money. The portal receives hourly data and prompts customers to investigate any unusual water usage patterns and resolve leaks in a timely manner. Additionally, the online portal eliminates the \$3.95 per transaction credit card convenience fee and increases options for customers to pay bills online without additional fees. As registration rates increase, the City will have greater reach to promote water conservation as a way of life and achieve increased water savings over time.

FISCAL IMPACT

The initial setup and implementation costs for the water customer portal were funded by the Advanced Metering Infrastructure Conversion Project No. 07025, part of the Capital Improvement Program (Water Replacement Fund 603). Beginning in FY24, the annual software maintenance fees will be included in the Operating Budget (Water Operating Fund 605). In FY24, the WaterSmart Annual Fees total approximately \$78,000.

² The Invoice Cloud bill payment system processed \$23.3 million in payments for Hayward water customers for the period January 1 through June 30, 2023.

STRATEGIC ROADMAP

This agenda item supports the Strategic Priority of *Confront Climate Crisis & Champion Environmental Justice*. Specifically, this item relates to the following Project:

Mitigate climate crisis impacts through resilient design and community engagement
Project C14: Continue to pursue water conservation measures like increasing recycled water supplies

SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

The online customer portal provides Hayward Water System customers with customized water use efficiency data to understand their usage patterns and the tools to proactively respond to irregular usage and leak patterns. Water consumption data provided by AMI technology aids in the City's efforts to measure the overall effectiveness of targeted conservation initiatives and inform customers about potential leaks or high consumption.

PUBLIC CONTACT

No public contact was made for this agenda item.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will receive feedback and provide periodic updates to CSC.

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Approved by:



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