



**DATE:** January 18, 2022

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Director of Public Works

**SUBJECT:** Informational Report Regarding Hayward Water Bills

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council receives this informational report regarding the Hayward water bill redesign.

## **SUMMARY**

Staff is currently implementing an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) water customer portal with bill payment functionality. As part of this effort, the City is partnering with bill printing and distribution vendor, InfoSend, Inc. (InfoSend), who is redesigning the bill distributed to utility customers. This report serves to provide an update about the bill redesign effort, and to share a mockup of the redesign, which is included as Attachment II.

### *Council Sustainability Committee*

The Council Sustainability Committee received this information at the November 8, 2021 meeting and concurred with staff's recommendation that the new bill design should highlight basic information and new payment options, outlined in the discussion below.

## **BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Council Sustainability Committee (CSC) on March 9, 2020<sup>2</sup> and March 8, 2021<sup>3</sup>.

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4389832&GUID=F46CB11A-247F-400F-AE74-907A02B58D6C&Options=&Search=>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4816829&GUID=09108CFF-23E6-4179-8AD1-5A0C4732D469&Options=&Search=>

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 Self Service (HSS). Partnering with Invoice Cloud was authorized by Council at their September 28, 2021 meeting<sup>4</sup>.

The third critical component to providing customers a robust water customer portal and bill payment experience is the ability to provide customers 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<sup>5</sup>, staff have also entered into an agreement with bill print and distribution vendor, 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. Lastly, partnering with this new vendor also provides the opportunity to redesign the Hayward water bill.

On November 8, 2021<sup>6</sup>, staff recommended to the CSC that the Hayward water bill be redesigned to improve the look, feel, and clarity of the information presented. This recommendation was made due to the fact that customers frequently request assistance from frontline customer service staff in identifying such basic information on their current Tyler Munis-generated bills as the amount owed and their account number. Updates to the billing template have not been possible in the past due to Tyler Munis inflexibility. However, partnering with InfoSend and redesigning the water bill will now 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 with the launch of the water customer portal and its Invoice Cloud payment features. For these reasons, the CSC concurred with staff's recommendation.

Attachment II of this informational report features the latest mockup of the new water bill, which includes the redesign elements recommended to and selected by the CSC. Notably, the new design features space for custom image-based promotional materials, QR codes for improved ease of bill payment, reduced volume of information on the bill back to avoid overwhelming customers, and an emphasis on encouraging online, paperless, and automatic payments. For reference, a current Hayward water bill has also been included as Attachment III.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> <https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5207542&GUID=9BF16A08-C025-4B11-916A-66AB230A90DF&Options=&Search=>

## **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 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**

Staff is currently working with InfoSend to finalize and implement the bill redesign described in this informational report, with plans to launch the new bill to customers in the first quarter of 2022.

*Prepared by:* Kait Byrne, Acting Senior Management Analyst

*Recommended by:* Alex Ameri, Director of Public Works

*Approved by:*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. McAdoo', is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Kelly McAdoo, City Manager