



**DATE:** March 9, 2020

**TO:** Council Sustainability Committee

**FROM:** Director of Public Works

**SUBJECT:** Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Customer Portal Pilot Program:  
Review and Comment on the Customer Portal Pilot Program Informational  
Report

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council Sustainability Committee reviews and comments on this informational report.

## **SUMMARY**

In October 2019, the City solicited proposals via a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the implementation of an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Customer Portal Pilot Program (Pilot). AMI technology enables two-way communication over a fixed network between a utility system and its respective meters, thus allowing meters to be read, monitored, and managed from an online portal rather than relying on the physical read of a meter in-field by an employee.

Of the three responses received in November 2019, two vendors' proposed software solutions and were selected for the Pilot: "AquaHawk" (a product developed by American Conservation & Billing Solutions, Inc.), and "WaterSmart" (a product developed by WaterSmart Software). Both vendors will develop a customer engagement portal that will be available to a select group of City staff (Pilot Staff) and Hayward water customers (Pilot Customers) for approximately four months, during which time feedback will be sought from both groups. This feedback will help inform staff's eventual recommendation to the City Council regarding which vendor, if either, the City should select to implement a City-wide customer portal.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2018, the City completed the replacement of its approximately 36,000 manual water meters with new AMI meters. Staff are currently able to access AMI-generated meter reads via a basic internal-facing portal provided by Aclara Technologies, LLC (Aclara), the vendor the City contracted with in 2016 to deploy the AMI system. However, maximizing the usefulness of AMI-generated data and providing customers access to the consumption metrics and other

information associated with their account requires the development of an online customer engagement portal.

At the March 12, 2018 Committee Meeting<sup>1</sup>, staff reported on their plans to conduct customer research to determine what features to include in a City-wide customer portal. Staff have since engaged with other Bay Area agencies on this topic, as well. Their insights have informed staff's decision to garner customer input via a Customer Portal Pilot Program. The Pilot will enable both City staff and customers the opportunity to test multiple vendors' platforms and provide feedback before City-wide implementation.

## **DISCUSSION**

To make the most informed decision regarding which customer portal vendor to select for long-term, City-wide implementation, staff released an RFP in October 2019, inviting vendors to submit proposals to implement a four-month Pilot. Of the three software solutions proposed during the process, two were selected: AquaHawk and WaterSmart. Both software solutions are in use by neighboring Bay Area agencies. Notably, AquaHawk is in use by Dublin San Ramon Services District (DSRSD), and WaterSmart is in use by East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD), Coastside County Water District, the Town of Hillsborough, and the City of Morgan Hill, among others.

For the Pilot, both vendors will develop a Hayward-specific customer portal platform, to which a select group of Pilot Staff and Pilot Customers will be provided access. Both groups will test the two platforms simultaneously over a four-month period. During this period, staff will seek feedback from the groups via periodic surveys regarding their preference between the two portals, the functions they like or dislike, ease of use, as well as other topics. This feedback will be used by staff to help inform their recommendation to the City Council regarding which vendor to contract with long-term for a City-wide portal. The feedback will also be used to determine which features should or shouldn't be included in the long-term portal.

Both portals will feature a customer-facing view, enabling customers to simply log-in via a computer or smart device, and manage their account from an online dashboard. The portals will include water use tracking, bill prediction and budgeting features, as well as leak alerts, which notify customers via text, email, or automated voice message in the event that their property shows signs of a leak.

The portals will also feature a utility-facing view, enabling City staff to provide enhanced customer service to water customers, in addition to streamlining several processes via comprehensive report libraries, improved account search functionality, GIS mapping capabilities, and more.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hayward.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3373000&GUID=C7A6E42B-95B0-4921-90F0-A5BB452CD7C2&Options=&Search=>

The four-month Pilot is anticipated to launch in June 2020, providing the vendors sufficient time to develop the platforms and ingest the necessary data to populate the system. Staff are currently working to seek approximately 100 Hayward water customers to volunteer as participants in the Pilot. More participants may be included depending on the interest expressed by the community. Outreach methods to identify these Pilot Customers include but are not limited to:

- Social media posts
- Messaging in water bills
- Messaging in leak notification letters
- Direct outreach to customers who recently received leak notification letters
- A message distributed to subscribers of The Leaflet
- Flyers and handouts at the Revenue Counter

## **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. The Portal will also likely aid the community in achieving greater water conservation over time.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

As shown in the table below, the total anticipated cost to implement the Pilot Program is \$37,500<sup>2</sup>.

AquaHawk Pilot Program	\$	20,000
WaterSmart Pilot Program	\$	<u>17,500</u>
Total:	\$	37,500

The adopted FY20 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes \$13,833,923 in the Water Replacement Fund for implementation of the AMI Project (Project 07025). The Project has sufficient funds available to cover the cost of this customer portal Pilot Program.

Should one of these vendors be selected to implement the City-wide portal, staff anticipate that the cost to the City could range from approximately \$700,000 to \$1,000,000 over a 10-year period, with most fees paid on an annual basis. The price will vary depending on which features the City decides to include or not include during the City-wide implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> Additional fees may be involved in order to work with Aclara and Tyler Munis, the City's water account and financial management software, to export the necessary data to populate the two portals.

## **STRATEGIC ROADMAP**

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

Project 13, Part 13.a: Upgrade water system infrastructure; Develop and launch Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) customer portal

## **SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES**

The AMI Customer Portal and larger AMI Project promotes 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. This information will also be used to inform customers about potential leaks or overly-high consumption.

## **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Staff are currently working to seek approximately 100 Pilot Customer volunteers via a number of methods, including posts in social media, the City's environmental newsletter, The Leaflet, and physical handouts, as well as letters to targeted groups like those who have recently received a leak notification letter.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Based on the Committee's comments, staff will proceed with implementing the Customer Portal Pilot Program.

*Prepared by:* Kait Byrne, Management Analyst

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

*Approved by:*



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Kelly McAdoo, City Manager