

New water meters

Written by Sean Green
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Bossier City residents could see digital automatic water meters be installed

Bossier City residents could get new water meters that can save them on their bills.

The City Council will decide Tuesday on whether or not to approve the \$8 million investment on installing automatic water meter readers. The money will come from the 2008 Utility Bond Issue.

“It will improve efficiency,” said Bossier City Public Information Officer Mark Natale.

The decision comes after the city initiated a year-long pilot program in February 2012 that saw 1,300 automatic meters be installed at various locations on the outer boundaries of the city's water system. The \$800,000 experiment was deemed successful enough to warrant a full switch.

“The pilot program was Phase I, and there were a few items that have to be ironed out as far operation capacity of the meters, now that is complete,” said Natale. “We will begin Phase II, which is city-wide installation, after the final reading and approval of the ordinance later in February.”

The meters are designed to provide real-time water use information to the city and submit readings wirelessly to the city's water department for monthly billings.

The computerized unit transmits information wirelessly to a relay tower that then send the data to City Hall computers.

“Everybody's water meter will automatically transmit data to city hall. It's automating the system,” said Natale.

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The new meters provide a more accurate measurement of actual water useage while simultaneously removing the possibility of human error.

“The beauty is (the meters) will be able to pinpoint any kind of leaks, or if someone sees a lot of water useage, (city employees) can look at the data and contact that customer about the abnormality,” said Natale.

It is expected to take 18 months to install roughly 26,000 meters for both residential and commercial customers.

Residents will be notified when they are having their meter installed.

These new readers will also serve the purpose of replacing older, worn out guages that are not up to governmental standards.

“Many readers are 15 or 20 years old and they're going away,” said Natale. “Plus, these are going to be brass cased and they're a new kind of meter that has lead content far below the federal government's new regulations.”

The six human meter readers staffed by the city will remain on the payroll in order to perform shutoffs and open new service. Any need to reduce the number of these positions can be done through attrition.

“To be honest, the turnover rate is so high, that if we have to scale back those positions, we can just do it through attrition,” Natale said.

The *Bossier Press-Tribune* previously reported during the pilot program's unveiling that the project comes with a two-year warranty bond built into the cost and a 20-year warranty on the

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batteries. The company will replace the battery and meter if it fails in the first 10 years. The southern Louisiana-based company, Xtralight/UMS, will install the Sensus FlexNet water metering system.