

DATE ISSUED: January 25, 2001

REPORT NO. 01-017

ATTENTION: Natural Resources and Culture Committee
Agenda of January 31, 2001

SUBJECT: Water Department Metering Requirements for Mobile Meters

REFERENCES: Manager's Report 00-93 Fire Hydrant Meter Program
Manager's Report 00-135 Water Department Billing and Collection Policy

SUMMARY

Issue: Should the Natural Resources and Culture Committee accept the Manager's Report on the Water Department's efforts to implement changes in metering requirements for mobile meters?

Manager's Recommendation: Accept the report on the Water Department's effort to implement changes in metering requirements for mobile water meters.

Other Recommendations: None.

Fiscal Impact: None.

BACKGROUND

At the January 9, 2001, City Council meeting, public comment was taken from Cynthia Drake regarding concerns associated with the Water Department's metering and backflow protection policies for mobile water tanks. The Council directed that the item be docketed for discussion by the Natural Resources and Culture Committee.

DISCUSSION

On July 17, 2000, the City Council accepted the recommendations of the City Manager associated with changes in the Water Department's policy on the use of temporary "fire hydrant" meters and mobile meters. These changes were necessary as there were a number of problems associated with the accounts established through this policy, including: a high delinquency rate for payment (116 of the 578 accounts on record had reached the stage of being referred to the Treasurer's for collection); only 55% of the meters had been brought in for their required annual maintenance and calibration, resulting in under reading of water consumption; billing information for the month of March 2000 had only been received from 387 of the 578 accounts; and, as the meters were portable and could be relocated by the customer, the department did not have the ability to remove the meter for nonpayment.

In order to address these issues, the Council approved several significant changes including: the installation, lock-on, and relocation by Water Department staff of all fire hydrant meters used by

customers, including construction contractors, developers, landscaping firms, and other similar businesses; monthly reading of all fire hydrant meters by City staff; and the requirement that all connections be fitted with adequate backflow prevention devices to protect the water distribution system from cross contamination.

In addition, the new program recognized that there were certain customers who utilized fire hydrant meters in multiple locations within a day whose operations may be impacted if they were required to use water from a meter locked to one site, i.e., for street sweeping, hydro seeding, sidewalk washing, auto detailing, concrete cutting, etc. As a result, given the operational impact on these types of businesses, the new policies allowed for the utilization of portable meter/backflow devices in special, limited circumstances, provided that the installation and configuration of the portable device complied with the state requirements for backflow prevention.

Consultation with the Department of Health Services has resulted in the approval of mobile meter/backflow prevention devices provided such devices were permanently mounted to a vehicle and that the meter/backflow combination was inspected on a quarterly basis. Regular inspection was considered crucial to ensuring the devices functioned properly given the susceptibility to jarring and jostling in the more mobile environment, versus the normal installation at a fixed location on the ground, which requires only annual inspection and calibration.

Since Council approval, the Water Department has begun a public outreach effort to ensure effected businesses are fully informed of the new program, with a target date for implementation of March 31, 2001.

As part of this public outreach effort, Water Department staff has been available to meet with concerned business owners to explain the policy and program, and to determine the degree to which unique circumstances require a variance from the fixed-hydrant requirement. As a result, Water Department staff met with Ms. Cynthia Drake of Owens Tree Care to discuss the particular constraints under which her business operates. Staff examined Ms. Drake truck mounted portable water tank and obtained information regarding the amount of water used and frequency of connection to a water source. Ms. Drake noted that the truck was also used in connection with her tree trimming service.

Consistent with previous discussions with the Department of Health Services, staff initially proposed the use of a mobile meter/backflow device which would be mounted in the bed of Ms. Drake's truck. However, Ms. Drake emphasized her desire not to have a permanently affixed meter/backflow device which would limit the usability of her truck for other purposes. As an alternative, staff has proposed the use of a meter/backflow mounting frame which could be bolted to the truck bed, but which could be removed when full bed space was required. This alternative would require monthly inspection by staff of the meter/backflow.

The Department of Health Services (DHS) has tentatively approved the "removable" meter/backflow combination frame in concept, pending more detailed review of the particular installation design to be used. The Water Department is currently awaiting the formal decision of

the DHS regarding the degree to which this solution is in compliance with state backflow protection requirements.

ALTERNATIVE

Do not accept the Manager's Report on the Water Department's efforts to implement changes in metering requirements for mobile meters.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Gardner
Water Department Director

Approved: George I. Loveland
Senior Deputy City Manager

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