



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Public Works and Transportation Committee **Date:** January 12, 2004
From: Robert Gonzalez, P.Eng. **File:**
Director, Engineering
Re: **Richmond Long Range Drinking Water Management Plan:**
Volunteer Water Meter Program Update

Staff Recommendation

That the Richmond Long Range Drinking Water Management Plan: Richmond Water Meter Program Update report from the Director of Engineering, dated January 12, 2004, be received for information.

Robert Gonzalez, P.Eng.
Director, Engineering
(4150)

Att.1

FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY

CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER



Staff Report

Origin

On December 8, 2003, City Council adopted Bylaw 7620, amending the City’s Waterworks and Water Rates Bylaw. The amendment includes provisions that allow the City to bill residential water customers based on a metered rate and is in alignment with the City’s long-term water management strategy. The purpose of this monthly report is to update Council on the progress of the water metering program.

Findings Of Fact

Volunteer Water Meter Program

Operational Considerations

Neptune and City Staff have worked together to solve technical and administrative issues surrounding meter reading and billing operations. Neptune has rented office space within the City of Richmond and is in the process of hiring a bilingual Project and Promotion Manager.

Forty Seven property owners have volunteered for the program to date. This is exceptional as the program has not yet been advertised. Current interest has been generated by articles in the local newspapers. The project team has elected to defer installation of meters at the volunteer homes until after the ceremonial first installation in February.

Marketing and Public Education

The Neptune Technology Group has a proven record of success with volunteer water meter programs across the nation. Staff have reviewed the marketing and public education component and are pleased with Neptune’s customer-focussed approach to ensure Richmond property owners understand the benefits of this voluntary program. Resource material provided by Neptune will be available in English and Cantonese.

In brief, the following critical path outlines the marketing and public education component up to the official program launch, which encompasses the first quarter of 2004:

<u>Week of:</u>	<u>Activity:</u>
January 19	Neptune web site for the Richmond Water Meter Program on-line, with additions to complement the site until the formal program launch in February 2004. The web site address for the program is www.watermeter.ca .
January 26	Installation of water meters for the Mayor and Councillor’s who volunteered for the program.
February 2	Execution of internal communication plan for front-line staff anticipating customer inquiries.

February 9	News release issued to local media detailing program launch and ceremonial installation.
February 9	Advertisement printed in local English and Chinese newspapers inviting public to an Open House during the first week of March.
February 16	One page bulletin from Neptune Group introducing volunteer water meter program, inserted with City utility bill. A draft of the bulletin is included in this report as Attachment 1.
February 23	Official program launch with ceremonial installation of water meter with Mayor and Councillor's, where publicity and photo opportunities will be available.
March 8	Public Open House providing one-on-one discussion and handout material on the benefits of the program.

In summary, this comprehensive public relations campaign covers the first quarter of 2004, which is designed to promote the benefits of the program and encourage residents to volunteer as a method of water consumption fairness and equity.

Residential Customers with Existing Water Meters

In December of 2003, just over 1800 residents who had existing water meters were advised they are on the metered rate effective January 1, 2004. These property owners are separate from the volunteer water customers and have been sent an invitation to receive complimentary water conservation devices, as well as helpful water conservation tips.

An initial read of the existing water meters by Neptune is underway. An initial read is required to insure that water paid for under the flat rate prior to January 1, 2004, is not invoiced under the metered rate.

Financial Impact

There is no financial implication to this component of the Richmond Water Meter Program outside of the contract.

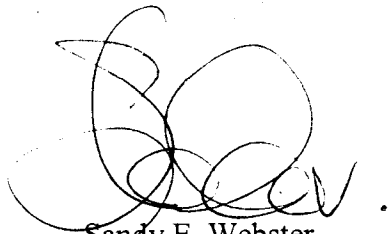
Conclusion

Staff is pleased with the technical and marketing elements proposed by the Neptune Technology Group for the Richmond Water Meter Program. To date, staff have received 47 requests from residents volunteering for the program. This public support is encouraging at this early stage of the program, which will be supplemented by strategic education and awareness.

January 12, 2004

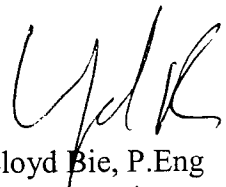
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Staff will be available at the next Public Works and Transportation Committee to answer any questions and provide further project details. Information reports will be provided to Committee on a monthly basis as to the progress of the program.



Sandy E. Webster
Public Works Liaison
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SW:sw



Lloyd Bie, P.Eng
Project Engineer
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REASONS To Consider A Water Meter



The City of Richmond has implemented a voluntary water metering program, and has contracted Neptune Technology Group to install the water meters. This flyer is produced by Neptune to introduce you to the metering program and to let you know how you may volunteer.

NOW YOU HAVE A CHOICE.....

You now have a choice in how you pay for water. You can continue to pay the flat rate (a fixed yearly charge) which will likely increase significantly over the next five years. Or you can have a water meter installed and pay only for the water you actually use. Here are five reasons to consider volunteering for a water meter.

1 THE COST OF WATER IS GOING UP

The City of Richmond buys its water from the GVRD and has no control over the price. The cost for water is expected to rise as much as 50% over the next five years. If you remain on a flat rate for water you will have no choice but to pay these higher rates.

2 A WATER METER GIVES YOU CONTROL

With a water meter you pay only for the volume of water you actually use. When water rates go up you can keep your bills lower by reducing your water consumption. If you are already a low water user a water meter makes sense for you.

3 FREE WATER CONSERVATION DEVICES

After your meter is installed you can request a free leak detection and water audit service. We will install a high-quality low-flow showerhead and a toilet water saving device at no charge. These devices will set you on your way to lower water bills.

4 FAST "NO HASSLE" INSTALLATION

The water meter will be installed outside your house. You don't even have to be home for the installation. The meter reading device will also be located outside. A meter reader will never have to enter your home and your privacy will be ensured.

5 THE "FIRST YEAR" GUARANTEE

You will have 12 months to adjust your water consumption. If after a year on the metered rate your total bills are more than they would have been under the flat rate for that same period you will receive a rebate for the difference. This guarantees that you will not pay more in the first year if you have a water meter*.

YES I WANT TO VOLUNTEER FOR A WATER METER

If you are ready to save money, here is how to get the process started.

STEP 1: Call (604) 271-9700 to volunteer for a water meter. Or you may register online at www.watermeter.ca

STEP 2: A Neptune representative will inspect your property to determine where the meter will be installed. The inspection will take place near the street and you do not have to be present. The representative will leave a form on your front door.

STEP 3: Fill out the form and return it to Neptune in the postage-paid envelope supplied.

STEP 4: Neptune will install the water meter. You do not have to be present.

COME TO OUR INFORMATION SESSION For more information about the program and its benefits.

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2004
RICHMOND CITY HALL
10:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Senior City staff and Neptune representatives will be on hand to answer all your questions. This will be the first of several public information sessions.



NEPTUNE

IS A WATER METER
RIGHT FOR YOU?

3 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE

1. How big is your family?

The current flat rate is based on the cost of providing water to a family of four. So if there are less than four people in your household you will likely benefit from a meter.

2. How large is your property?

If you have an average size lawn and gardens and avoid excessive irrigation you will avoid high water bills. If you have a lot of ground cover that does not require any watering (gravel, decks, etc.) This will also help keep your bills low.

3. How water conscious are you?

If you are water conscious and practice a few simple water conservation tips you may pay less under the metered rate than under the flat rate.

Here are some customers who could save money with a water meter:

- Seniors
- Single Occupants
- Empty Nesters
- Young Couples
- Small Families

RICHMOND
WATER METER PROGRAM

*FOR MORE INFORMATION

CALL 604.271.9700

OR VISIT OUR WEB SITE

www.watermeter.ca