



City of Bellevue

MEMO

DATE: January 26, 2022

TO: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

FROM: Vanja Knezevic, Chair, Environmental Services Commission

SUBJECT: **Utilities Non-Communicating Water Meter Service Program Recommendation**

As part of the Environmental Services Commission's charge, the Commission has conducted a review of the Utilities Department's proposed Non-Communicating Water Meter Service Program, also referred to as the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) opt-out program. The Commission has reviewed the intent of the program and the proposed fee structure for customers who wish to participate in the program. We have concerns about the program being financially self-sufficient, as well as the logistical challenges of implementing and managing this program. Accordingly, **the Commission recommends the City not offer the Non-Communicating Water Meter Service Program.**

Commission Background

Established by ordinance in 1991, the Commission advises City Council on water, wastewater, storm and surface water, and solid waste utility programs. The Commission is comprised of seven members, appointed by the Mayor with the concurrence of Council, who reside within the Bellevue Utilities Department's service area. In this role, the Commission embodies the interests of utility ratepayers throughout the service area, including Bellevue, Beaux Arts, Clyde Hill, Hunts Point, Medina, Yarrow Point, and sections of the City of Kirkland. The Commission's responsibilities include evaluation of policy issues and providing policy recommendations to City Council.

Commission Analysis and Feedback

The Commission supports the AMI project and the City's Smart City vision. The Commission is concerned that offering an AMI opt-out program is contrary to the intent of Bellevue's Smart City vision, and will detract from the goals of the AMI project if a large number of customers chose to opt-out of a standard smart water meter.

Additionally, based on the research provided to the Commission by Bellevue Utilities staff, there is no precedence for this program. Other water utilities in Washington state do not typically offer their customers the option to opt-out of AMI. Water meters are the property of Bellevue Utilities and customers are not normally provided individual discretion over the type of meter installed to service their property. It is in the best interest of the City to establish a standard meter and ensure widespread adoption.

On May 6, 2021, the Commission reviewed and voted 4-2 in opposition of the proposed AMI opt-out program. The majority of the commissioners do not believe that this program is in alignment with the City Council's vision for a Smart City and may result in additional costs to all customers.

Based on Utilities staff presentation and the resulting discussion at the Commission's January 6, 2022 meeting, we reaffirmed our earlier recommendation not to offer the opt-out program.

The Commission takes the responsibility assigned by the City Council very seriously.

Commissioners, as Bellevue ratepayers, are sensitive to the concerns of a small percentage of customers. To date, approximately 45 of the City's 37,000 water customer accounts have inquired about the opt-out option. We understand that these customers are largely concerned with the safety of cellular and other radiofrequency transmissions, and potential impacts to their health. Digital meters and cellular transmitters are widely accepted in the water utility industry and are certified for use by the applicable regulatory agencies. Based on the evidence presented, we do not believe there is a credible safety risk that would justify the potential negative impact to the AMI project or additional costs associated with continued manual meter reading.

Consequently, the Commission recommends that Council not approve the proposed AMI opt-out program. The Commission recommends that all customer meters be converted to the new standard meter, comprised of a digital meter and cellular transmitter. The Commission appreciates the opportunity to provide Council with a recommendation on this matter.