



City of Longview

1525 Broadway
Longview, WA 98632
www.ci.longview.wa.us

Agenda

Public Works SubCommittee

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

3:30 PM

Public Works Conference Room
1st Floor, City Hall

1. **HYBRID MEETING DETAILS**

24-00406 To join the webinar: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85191031903>
Webinar ID: 851 9103 1903
Or Telephone: (253) 215 8782 or (253) 205 0468

2. **CALL TO ORDER**

3. **ROLL CALL**

4. **APPROVAL OF MEETING NOTES**

24-00404 MINUTES FROM APRIL 17, 2024

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

24-00405 METERS & METER READING

6. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

7. **CURRENT PROJECT UPDATES**

8. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

9. **ADJOURNMENT**



Minutes

Public Works SubCommittee

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

3:30 PM

Public Works Conference Room,
1st Floor, City Hall

1. **HYBRID MEETING DETAILS**

24-00204 To join the webinar: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85191031903>
Webinar ID: 851 9103 1903
Or Telephone: (253) 215 8782 or (253) 205 0468

2. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 pm.

3. **ROLL CALL**

*Present: Councilmember Ruth Kendall; Councilmember Keith Young; Assistant Public Works Director Chris Collins
Excused: Councilmember Erik Halvorson
Staff: Ken Hash, Public Works Director; Sam Barham, City Engineer; Brian Steveson, Utility Manager; Tabitha Hayden, PW Contract Administrator; Nancy Vandehey, Admin (left at 3:33)*

4. **APPROVAL OF MEETING NOTES**

24-00335 **MINUTES FROM MARCH 20, 2024**
Approved as presented.

5. **OLD BUSINESS**

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

24-00336 **RESCHEDULE JUNE 19TH MEETING**
June meeting will on June 18th at 3:30 pm, due to the City Hall holiday on June 19th.

24-00291 **APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**
Tabitha Hayden presented on the Apprenticeship program. There was a discussion on how we got here and how it's not working. Then where we are going and how we are going to get there.

24-00281 **SEWER ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN - WALLA WALLA**
Chris Collins shared the Walla Walla presentation on their sewer asset management plan. Discussion included how we can work towards this plan for our system.

Topics for next month - meters & meter reading

7. **CURRENT PROJECT UPDATES**

8. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:21 pm.



Memorandum

DATE: 4/17/2024

TO: Jim Duscha, City Manager

From: Chris Collins, Assistant Public Works Director

SUBJECT: Meter Reading Issues and Proposed Solution

The purpose of this memo is to inform you of the challenges and failures related to the contracted water meter reading service provided by Metereaders, LLC.

The City of Longview (the City) hired Metereaders LLC. (Metereaders) to read water meters for the City on a monthly and bi-monthly basis respective to the reading cycles outlined within the professional services agreement (agreement) executed on September 13, 2018.

Within this agreement Metereaders is required to deliver accurate meter reads within specific timelines. These timelines are imperative because city staff must execute billing to customers without delay or disruption. Failure to bill within a timely manner could result in financial instability, customer dissatisfaction, compliance issues, bill irregularity and overall bad customer service.

In June of 2023 Metereaders notified the City last minute that they were not able to provide the needed reads to complete the cycle 2 billing: citing staffing issues. City staff worked overtime through the weekend to collect the meter reads and worked overtime to complete the billing and miraculously managed to get the bills out on time. This additional unplanned work costs the city and customers a great deal.

During this time, it was brought to our attention that many of the meters that needed read were buried, covered or inaccessible. It was extremely clear that many of the meter reads the City was being provided were estimates. When the actual reads were provided, customers were shocked to see the change on their bills. For example, if there were a family of 4 living in a household and a meter read was being estimated based on the past consumption each cycle for a year. During that year an additional member was added to the household. The billing would be low by approximately 25% each cycle. Then City

staff accurately read the meter and the next bill is 250% higher than you expected because you are making up the uncharged usage in a single billing cycle.

This scenario also has been present related to water leaks. Accurately reading meters in a timely manner allows the City to identify water leaks quickly limiting the water loss. We can flag high consumption and notify the customer limiting the burden they may have. If the meters are being estimated, this necessary service is ineffective exposing our customers to undue bills that many may not be able to pay.

In January of this year the issue repeated itself. Metereaders notified the City that they were not be able to provide the cycle 3 meter reads by the required deadline. Again, City staff worked overtime through the weekend to get the reads to provide the bills to our customers in time.

Metereaders is not allowed to estimate any meter readings. The agreement clearly prohibits estimating citing: Attachment A. paragraph 9. "All meter readings shall be accurate and shall not be estimated, except that the City may authorize estimates under extenuating circumstances. Contractor shall maintain a level of accuracy that results in not more than one-half of one percent (0.50%)."

These issues have resulted in an unprecedented number of issues and headaches for both staff and customers. This has also placed a large financial impact on the City. Below is a financial summary of the impact.

Frontline Employees (Fiscal/Utility Support Assist.): primary role is assisting walk in customers/assisting customers via phone.

- Average hourly wage for 5 support assistants is \$26 per hour.
- Time per employee input into meter issues is about 5 hrs per day.
 - Includes: incoming customer service calls, outgoing follow up calls, inputting meter investigates/updating meter investigates, calculating adjustments based off misreads, escalating customer complaints
- Right now, we have 4 front line employees who service most of our customers coming in and/or calling. With our employees spending at least 5 hrs per day assisting with current meter issues, we're approximately spending \$520 per day in FTE. That's \$99,840 per year in time that's going towards meter issues if we continue with the current issues we're having.

Water Works Technician: primary role is assisting Finance Department with meter investigates etc.

- Right now, our water technician is spending an average of 28 hr per week assisting us with meter issues.
 - Includes: getting re reads due to customer complaints of high consumption, meeting customers per customer request to review their meter, re reading meters due to the meter reader not getting a read at all, updating work orders, working with frontline employees on customer complaint, time spent driving back and forth.

- Jim makes \$36.40 per hr., that's around \$1,020.00 per week in FTE spent on meter issues, that would be \$48,921.00 per year.
- Overtime for Jim due to meter reader issues:
 - 2023: 4 hrs. (\$269.20), 2022: 23 hrs. (\$1374.85), 2021: 18 hrs. (\$1047.21)
- Gas used per week for meter issues: \$84 (20 gals @ \$4.20), \$1008 per year.

Total Finance Department annual expenses for current 2024-meter situation: \$150,038.20

Service Orders (Meter Investigates) for 2024:

- 1,264 (Jan-April 3rd)

Service Orders (Meter Investigates) for 2023:

- 2,768 (Jan-Dec.)

Operations staff time for meter reading for June of 2023 failure to read: \$36,324.

Operation staff time for meter reading for January 2024 failure to read event: \$33,443.

This brings the total known financial impact to: \$219,805.

If no more failure to read events occur the anticipated financial impact for 2024 is: \$183,481.

We also anticipate paying Metereaders \$80,000 each year for services rendered.

The estimated annual cost for meter reading and unbudgeted impact cost for 2024:

\$263481.

This cost does not quantify the loss of consumer confidence that has to be considered in addition to the financial impact of poorly executed meter reads.

To provide some frame of reference to the volume of necessary meter readings that must take place on either a monthly or bi-monthly basis:

Cycle 1 - read every odd month - 4092 meters.

Cycle 2 – read every even month – 6718 meters.

Cycle 3 – read every month- 3508 meters.

This means that on even months there are 10226 meters that need read within the allotted timeframe. Which means that a meter needs to be read every 1.33 minutes. In some areas of town this is not a large task. In other areas of town and the county this is a major undertaking.

We believe the time has come to resume meter reading with City staff. We are proposing to add an additional three full time employees with vehicles and equipment to read the meters. The cost for this enhancement is as follows:

3 FTE: \$90,000 each \$270,000.

Tools: \$10,000

Rent/ Depreciation \$10,000

Small Pickup	\$35,000
2 UTVs	\$40,000
Total annual cost:	\$290,000
Total up front cost:	\$75,000

Thank you for your time and consideration to this sensitive and urgent mater.

Meter Reading Overview

Chris Collins, Asst.
Public Works Director
5/15/2024

Agenda

Overview of current service.

Problems

Cost of problems.

Recommended solutions.

Cost of solutions.

Current Situation

Meterreaders Inc.

~\$80,000 annually

Meters readers are piece work employees (paid by meter read).

Problems....

Several instances of not being able to deliver meter reads on time.

Meter reads have been estimated in violation of the contract.

Many leaks not caught in a timely manner.

Customers getting high bills due to having estimated reads.

Cost of problems

- Cost impacts to the Finance department: \$150,038.20
- Cost impacts from the two major no read events: \$69,767.00
- Meter reading Contract: \$80,000.00
- Total:\$263,481.00



Recommended solutions

Bring meter reading back in house.

More control of the reads.

Better maintenance.

Reliability

Accuracy

Better customer service.

Cost to bring meter reading back in-house

3 FTE:	\$ 270,000.00
Tools:	\$ 10,000.00
Rent/ Depreciation:	\$ 10,000.00
Small Pickup:	\$ 35,000.00
2 UTVs:	\$ 40,000.00
Total Annual Cost:	\$ 290,000.00
1 time cost:	\$ 75,000.00

How much per customer?

Sewer		Water	
Base:	\$ 35.06	Base:	\$ 16.92
Consumptive:	\$ 5.82	Consumptive:	\$ 3.58
At 6 units:	\$ 34.92	At 6 units:	\$ 21.46
Total/month:	\$ 69.50	Total/month:	\$ 38.37
Increase/month:	\$ 0.49	Increase/month:	\$ 0.49



Questions?

Thank You.

Chris Collins, Assistant Public Works Director



Metering In Longview

Chris Collins, Assistant Public Works Director

Brian Steveson, Utilities Manager

5/15/2024

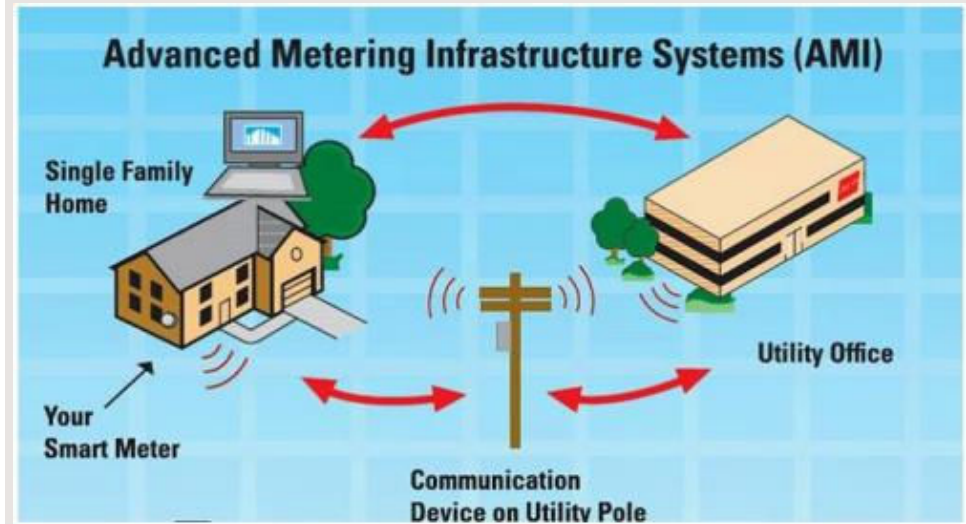
Agenda

- What is AMI.
- What is AMR.
- Metering as a service.
- What do we currently have?
- Cost comparisons.
- Recommendation



Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI)

- Reads meters real time.
- Reads remotely
- Utilizes either cellular or radio receivers.
- Automatic leak detection.
- Advanced customer interface.
- Very minimal staff time.
- Substantial investment.



Automated Meter Reading (AMR)

- Meter data is collected by driving/ walking by.
- Data is sent to the receiver within proximity.
- Very fast data collection.
- Does not require cellular or radio infrastructure.
- Reduces staff time reading meters.
- Substantial investment.



Metering as a service

- A hands-off approach.
- Selected vendor upgrades the system.
- The data is provided to the City as required.
- All infrastructure is owned/maintained by the vendor.
- Virtually no staff required.
- Substantial annual cost.

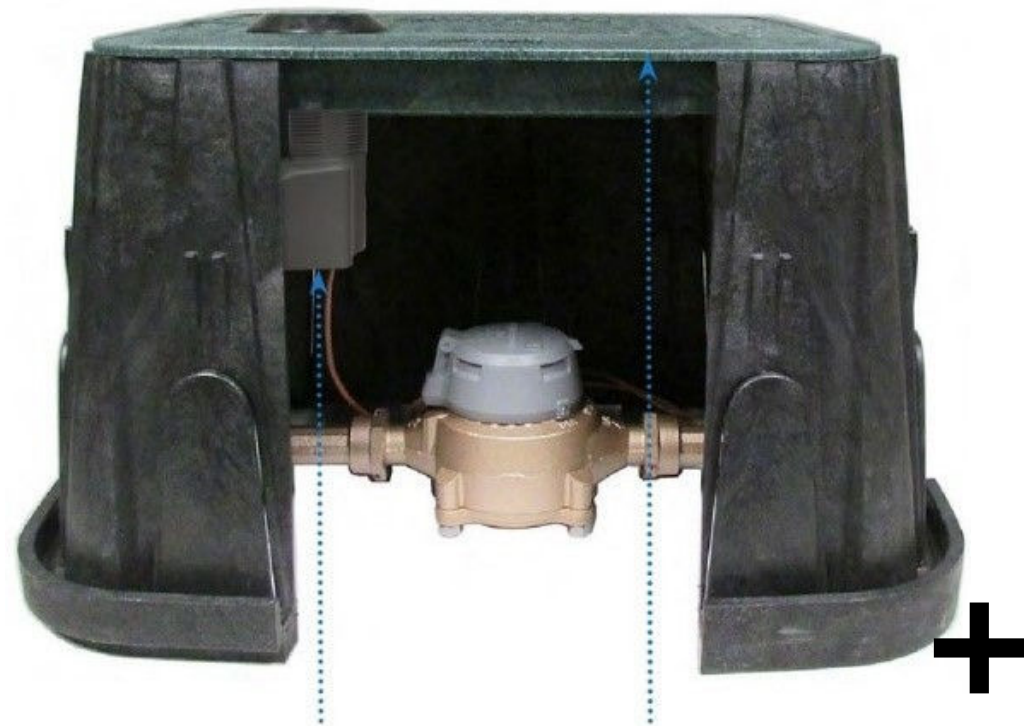
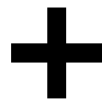


Image shown represents ORION Cellular LTE endpoint installed, as per instructions, through non-metal pit lid

What do we have today?

- Conventional, touch read and obsolete AMR meters.
- Takes staff or contractor time to read.
- Behind current standards.
- Our goal is to replace our meters every 20 years.



Cost of AMI/AMR

- AMI and AMR are each around \$12 million

10-year finance

Per year:	\$	1,727,474.00
Base:	\$	4.39
Consumptive:	\$	26.37
At 6 units:	\$	26.37
Average monthly total:	\$	47.16
\$ Increase/Month	\$	9.28



Metering as a service

Per year:	\$	2,250,000.00
Base:	\$	22.03
Consumptive:	\$	4.66
At 6 units:	\$	27.94
Average monthly total:	\$	49.96
\$ Increase	\$	12.08

Cost of Metering as a service

10-year service contract-
\$2.25 million/year



An Alternative.

- Allocate \$200k/ year to replace meters to (AMR) An increase of \$1/ month.
- Focus outlying area meter replacement using AMR meters first.
- 20 years to fully upgrade.
- Over time this will allow staff to upgrade our system to AMR without the huge cost.
- Speeds up meter reading and provides better customer service.
- Focus on system replacements. Water system is currently 71% or \$27/ month/customer underfunded.



The background of the slide is a dark, textured surface filled with numerous question marks of varying sizes and shades of gray and gold. A large, white question mark is prominently displayed in the center-left. A dark, semi-transparent rectangular overlay covers the lower half of the slide, containing the word "Questions?" in white text. In the top right corner of the overlay, there is a small white horizontal line. In the bottom right corner of the overlay, there is a small white plus sign.

Questions?

Thank You

- Chris Collins, Assistant Public Works Director
- Brian Steveson, Utilities Manager

