



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To Public Works & Transportation - Mar. 25, 2009

To: Public Works and Transportation Committee **Date:** March 19, 2009
From: Greg Halsey-Brandt **File:** 03-0930-02-03
 Councillor
Re: **Multi Family Rates for Water and Sewer Services**

Recommendation

1. That Council form a Task Force comprised of 5 citizens representing different ownership and build models of townhouse and apartment water users and 2 Council members, along with staff support, to examine problems experienced by townhouse and apartment properties in taking advantage of the City's water metering programme; and

- 2 That the Task Force bring forward recommendations to Council through the Public Works and Transportation Committee by the end of September 2009 on how these types of properties might take advantage of the programme or if metering is not feasible or practical, how to re-structure the water and sewer utility charges to make the rates charged to these types of properties as equitable as possible with other types of metered residential properties in Richmond.

Greg Halsey-Brandt
Councillor
(604-276-4134)

Att. 3

Purpose

Since the introduction of a water metering programme for single family dwellings in 2004 and a similar mandatory programme for new multi family dwellings in 2005, it is evident that the programmes have been successful for the single family category and new multiple family construction but suffers from serious obstacles in the multi family category for buildings built before 2005.

It is proposed that Council form a Task Force comprised of 5 citizens representing different ownership and built models of townhouse and apartments and 2 Council members, along with staff support, to examine problems experienced by townhouse and apartment properties in taking advantage of the City's water metering programme. The Task Force can bring forward recommendations to Council through the Public Works and Transportation Committee by the end of September 2009 on how these types of properties might take advantage of the programme or if metering is not feasible or practical, how to re-structure the water and sewer utility charges to make the rates charged to these types of properties as equitable as possible with other types of metered residential properties in Richmond.

Analysis

With the escalating cost of water and sewer charges on the City of Richmond utility bills (in my example the 2009 utility bill is only \$191 less than the 2008 municipal levy portion of my property tax bill) residents are looking for ways to save on their water consumption and hence reduce their water and sewer bills. The sewer charge is based on the volume of water consumed and hence a reduction in one results in a reduction in the other. The monetary reason is over and above the public's concern about saving our water resource as a precious natural resource.

The City of Richmond has been a leader in introducing a voluntary water meter programme for single and multifamily dwellings and the programme has worked well for single family homes. For multi family dwellings however the type of construction for apartments and in many instances that for townhouses does not lend itself to individual water meters. The added complexity of strata ownership in the majority of buildings makes it very difficult for these residential units to take advantage of water meters.

Bringing together some residents of Richmond living in multifamily buildings with Council members and our staff to examine the obstacles and potential solutions may provide a way for all Richmond residents to participate in the water metering programme or if not by restructuring the utility rates, may make the charges more equitable for everyone.

Financial Impact

None at this time.

Conclusion

The introduction of water metering programmes in Richmond has allowed single family dwellings to realize significant financial savings in water and sewer utility bills however older multi-family dwellings have not been able to take advantage of the programme to the same extent. Inequities are significant especially for customers with only one occupant in the dwelling. Utility costs have risen considerably and are projected to continue to rise as Metro Vancouver ramps up utility infrastructure construction. A review of the residential water and sewer rates by a citizen/council task force should be under taken to bring forward recommendations directed at bringing greater fairness to the utility billing programme.



Greg Halsey-Brandt
Councillor
(604-276-4134)



To: Public Works and Transportation Committee **Date:** October 16, 2003
From: Siu Tse, M.Eng., P.Eng. **File:** 6060-02-01
 Manager, Engineering Planning
Re: **Volunteer Residential Water Metering Program**

Staff Recommendation

That the City enter into a three year agreement with Neptune Technology Group (Canada) Ltd. to conduct the City's Volunteer Residential Water Metering Program.

That the City waive municipal fees associated with water meter installation for meters installed as part of the Volunteer Water Metering Program.

Siu Tse, M.Eng., P.Eng.
Manager, Engineering Planning
(Local 4075)

FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Water Services	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
Budgets	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
Law	Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	

Staff Report

Origin

At the February 24, 2003 Council Meeting, City Council endorsed a voluntary water metering program for single family dwellings and instructed staff to issue an RFP (Request for Proposal) for the installation of water meters and other services related to the residential metering program.

Analysis

The Volunteer Residential Water Metering Program RFP includes promotion of the Volunteer Residential Water Metering Program, installation of water meters at residences participating in the program, reading all SFD (Single Family Dwelling) water meters and maintenance of all SFD water meters for a three year period.

Staff issued the RFP and received four proposals. Three staff members independently analysed the proposals and ranked them in a decision matrix (as shown in Appendix A). Three categories were used to evaluate each proposal, Methodology, Capability and Cost.

Neptune Technology Group (Canada) Ltd.'s proposal was ranked highest in all three categories, however, Terasen Utility Services was a close second. Both Neptune and Terasen were interviewed to support and clarify their submitted proposals.

Both Neptune and Terasen appear capable of installing water meters and have significant experience in British Columbia. Neptune distinguished themselves through their detailed promotion strategy, complete pricing schedule and long term experience with volunteer water metering programs.

Financial Impact

This program, and its financial impact, is based on voluntary public participation and that participation level has a high degree of uncertainty. However, for the purpose of the proposal evaluation, a target of 7,000 (approximately 25% of the single family homes in Richmond) program participants over three years was used. Based on this level of participation it is estimated that the three year program will cost \$4.5 million plus applicable taxes.

The Volunteer Water Metering Program will be funded through the Water Meter Provision account.

The pricing schedule for both Neptune and Terasen are shown in Appendix B.

October 16, 2003

- 3 -

Conclusion

Staff recommends that the City enter into a three year agreement with Neptune Technology Group (Canada) Ltd. to conduct the City's Volunteer Residential Water Metering Program.

Lloyd Bie, P. Eng.
Project Engineer - Water and Sewer
(Local 4385)



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Public Works and Transportation Committee

Date: April 6, 2005

From: Robert Gonzalez, P.Eng.
Director, Engineering

File: 10-6650-02/2005-Vol 01

Re: Multi Family Water Metering

Staff Recommendation

That all new multi family residential properties be required to install water meters and be charged the metered rate for water and sanitary sewer.

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

FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY					
ROUTED TO:		CONCURRENCE		CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER	
Water Services		Y	N	_____	
Budgets		Y	N	_____	
REVIEWED BY TAG		YES	NO	REVIEWED BY CAO	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES	NO
				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Staff Report

Origin

At the February 24, 2003 Council Meeting, City Council endorsed a voluntary water metering program for single family dwellings.

On January 10, 2005, staff brought forward a report to Council proposing a water metering strategy for multi family developments (Appendix A). At that Council Meeting, City Council resolved that:

- 1) all new duplex residential properties be required to install water meters and be charged the metered rate for water and sanitary sewer;
- 2) all duplex units undergoing renovation in excess of \$75,000 be required to install water meters at the property owners' cost and be charged the metered rate for water and sewer;
- 3) all existing duplex units, except those with interconnected potable water plumbing, become eligible for the Residential Volunteer Water Metering Program;
- 4) all existing apartment and townhouse sites be allowed to have water meters installed at the property owner's cost; and
- 5) staff provide additional comment on the metering of new townhouse and apartment complexes after consultation has occurred with:
 - i. industry stakeholders, which would include the Urban Development Institute, the Greater Vancouver Homebuilders Association, and local developers; and
 - ii. other communities to determine their specific water-metering histories and results.

This report addresses both parts of the 5th resolution.

Findings Of Fact

Consultation with Stakeholders

Staff consulted with UDI at their March 30th, 2005, meeting with the City. The general consensus from UDI was a preference for not metering multi family dwellings. There was also general agreement that if metering was required for multi family dwellings, UDI preferred a master meter with the strata corporation holding responsibility for paying the metered utility bill and distribution of that cost to their members.

Staff also consulted with the Greater Vancouver Homebuilders Association (GVHA). The GVHA is not opposed to metering multi family developments and does not have an opinion on master metering versus sub metering. However, the GVHA was clear that they would like to be involved in creating the standard for metering of multi family developments as they believe they can add a cost sensitive perspective to the process.

Consultation with Other Communities

Staff contacted a total of 21 Canadian municipalities¹ (results are attached as Appendix B). 17 of these municipalities meter multi family developments for water. The majority of these municipalities employ a master meter to measure water and bill the strata corporation for large developments. 2 of the municipalities allow some sub metering with individual billing in apartments and 5 municipalities have sub metering with individual billing in townhouse complexes.

Abbotsford has some existing sub metering, but is actively moving toward master meters for their entire multi family inventory. The reasons cited for this change are access problems for maintenance and reading of the water meters².

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Most Canadian cities that meter multi family developments for water use a master meter scheme and bill the development's strata corporation for consumed water. UDI does not support metering multi family developments for water, however, they have a preference for the master meter scheme if water meters are required. Staff recommends that the City proceed with requiring all new multi family developments to install a master water meter, in a manner consistent with the report attached as Appendix A, and pay the metered rate for water and sewer.

Lloyd Bie, P. Eng.
Project Engineer - Water and Sewer
(4385)

¹ 14 lower mainland municipalities, 3 Vancouver Island municipalities and 4 other major Canadian municipalities
² Often access is only available after regular working hours, creating a chronic overtime problem



To: Richmond City Council **Date:** October 4th, 2006
From: Mayor Malcolm D. Brodie **File:** 03-0930-03-01
Chair, General Purposes Committee
Re: **ELIMINATION OF THE SINGLE RATE FOR WATER AND SEWER SERVICES**

The General Purposes Committee, at its meeting held on Monday, October 2nd, 2006, considered the attached report, and recommends as follows:

Committee Recommendation

- (1) That the water and sewer utility single rate be eliminated, effective January 1, 2007; and*
- (2) That staff advise single rate users of this change and the options available.*

Mayor Malcolm D. Brodie, Chair
General Purposes Committee

Attach.

VARIANCE

Please note that staff recommended the following:

That the water and sewer utility single rate be eliminated.

Staff Report

Purpose

Staff proposes to eliminate the single rate for water and sewer services to avoid possible abuse of the program and to reduce administration costs. With the introduction of residential water metering, the continuance of the single rate hinders migration to metering.

Analysis

Historically, water rates were the same for all three types of residential properties (single family dwellings (SFD), townhouses, and apartments). With the absence of residential metering, many property owners felt that utility charges based on a flat rate is inequitable to those homes with lower than average occupancy. In an attempt at equity, a single rate was first introduced in 1989 to provide equity to single occupants. The single rate was set as a percentage of the SFD rate.

The single rate program is administered by having the property owners sign an affidavit stating that they are currently the sole occupant of the property. No annual reporting or adjustments are made to their claims until a change in ownership takes place or until the property owner advises the City otherwise. Though the affidavit states that the owner must be the single occupant of the property and that they must advise the City if situations change, without the resources for physical inspections, this program allowed ample opportunity for abuse.

With the growth in apartments and townhouses in the City, a taskforce was formed in 1998 to analyze utility rates for these two types of properties. This resulted in separate townhouse and apartment rates in the 1999 Utility Rates Bylaw. Since the single rate for SFDs was lower than the apartment and townhouse rates, single occupants in those types of dwellings also benefited from the single rate.

Over time, with the continual rate increases for SFDs, the single rate surpassed the regular apartment rate. In 2003, single occupants in apartments no longer received the savings while single occupants in townhouse continued receiving the single rate. This caused many complaints from apartment dwellers on the inequity in the application of utility rates.

The following table provides the current rate comparison between regular and single rate for each type of dwelling:

	2006 Utility Rate (water/sewer) Comparison		
	Single Family Dwelling	Townhouse	Apartment
Regular Rate	\$543.25	\$464.77	\$335.38
Single Rate	\$449.69	\$445.58	\$335.38
Savings	\$93.56	\$19.19	\$0.00

Presently, 1,298 townhouses and 882 SFDs in Richmond are slated for single occupant rates in 2007. This represents approximately 4.08% of total customers. Should the single rate be eliminated, all 882 SFDs or 1.64% of the total customer base would qualify to have water meters

installed. Assuming all 882 SFDs were occupied by single occupants, switching to water meters could save them up to 25%, depending on usage.

A water rate survey was conducted with other members of the GVRD. Only the City of Richmond and the Corporation of Delta maintain a separate single rate. Though the Corporation of Delta offers the single rate, it does not offer lower rates for townhouses and apartments. Eliminating the rate will bring the City in line with utility practices across the region.

With the elimination of the single rate, single occupants of townhouses would lose a net savings of \$19.19. However, the rate afforded to townhouse occupants is still a sizable reduction from the SFD rate. In addition, under the amended residential volunteer water metering program, single occupants in both apartments and townhouses may, through the consensus of their strata council, apply to the City for a water meter to be installed in their complex.

Eliminating the single rate will bring equity amongst single occupants in all three types of properties. This will encourage migration to the residential volunteer water metering program and promote equity for consumers.

Financial Impact

The elimination of the single rate will be reflected in the 2007 water and sewer utility rates.

Conclusion

The elimination of the single rate will provide consistency in billing and will actively encourage residents to switch to residential metering. This will bring fairness and equity to users and promote water conservation in the City.

Steve McClurg
Manager, Water Services
(1201)

Ivy Wong
Manager, Taxes
(4046)

April 6th, 2009

Councillor Greg Halsey-Brandt,
City of Richmond, 6911 No. 3 Road
Richmond, BC

to go w/
GHB Water
meter report

Dear Councillor Greg:

Re: Water Metering Program & Inside Water Meters for NW 12
Glenacres Village Townhouses at 9700 Glenacres Drive.

I spoke to Nelson Liang of Neptune Technologies at the City's Open House last Thursday. His company is the contractor installing the water meters in Richmond. I was given good news!

He advised that inside water meters are available and that, technically, it is possible to install them inside each townhouse near where the main water shut off is located. (In my case under the sink in the small powder room by the front door). He further advised that the installation would take only approx. 1 ½ hours to do and that it was not necessary to determine where the outside shut off from the main water line is in order to install the meter. The inside meters are quite a bit smaller than the current outside meters, approx. 3" x 5" x 5". These meters can be read by remote from a drive-by.

He further advised that at the present time, inside meters are installed and in use in West Vancouver, Kamloops, Kelowna and possibly Gibsons area. However, he said that Richmond's current by-laws do not allow them here and that the Engineering Department needs to recommend changing the existing by-laws in order to allow them.

These inside meters would work well for townhouses, and would eliminate the need for the costly vault of \$75,000 per common meter. Also, it would avoid the implications of the Strata's water bill falling on the first unit #101, as well as liability - however this needs to be confirmed by the Tax Department. Participation could be on an individual basis upon Strata Council approval.

I found this conversation with Nelson very encouraging, and hope you will continue your effort to have individual inside water meters available for Richmond townhouse residents. Nelson can be reached at Neptune, at #604-271-9700 for further discussion.

I hope that if this new By-law does go through, that the City will extend the deadline for free water meters to those affected by the new regulation. Can you see to that, please? Thank you.

Thank you again for taking up this important issue, Mr. Halsey-Brandt.

Moreah Sinclair
Glenacres Village #126 - 9700 Glenacres Drive Richmond, BC V7A 1Y7

Tel: #604-241-7009

Moreah Sinclair

9280 Railway Ave.
Richmond, BC V7E 2B6
April 12, 2009

Mr. Greg Halsey Brandt,
Richmond City Council,
Richmond, BC

Dear Greg,

Apartment Building Water Meter

Thank you for our telephone discussion about this on Tuesday afternoon, April 8. I am a member of the Strata Council of the Garden Glen Apartments, 8391 Bennett Road, Richmond.

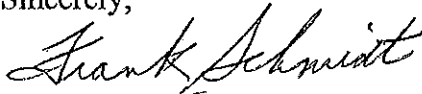
After we received our utility bills in the spring of 2007, I made enquiries at City Hall with regard to the possibility of installing a water meter and saving some money with the City installation program. It was not until 2008 that I actively pursued the installation of a water meter with the City once we received AGM approval.

I was in contact with Chris Blackwell in May, 2008 who thought it was possible and promised to send someone to assess the building location. It was mentioned that this had never been done and ours could be the first. Despite calls back and forth, this never happened, however, it always seemed to be ongoing. There never seemed to be the "will" at City Engineering to install a water meter for a multi residential apartment. Mr. Chris Blackwell informed me in February that it could not be done. Following phone calls with Mr. Doug Anderson, Mgr. of Water Services, I was informed in March, 2009 that there was no money left in the budget and all meter installations were halted. If we had been a single family residence requesting a water meter installation anytime in 2007 or 2008, this would have been taken care of within a week. Richmond has no older apartment buildings on water meters to my knowledge because of the reluctance of City Engineering and now with no budget money, it may never happen. When all residences have to have water meters, will this also apply to apartments and at our own cost?

Garden Glen has 48 apartments: 17-2 bedrooms, 24-1 bedrooms and 7 studio units, all paying the same for utilities. It seems to me that as tax paying citizens of Richmond, we should be offered free meter installation as equal to that of residential tax paying citizens. How about a portion of any new water meter budget being set aside for multi family buildings?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Frank Schmidt

Mah, Cheryl

From: Lynne Bigg [lbigg@telus.net]
Sent: April 22, 2009 11:35 AM
To: Mah, Cheryl
Subject: Att'n Greg Halsey-Brandt

Dear Councillor Halsey-Brandt,

I live in a small townhouse complex here in Richmond and I am outraged by the discrimination now present in the water metering situation. As a senior, living alone in a townhouse, my water usage is modest, and yet, I have no way to have that reflected in my bill since Richmond apparently does not allow individual meters in multiple unit complexes. I have heard from a friend, Moreah Sinclair, that the technology exists to allow townhouse metering. Why can we not have that? If the city is truly using the metering program as a way of encouraging conservation, then why not involve the maximum number of people. Otherwise, individuals may begin to behave on the premise that since they are paying for the extra water anyway, they might as well use it more lavishly.

I understand that Moreah Sinclair has sent you a letter that you will be presenting to the appropriate committee. Please add my comments and concerns. I have heard many expressions of frustration from my peers, single seniors on fixed income, as we find ourselves being penalized for our situation. Unfortunately, few of us have the confidence or the skills to voice these concerns. I hope that you will continue to do your best to represent us.

Lynne Bigg
Victory Wynd Complex
Richmond, B.C.
Ph 604-271-9815

Mah, Cheryl

From: Tom Moses [tlmoses@hotmail.com]
Sent: April 22, 2009 11:18 AM
To: Mah, Cheryl
Subject: Town House Water metering

Dear Councillor Halsey-Brandt **Water Metering for individual Town Homes**

We understand that you propose to ask council to amend the current city by-laws to allow installation of water meters in individual town home. We wish to support that action as we feel that any means aimed at conservation of a valuable natural asset, is a worth while effort.

In addition, we feel that the current situation is discriminatory toward Town House owners in that they are not offered the same choices as other home owners.

Yours Sincerely,

Tom and Laura Moses
#7--4411 Williams Road,
Richmond, V7E 6B5

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Mah, Cheryl

From: Pat Gannon [pgannon@smartt.com]
Sent: April 22, 2009 11:11 AM
To: Mah, Cheryl
Subject: Inside water meters for townhouses.
Attachments: "AVG certification"

Dear Councillor Halsey-Brandt,

Representations have already been made to you regarding the changing of the city by-laws to include all taxpayers of Richmond which provides free water meters for those in single family residences but not for those of us who live in townhouses. Since it is technically quite feasible to fit inside water meters to any house, why are town house owners discriminated against? My wife and I are old age pensioners living on a fixed income. We live in a small (16 unit) town house complex. It is patently obvious that some of the residents consume far more water than ourselves, yet we are obliged to pay an equal amount for water service.

We understand that technical details regarding the installation of these meters is already in your hands. Please support the changes in the city by-laws to end this discrimination.

Thank you.

Patricia and Patrick Gannon.(

Schedule 4 to the Minutes of the
Public Works and Transportation
Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, April 22, 2009.

April 6th, 2009

Councillor Greg Halsey-Brandt,
City of Richmond, 6911 No. 3 Road
Richmond, BC

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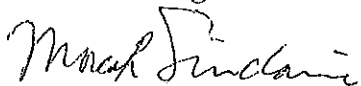
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