

# City changes water meter plans

Program remains voluntary, for now

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- BY DAVE STEWART

At least for the time being, the City of Charlottetown is backing off plans to make water meters mandatory for all homes.

Coun. Eddie Rice, chairman of the Water and Sewer Utility, announced at city council's regular public monthly meeting Tuesday night the program will remain voluntary, for now.

Rice explained that homeowners from all over the city are calling city hall in significant numbers asking to have a water meter installed on their home. He's also receiving feedback from his colleagues on council who are hearing demand is high.

Right now, most residents pay a fixed rate of \$ 183.93 and a sewer charge of \$ 326.96 for a total of \$ 510.89 per year. Once a water meter is installed, the homeowner only pays for the water they use. Rice said some customers are saving \$ 120 per bill. Close to 900 homes have been metered so far, all voluntarily.

Council passed two resolutions on water meters at its meeting Tuesday.

The city will pay Sansom Equipment Ltd. \$ 354,856.65 over three years for the actual meters. It will pay AMR Equipment \$ 270,485.13 over three years to make the meters automated. In other words, rather than have someone read the meters attached to each house, they simply drive by in a utility vehicle and pick up the readings through a transmitter.

Last month, Rice announced that within seven years all homeowners in the city would be

metered. On Tuesday night, the councillor said the first areas to be metered were going to be the neighbourhoods of East and West Royalty.

Rice said concerns have been raised since then.

"Some felt we were concentrating too much on one area," Rice said.

While no one will say so on the record, it is believed some councillors expressed concern with forcing meters on people in the leadup to the November 2014 civic election.

Rice says the utility hopes to install 1,000 meters per year for the next seven years and will leave the program voluntary for now.

He noted it's difficult to know if this method of installation will achieve the numbers the city is shooting for so if the numbers aren't there the utility will review its options next year. If the city isn't on track to have everyone done by Dec. 31, 2019, it's likely metering will be made mandatory by 2015.

Coun. Rob Lantz said he's already asked for one and his father is also very interested.

"There are people out there who want to volunteer. My father wants one. He'll be happy to learn we are taking volunteers again," Lantz said, noting his children are already paying attention to how much water they use.

For more information, or to fill out an application to have a water meter installed, go to

<http://www.city.charlottetown.pe.ca/volunteermeterprogram.php>.