



## August 22, 2023 – Superintendent’s Report

### ADMIN UPDATE:

The Utility is seeking approval of the agreement with Baker Tilly for the 2023 Water Rate Study, which both we and Baker Tilly neglected to do at the beginning of the project. We recommend approval of the agreement in the amount of \$28,500. The rate study is still underway, and Baker Tilly is awaiting some final information that we are compiling to complete the study.

I would like to address some customer concerns that have come to my attention.

The first is the issue of lead service lines, and lead in general. We follow strict testing requirements from IDEM concerning lead and each year we publish a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) that provides results for a wide range of tests, which includes lead. The CCR is made available to all our customers in keeping with IDEM notification requirements. The 2022 CCR (CCR’s are to be published no later than July 1 of each year for the previous year’s testing) shows our lead results are 2.9 micrograms per liter. The Maximum Contaminant Level for lead is 15 micrograms per liter.

The USB should be aware by now that the Utility, along with all other public water systems, are now required under new regulations from the EPA (the revised Lead and Copper Rule) to conduct a lead service line inventory. The inventory must be complete by October 2024. We are working on this already with 120Water and Wessler Engineering. We are also in the process of preparing the documentation needed and get it before the council to approve an ordinance that will allow us to receive \$400,000 in funding from the Indiana Finance Authority to perform field work to complete the inventory. While most of our service line types are known (i.e. we know they are copper, polyethylene, etc.) there are some for which there is no documentation and have to be considered as “unknown”. The field work we need to do will be to confirm these “unknown” service line types and update our inventory in the IDEM database. While the \$400,000 will certainly be helpful in offsetting these costs, the Utility will likely incur additional costs above that amount, which will have to be funded out of our capital funds.

The next issue concerns the fact that our walk-in payment lobby is closed. The lobby has been closed now since the beginning of the pandemic, so close to two and a half years now. We do not plan to re-open the walk-in lobby as we believe the payment options available to our customers are more than sufficient. Customers can make payments by:

- ACH (automatic deduction from checking account)
- Recurring credit card payment through the on-line bill payment system
- Credit card payment over the phone
- Cash, credit card and check payment at the drive-up kiosk located in the parking lot of the Lawrence Government Center
- Checks and Money Orders can be dropped off at the night drop box in the parking lot of the Utility Building located at 9201 Harrison Park Court

With all the various payment methods, there is no reason why a customer cannot pay their bill easily. The original closing of the walk-in lobby was of course related to the pandemic. It is a goal of our

internal controls policies to greatly reduce or eliminate the handling of cash by employees. Of course, we are also still seeing COVID cases being reported, albeit on a reduced level, so less face-to-face interaction, and no cash handling benefits operations from an employee health perspective. Finally, for the safety of our staff and because we offer all these different payment options, we do not believe that the walk-in option is necessary. In addition, virtually all our dealings with customers can be handled over the phone at (317) 542-0511 or via email at [lucustomerservice@cityoflawrence.org](mailto:lucustomerservice@cityoflawrence.org) and are handled as or more efficiently than in person transactions.

We have had some recent issues with the touchscreen at the drive-up kiosk, but that is being resolved as we have received a replacement touchscreen and a technician will be out soon to switch them out. It is standard practice at the Utility that if a customer was late paying a bill because of a malfunction with the kiosk, or if the phone lines are down at the Utility, or the internet-based billing system is down, that no late fees are applied. If there is a malfunction on the utility's side that makes it so that a customer cannot make a payment to avoid being placed on the non-payment turn off list, then that customer is not placed on the list.

The next matter is how we handle non-payment turn off days.

- If a customer has not made payment by 8:00 am and are on the turn off list prior to the techs leaving the building to start turning off delinquent accounts and the customer makes a payment after 8:00 am and notifies the Business Office of the payment, the Business Office (BO) will instruct the tech to leave that service on if tech has not already disconnected the service. If the tech has already turned the service off, service will be restored in the order in which payments are received and a Water Release Form is submitted on-line.
- Customers can make payments 24-7, all payment portals are checked prior to the service technicians leaving the building to start shutting off for non-pay.
- Once the technicians leave the building, no additional payment verifications are performed.
- Customers are to notify the Business Office of any payments being made on turn off day to avoid non-payment turn off.
- All customers receive a red disconnect or E-Bill arrears notification prior to the scheduled disconnect date. All disconnect bills notify customer of the scheduled disconnection date.

For a full explanation of billing policies and procedures, please visit the website here: <https://www.cityoflawrence.org/utilities/water-sewer>, and then select the "Policy and Procedures Manual" under the General Information heading.

Non-payment of utility bills is the only reason we disconnect customers, unless of course the customer requests it for repair work or some other reason. We do work with our customers to make payment arrangements to help through tough times, but we must meet our obligations too. We believe it is reasonable to expect that, after having met our obligation to provide safe, clean, and reliable water and sanitation services, we be paid for doing so in accordance with the costs established by City Ordinances. And as I mentioned before, we do work with our customers to set up payment arrangements so that non-payment disconnection can be avoided. If the customer keeps up on their current billing plus whatever amount was agreed to in the payment extension plan, they are not subject to disconnection.

**Operational Data:****Sanitary Sewer System**

- Performing routine maintenance and upkeep on lift stations and grinder pump stations.
- Performing routine maintenance on the gravity sanitary sewer collection system.
- Working with Engineer and Contractor as needed for the 2022 Manhole and Sewer Main Rehabilitation Project (SWIF/ARPA)

**Water Distribution Underground Operations**

- Performing routine inspections, emergency shut outs for repairs, valve exercising, valve box repairs, and fire hydrant testing/inspections.
- Performing routine water line repairs, service line repairs, fire hydrant replacements, vehicle repairs, and maintaining street and sidewalk cuts until final restorations can be made.
- Working with engineers and contractors as necessary on all Lawrence Utilities Capital projects.
- Performing testing and inspections as necessary for private projects in the city.

**Water Plant/Well activity**

- Performing routine maintenance and daily tasks to make sure water treatment plants are operating properly.

**Business Office/Service Department****June Totals**

- 15327 Active accounts.
- 2144 Work orders completed.

**BILLING ADJUSTMENTS: None**