



Water Utility Reorganization: Where Are We Now?

Overview

The City of Columbia’s 2036 Vision includes leading the way in innovative and high quality municipal services. In February, 2017, the City announced big changes on the horizon for its water, sewer, and stormwater utility services. While some improvements are still in development, others have already taken place that are advancing our systems and services. We believe that as we move forward, we will succeed in providing high quality municipal services, efficiently, effectively, and responsively. Below are highlights on work done as of June 1, 2017.

Customer Service Efforts	Status
<p>Customer Care & Field Services Staff Training: Customer Care and Field Services staff received training to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand their knowledge of City services and available City assistance program • Improve their ability to listen to customers and meet their needs within the capabilities of City policies • Improve their ability to explain what steps a customer can expect City staff to follow if an issue cannot be immediately resolved • Enhance their ability to educate customers preventing high use bills • Convey the care and respect owed to our customers 	<p><i>All Customer Care and Field Services staff received advanced customer service training. Staff will continue to train as part of their customer service responsibilities.</i></p>
<p>Escalated Issue Team: Customers with complex billing issues are already being served by Customer Care representatives acting as Customer Advocates. With the new fiscal year, positions will be added to allow specially trained staff to act as full-time Customer Advocates and Meter Maintenance Task Force members.</p>	<p><i>Customer Advocate services available now. New positions planned for Fiscal Year 2017-2018.</i></p>

Meter Reading Auditing Efforts	Status
<p>Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI): The City plans to convert its meter system to an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). All analog meters will be replaced with digital meters that collect and transmit real-time water use data to the billing network. Over the next 3-5 years, the City plans to replace all current meters with AMI meters and set up the data transmission network.</p>	<p><i>The City has completed the feasibility study for upgrade to AMI. Next steps are to move forward with a phased installation.</i></p>
<p>Meter Reading Routes: Change in protocol so no meter reader will read the same route three months in a row. This will reduce opportunity for skipped reads to go unnoticed.</p>	<p><i>Started: July 2016</i></p>

<p>Weekly Random Meter Route Recheck: Random selection of a meter reading route to be rechecked by staff from a different section (meter maintenance). At least ¾ of route will be re-read. If discrepancies above a certain level are found, a third staff member will confirm the correct amount. Over-time, staff expect to see a reduction in skipped readings and misreads.</p>	<p><i>Started: July 2016</i></p>
<p>Consolidated Skipped Meter Report: Skipped reads are now reported in a consolidated report in addition to a master list of individual accounts. The consolidated report lets staff identify which categories cause the most skips.</p>	<p><i>Started: December 2016</i></p>

<p>Department Reorganization Efforts</p>	<p>Status</p>
<p>Gap Analysis: Working with an outside agency to identify areas department-wide where processes could be improved both in quality of service delivered and in efficiency.</p> <p>The Gap Analysis started as an initiative of the Clean Water 2020 program. In 2016, it was expanded to include all of the Department of Utilities & Engineering. It continues through the reorganization of the Department of Engineering and the Department of Utility Operations.</p> <p>Capital Improvement Project planning will use more data-driven approaches using customer complaint data, asset age, and other performance indicators to prioritize projects.</p>	<p><i>Work continues to improve the Department of Engineering, Department of Utility Operations, and Customer Care.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision: A high quality product with great customer service. • Values: Providing a level of service as if we have direct competition in our service area.
<p>Reorganization: As part of the Gap Analysis, the Department of Utilities & Engineering and Customer Care were reorganized to bring all water and sewer related services, including billing, under one Assistant City Manager. The Assistant City Manager will oversee the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Care and Field Services Division <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Billing, meter reading, customer service • Department of Engineering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capital Improvement management, floodplain and stormwater management, asset management, strategic planning • Department of Utility Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plant, water system, and wastewater system operations and maintenance; regulatory compliance oversight 	<p><i>Reorganization Planning Started: Summer 2016</i></p> <p><i>Effective Date: January 1, 2017</i></p>
<p>Customer Satisfaction Strategy: Improving overall customer satisfaction levels is one goal of the department-wide Gap Analysis.</p>	<p><i>Redesign of Strategy Started: December 2016</i></p>