City of West Kelowna

Public Works – Utilities Department
Water Meter Technician – 1.0 FTE Request
FTE2020-10

General Overview

This business case provides background and information for the Water Meter Technician - 1.0 FTE. This position would work under the direction of the Utilities Supervisor and would be the primary contact for all water meter related services in the City of West Kelowna, working closely with Utilities Technical Coordinator.

It should be noted that this FTE, should Council support it, would also require a vehicle as indicated in the capital request No. C2020-7.

Background

- In the CWK, there are approximately 11,850 meters of which:
  - 95% are residential customers which use approximately 60% of City's consumption;
  - 20% of the consumption is allocated to agricultural,
  - 20% of the consumption is commercial, institutional, & multi-family.

- Currently the City has one Utility Operator who installs new meters (with some exception), repairs, does change outs, maintains, troubleshoots, and performs customer service, for all meter related issues.
  - Has been in existence since the legacy WID and legacy LID water systems amalgamated with the City in 2011.
  - Not a dedicated water meter technician, and therefore when other issues arise, they can be pulled off dealing with the water meters and then the list of water meters to investigate / repair/ replace just grows.
  - It is expected that the utility operator would continue to assist the Water Meter Technician, however by having a dedicated Water Meter Technician, this work can continue even when the utility operator is needed elsewhere.

- Throughout the City, one type of meter has been installed, and over the past 10 years, this meter has had issues including failed batteries, moving parts issues and more.
  - Has resulted in a high volume of meter failures. Over the course of the last 6 to 7 years, the City consistently has approximately 100-150 broken meters (non-advancing – "Zero Consumption") after every quarterly meter read (this backlogged to approx. 500 in 2019).

        - These come from a report of approximately 750 zero consumption meters that Finance staff investigate and determine which zero consumption meters need to be investigated by Public Works staff.
    - In March of 2019, in addition to the non-advancing meters, the City had 380 meters not reading – "No Read". With the no-read meters, we consistently have a minimum of 100 meters (this increased substantially in 2019) that do not read for various reasons (register is broken, battery dead, wire fencing, etc.).
        - Finance will estimate all "No Reads" so they are billed a metered charge. We do NOT estimate "Zero Consumption" as this creates a very onerous amount of administrative work in Finance.

- We have 250-300 meters identified by Finance as requiring an investigation by Public Works per quarter, this works out 4-5 a day.
    - Each problem meter needs to be investigated and either fixed or changed out to a new meter.
    - In addition, we also need new meters installed (approximately 20 to 50 per month or 1-2.5 meters per day). These new meters could be new construction or a new service for an existing premise.

- To illustrate the extent of the loss in financial revenue the following example calculation has been provided:
    - If you have 150 non-advancing meters that the City is not billing consumption per quarter, this is a shortfall of approx. $152.50/meter/year in revenue (150 x 4 x $152.50 = $91,500.00).
    - Each new install meter that is delayed for installation could cost the City approximately $51/month
    - The Water Meter Technician will have $ 89,366 of annual expenses and would require a vehicle as requested in C2020-7 ($40,000)

- In 2019, the City hired a contractor (meter manufacturer) to help with a backlog of meter failures (approximately 1000 meters). This was done as part of the Capital Project No. C2019-72.
    - The backlog was due to a staff illness and an increase in number of meter failures. The meter failures were too numerous to catch up with by existing staff and the revenue loss had become substantial.
    - Historically, since the initial universal metering program, the Utility Operator has always performed this work prior to this one time exception in 2019.

Currently the City is in a "reactive only" level of service as it relates to water meters, and staff would like to work towards a much more proactive approach to meter and water consumption issues – especially with the development of a new water treatment plant. With this proposed increased FTE request, staff could read more often and identify broken meters much faster (reducing expenses). We can also assist our customers much faster with identifying leaks and high consumption.

Job Responsibilities

Under the direction of the Utilities Supervisor, with a strong connection to the Utilities Technical Coordinator, this FTE would be responsible for the following:

- Install new meters.
- Repairs and replaces broken water meters
- Troubleshoot existing meters.
- Does the quarterly meter reads for all 11,850 accounts.
- Provides customer service.
- Conducts final account reads.
- Contribute to the leak detection program.

Financial Breakdown

As per the covering Supplemental FTE request, the Water Meter Technician will have $ 89,366 of ongoing expenses. Also, and as mentioned earlier in this business case, this position would require a vehicle as requested in C2020-7 ($40,000).

Staff's Recommendation

Staff is recommending support of the Water Meter Technician FTE. This position will allow the CWK to deliver a higher level of customer service, help with managing and eventually eliminating the current water meter backlog, and in time, allow the CWK to tackle metering and water consumption issues on a proactive basis.