CHARLOTTE
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG UTILITIES

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City Council to consider water meter project

CHARLOTTE – Continuing its series of customer service improvements that included last year's water meter equipment audit, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities will ask City Council Monday to approve a pilot program in two neighborhoods to test-drive the latest, most sophisticated meter transmitter equipment available on the market.

The program would include the installation of the new '100W' meter transmitters and registers in the River Run and Hidden Valley neighborhoods. The cost of the program is $234,470.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities began installing automated meter reading (AMR) equipment in 2002. AMR uses traditional, mechanical water meters with attached electronic transmitters that capture the mechanical reading and transmit water usage data via radio signal to mobile collectors as they drive through neighborhoods.

Currently, about half of residential water meters use a model 60W transmitter, and half use an older model called the '50W.' Under the agreement, Itron, Inc., would accelerate the ongoing upgrade of 50W transmitters to 60W transmitters at no charge to the utility. This agreement will replace about half of the remaining 50W transmitters.

A second agreement will be forthcoming through another vendor to replace the other half. Over the last decade transmitter technology has made significant advances, and the utility has worked continuously to keep the system up-to-date.

"During the last several years we've replaced 50Ws with 60Ws as needed. This agreement speeds things up," said Barry Gullet, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities Director. "The meter audit confirmed our meter equipment functions properly. The audit also supported our vendor's findings that the 60W, with its stronger radio signal, transmits the data signal at a better rate than the 50W. So we've worked with Itron to accelerate the upgrade process while seizing the opportunity to test the 100Ws."

The testing of 100W meter transmitters in River Run and Hidden Valley marks a first step toward real-time, continuous meter reading. Because 100Ws capture and store water usage data at a more frequent interval, water customers could eventually have access to far more information about their water usage. River Run and Hidden Valley were chosen for the pilot because of their different water use patterns and because baseline data was established in both neighborhoods during last summer's meter equipment audit

"100Ws are newer and more expensive technology," Gullet said. "But they offer tremendous opportunities to improve the way we serve customers."