

WINTER 2020-21 VOLUME 25 ISSUE 2

Positive Results from City Survey ■ Rate Adjustment for 2021 ■ IDNR Grants WDMWW Permit

And The Survey Says: High Marks for Reliability, Ways to Pay

West Des Moines residents view their water services with more favor and satisfaction than most people living in the Midwest and United States in general, according to the City of West Des Moines biennial survey.



The survey done by the ETC Institute earlier in 2020 found that 94 percent of residents who offered an opinion were satisfied with the reliability of drinking water delivered to their homes.

Customers can pay bills in person at WDMWW offices at 1505 Railroad Ave. 7:30 am to 4 pm weekdays.

“Reliable, quality drinking water is easy to take for granted, and most of us do. You turn on a faucet and it’s there,” pointed out **Christina Murphy**, general manager of West Des Moines Water Works. “We’re doing our job well when such a high percentage of respondents say that they value the reliability of their water services.”

The biggest gain in perception for the Water Works revolved around payment options for monthly service bills. The variety and ease of use earned WDMWW a six-point gain in satisfaction from the city’s 2018 survey results.

“When our offices were closed to the public as a result of COVID-19, we saw more customers change the way they paid their bills,” noted **Josh Heggen**, business manager of WDMWW.

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WDMWW Trustees Keep Water Rates Among Most Affordable in Face of 15-Percent Increase from Des Moines Water Works

The West Des Moines Water Works Board of Trustees places top priority on maintaining affordable rates for its customers, understanding that the availability, quality and price of water matter when residents and businesses choose where they want to live and work.

That guiding principle remained strong as ever as the board prepared for 2021. After thorough study and consideration, the trustees approved a 9.5-percent rate increase, effective January 1, 2021.

SECOND-LOWEST WATER RATES IN THE METRO

Even with the increase, WDMWW water rates will rank as the second-lowest among the 10 largest cities in metro area, according to 2021 published rates at the time of this printing.

“Nothing has been typical, common or predictable about 2020,” noted **Christina Murphy**, general manager of the Water Works. “We knew rates would increase in the coming year and we also knew that at least one of the most critical barometers of future costs was beyond our control.”

In October 2020, Des Moines Water Works announced a 15-percent increase for the rates it charges wholesale users such as WDMWW. Murphy and her staff sharpened their pencils and conducted extensive

financial modeling of future costs and expected revenues to provide the trustees with multiple options for setting 2021 rates. WDMWW purchases about 25 percent of its water from Des Moines.

“The board has been highly sensitive to the added challenges that families and businesses have confronted as a result of the pandemic,” explained Trustee Scott Brennan. “In response, we voted to keep the increase in single digits and our rates among the lowest in the area.”

As a result, residential customers will see their rates increase by 52 cents per 1,000 gallons. The basic water service fee will increase 13 cents to \$4.47. A typical family using 4,000 gallons of water a month will see their monthly bill increase from \$26.10 to \$28.31. Irrigation rates will increase from \$6.57 per 1,000 gallons to \$7.19.

The 2021 rate also reflects increased operational costs as well as capital improvements needed to keep pace with water demand as West Des Moines grows.

“We have a dynamic community and a utility with forward-thinking leadership that have invested the time to plan and prepare for future so that we can provide safe, reliable drinking water today and 40 years from now,” Murphy said.



**JOHN
LUTHER**
1941-2020

WDMWW lost one of its most notable institutions this year with the passing of John Luther. He began his 38-year Water Works career digging ditches, and through hard work rose to the position of Superintendent. His efforts to save the AC Ward Plant during the floods of 1993 were epic, though he never asked for credit or accolades. He will be missed.

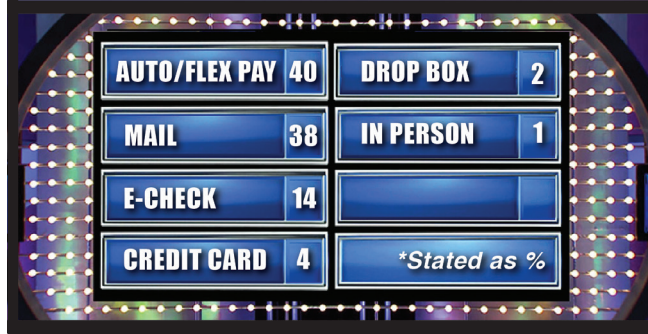
Auto/Flex Pay Overtake Mail as No.1 Payment Preference

"Survey" continued from page 1

In many ways the pandemic crystallized the trend already underway and enticed customers to opt for paperless billing and electronic bill pay. Over the past five years, for example, paperless accounts have increased by 33.6 percent while AutoPay has increased by 74.2 percent.

"Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for people to pay their public services bills," Heggen added. "The survey validated that our customers believe these choices are important and they take advantage of them."

How Customers Pay • SURVEY SAYS...



WDM Water Works Receives Green Light from IDNR; Moves Closer to a Decision on Regional Water Options

West Des Moines Water Works is preparing for the inevitable expansion of the Metro area and the ever-increasing drinking water needs of its customers. Years of study, investigation and collaboration culminated this year when the Iowa Department of Natural Resources awarded a water-use permit to WDM Water Works to draw from the wells along the Raccoon River. With the approved permit, the West Des Moines Water Works Board of Trustees can fully evaluate options related to a Full Regional Water Authority, a West Metro Regional Water Authority or a shared regional plant with Waukee and Van Meter.

"Population growth in the western Metro is a reality and we must plan for it by working with our neighbors," said Christina Murphy, WDMWW general manager. "We began this process four years ago and our due diligence included partnering with neighboring communities on engineering and hydrology studies of the area."

The results of that research indicated that well fields in the Van Meter area could provide the supply needed for future western growth, yet would not adversely affect communities that draw from the Raccoon River Alluvial Aquifer including Des Moines Water Works.

NO ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES, FUTURE BENEFIT

In awarding the permit, the DNR agrees and validates that WDMWW can draw from the Raccoon River without adversely affecting Des Moines Water Works and its customers, nor the sustainability and water quality of the river in the event of drought.

"We know the best way to ensure sufficient water resources for future growth is to work with our

neighbors to address common issues," Murphy asserted. "We have a fiduciary duty to our ratepayers to weigh the options in front of us across several metrics including access, volume and financial implications, while acting in the context of protecting the quality and flow of the Raccoon River and the many communities it serves."

PERMIT ALLOWS FOR FULL VETTING OF WATER OPTIONS

This water use permit allows WDMWW to move forward by securing the rights to the source water needed for a future treatment plant. The proposed plan includes a primary well field located just east of Van Meter and a secondary, smaller well field within the city limits. It was important for WDMWW to receive the permit so the options for future water production needs can be fully vetted and the best option selected for rate payers.

WDMWW and Des Moines Water Works have a long history of cooperation, and we will continue to work together. "We buy water from Des Moines Water Works and have worked with them on a multitude of projects. We will continue to do so," Murphy noted. "Expanding partnerships to the west – as the population expands to the west – only makes sense. Collaboration with neighboring communities is essential as we seek to provide safe and reliable sources of water for the future."

A final decision on the construction of a future water production facility has not been made. But Murphy adds that if the analysis reveals pursuing a west regional plant is a strong viable course of action, a new plant could come online in three to five years if approved.

