Halifax Water
Halifax Regional Water Commission

ITEM # 4-I
HRWC Board

March 26, 2020

TO: Craig MacMullin, MBA, CPA, CGA, Chair, and Members of the Halifax Regional Water Commission Board

SUBMITTED BY: Digitally signed by James Campbell
DN: cn=James Campbell, o=Halifax Water, ou=Corporate Services, email=james.campbell@halifaxwater.ca, c=CA
Date: 2020.03.20 16:11:35 -03'00'

James Campbell, Communications and PR Manager

APPROVED: Cathie O'Toole
Digitally signed by Cathie O'Toole
DN: cn=Cathie O'Toole, o=Halifax Water, ou=General Manager, email=cathieo@halifaxwater.ca, c=CA
Date: 2020.03.20 16:17:35 -03'00'

Cathie O'Toole, MBA, FCPA, FCGA, ICD.D, General Manager

DATE: March 4, 2020

SUBJECT: **Customer Portal, Customer Engagement / Communication Plan for 2020/21**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Approval of the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Project on October 6, 2016 by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB), as well as changes to Halifax Water's regulations to enable AMI.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, Halifax Water began investigating changes, trends and options in metering technology that would help enhance customer service and make the utility more operationally efficient. The AMI technology selected offered many benefits including the ability for customers, should they wish, to manage their consumption, and detect and correct leaks before they lead to a high bill. The technology also allows the utility to alert customers to high consumption due to possible premise plumbing leaks and thereby reduce high bills and billing disputes.

To allow for the customer benefits of AMI to be realized, a Customer Portal would need to be developed. The Customer Portal formed a central benefit in the promotion of the AMI program.

The Portal is currently in development and will be rolled out in two phases. The first phase, which will provide customers with the ability to monitor their consumption online through

a web portal, is anticipated to be in place late fall 2020. The second phase, which allows customers to manage their account(s) online (ie. bill payments, account set up/cancellation, etc.) is anticipated to be in place early 2021."

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has introduced some unavoidable uncertainty into the schedule. Halifax Water staff resources are being deployed to ensure critical water, wastewater and stormwater services are being maintained for our customers. Also, current travel restrictions, which are in place for the foreseeable future, make face-to-face meetings with vendors unlikely if not impossible. These issues will undoubtedly impact the previously developed project schedule. To what extent is not yet known as the length of the COVID-19 issue will impact Halifax Water and others is undetermined.

DISCUSSION

For customers and the utility to realize the full benefits of AMI, customers need to be aware of the Portal, how it will benefit them, and how to set up and access it. Halifax Water proposes to use a variety of communications tools to get the message out to customers.

Those options include:

1) Use of local Twitter and Instagram and "influencers" to push out paid advertisements across our service area
2) Use of Halifax Water's Twitter and Facebook sites
3) Purchase of Facebook and Twitter advertisements
4) Advertisements in AllNovaScotia.com
5) Temporarily replace the "alert" function on Halifax Water's website with a clickable link that will take users directly to the Portal log in/sign up page. The "alert" function can be quickly reestablished should the need arise.
6) Halifax Transit Busboards
7) The Shed
8) Fall Water talk
9) Advertisements in Councilor newsletters

The Customer Portal will be transformation for customers and the utility. Ensuring it is utilized to its fullest potential will help maximize the benefits of the AMI project.

Report Prepared by:

Digitally signed by James Campbell
DN: cn=James Campbell, o=Halifax Water, ou=Corporate Services, email=james.campbell@halifaxwater.ca, c=CA
Date: 2020.03.20 16:12:06 -03'00'

James Campbell, Communications and PR Manager, 902-490-4604