Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 13 February 2013 20:00

Village considers buying H2Oscore program that would give utility customers online monitoring, business discounts

Village of Grafton residents may soon be able to track their water use and be rewarded for water-conservation efforts by receiving discounts to local restaurants and other businesses.

The Public Works Board on Monday recommended the village consider purchasing H2Oscore, an online program developed by a start-up company that promotes water conservation and sustainability.

The firm was established in 2011 by McGee Young, a Marquette University professor who created the program with his students through an entrepreneurial fellowship. By using H2Oscore, utility customers can monitor their personal water consumption on a free account and compare it to other residents in their neighborhoods and the community at large.

In a report to the Works Board, Grafton Utility Director Tom Krueger said Young contacted the village about joining the program. Young proposed a fee of $3,000 but said the cost is negotiable and could be tiered based on reaching levels of customer subscribers, Krueger added.

The program is worth considering, Krueger said, in light of the village's water-conservation efforts and ongoing concerns with future municipal water sources.

Because the village has eliminated its longtime summer sprinkling credit, water bills at that time of the year will be higher for many customers, who should now "be highly interested and motivated to track and reduce water usage," Krueger said.

The village is also planning water-rate increases for 2014, which would be its first since 2009.

"The H2Oscore program would further empower customers to reduce water usage with incentives and thereby minimize the amount of water billing increase," Krueger said.

Conservation efforts such as those offered by H2Oscore could help postpone the need for the village to tap into Lake Michigan as an alternative water supply, according to Krueger. Using the lake will probably increase the cost of water service for customers by two to three times, he said.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the H2Oscore program is worth considering because of its long-term benefits and minimal cost. The company pays for program maintenance through advertising fees from participating businesses, he noted.

"Customers would not have to enter their specific address but still could get a sense of how their private water use is going," Hofland said. "They would be able to create their own user profile."

Krueger said H2Oscore launched a successful pilot program in the City of Whitewater and plans to expand throughout the state. The firm has introduced the program in Milwaukee and will begin operations in Madison this year.

Plans call for H2Oscore to build a base of registered users and contact businesses whose participation would include offering discounts on products and services, Krueger said.

In its recommendation, the Works Board urged the Village Board to authorize the utility staff to explore the H2Oscore proposal further and work out a draft agreement with the firm.

More information on the company is available at www.H2Oscore.com.