

Plan to help residents track their water use put on hold

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Cost concerns with using H2Oscore program prompt Works Board to table decision

A plan to allow Village of Grafton residents to track their water use online and be rewarded for water-conservation efforts has been put on hold.

Citing cost concerns, the Public Works Board on Monday tabled a plan to purchase H2Oscore, a software program developed by a Milwaukee start-up company that promotes water conservation and sustainability.

The board's decision came after it reviewed a recommendation from Utility Director Tom Krueger to enter an agreement to buy the program, which the H2Oscore firm offered for \$3,000. Although village officials initially believed the cost would be a one-time fee, Krueger told the board the company has since indicated the cost would be annual.

Krueger said he negotiated a tiered approach to the fee with McGee Young, a Marquette University professor who created the program with his students in 2011 through an entrepreneurial fellowship.

Krueger proposed paying \$1,500 to start the program, with the \$1,500 balance to be paid after one year or whenever the software-users base in Grafton grows to 10%, or about 440, of all residential customers.

Young also agreed to permanently fix the annual fee at \$3,000, Krueger said

Through H2Oscore, utility customers could monitor their personal water consumption on a free account and compare it to other residents in their neighborhoods and the community at large. According to Krueger, the program would be worthwhile because of the village's water-conservation efforts and ongoing concerns with future municipal water sources.

"This is a new arena for Grafton in terms of enhanced customer service and promotion of water conservation," Krueger said in a report to the board.

"The payoff or return on investment or program cost is not immediate but rather long-range in terms of delaying facilities' wear and tear and the need for water supply capacity expansion or later water regionalization."

After giving H2Oscore a favorable review in February, the board cooled to the idea Monday and asked Krueger to negotiate another payment plan with the company. Public Works Director Dave Murphy said members expressed concern about paying an annual fee without knowing how many customers would participate in the program or how large the community data base would be.

Murphy also noted that Village Administrator Darrell Hofland did not support participating in the

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program because it would require an annual fee rather than a one-time charge.

“There are too many unknowns at this time,” Murphy said.

Krueger said many utility customers should be motivated to track and reduce water usage because the village has eliminated its longtime summer sprinkling credit. During that time of the year, water bills are usually higher for many customers.

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

Plans call for the company to build a base of registered users and contact businesses whose participation would include offering discounts on products and services.

The Works Board is expected to consider possible changes in the H2Oscore proposal before making a recommendation to the Village Board on a possible agreement with the company.