



January 2024

Dear Valued Customer:

Happy New Year and thank you for the continuous opportunity to be of service to you. As we embark upon a new year and a new beginning, I would like to share a few updates about the City of Richmond Department of Public Utility's progress over the last 12 months as well as what's in store for 2024.

DPU remains committed to its core mission, which is to provide clean, safe drinking water along with sanitary sewer, stormwater management and the distribution of safe and reliable natural gas. For this reason, I start this year with thankfulness for the public servants that show up every day serving you and providing these critical services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Did you know that DPU received approximately 261,000 incoming calls in 2023 through the call center? This equates to nearly 24,000 per month and approximately 1,200 calls per day. Reducing the average hold time is another top priority for my office in early 2024. While several of the strategies discussed in this letter will aid in this effort, I would like to offer an update on a few key items.

Timely and Accurate Billing – Reducing Estimated Reads

In 2023, we were billing actual meter reads for approximately 85% of our water customers; this translated to an estimation rate of approximately 15%. Through concerted efforts and creative solutions, we have reduced the 15% estimated read rate to exceed industry standards as recommended by American Water Works Association (AWWA), which is plus or minus 3% estimation. To help maintain DPU's ability to provide timely and accurate readings, we encourage customers to keep the meter box free from debris or other forms of obstruction. To learn more about our long-term strategy for meter reading, please see the AMI initiative below.

Customer Inquiries and Escalations

While DPU received and was able to resolve nearly 200 escalations that came through the Councilmembers' staff this past year, we do ask for your continued patience and allow us from one to three billing cycles as we work toward continued progress in tackling our backlog. As a result of our ability to modify operating hours to address backlogs, DPU has been able to respond to approximately 20,000 customer inquiries related to emails, adjustments and ownership changes, amongst other customer concerns. This is exciting progress and I invite you to revisit the September 2023 customer letter for important details about our strategy.

Financial Assistance is Available:

In continued partnership with PromisePay, DPU is currently assisting nearly 10,000 residential and commercial customers with affordable, flexible and interest-free payment plans. More than 1,700 customers have completed plans, whereby they have paid off their PromisePay plan amount. When you establish a payment plan for past due charges, you will avoid late fees and collection activity, to include possible disconnection of services. Don't delay, contact PromisePay today at 804-626-5420 or richmond.promise-pay.com.



*September
customer
letter*

In closing, I would like to highlight three specific initiatives on our technology track that will help to further enhance the customer experience. Please stay tuned for updates in the months ahead.

1. **Customer Information System (CIS) Replacement Project**

The existing billing system requires replacement. A request for proposal (RFP) was released in August 2023 and the project team is making great progress with exploring solutions that will not only enhance the customer experience but add value to the journey. We anticipate going live with the new billing system by December 2025.

In the meantime, and in light of recent challenges with postal mail delivery, customers are encouraged to take advantage of electronic billing via E-Z PAY. This option allows for quick and convenient access to your utility bill and payment options. To start the process, scan the QR code or visit RVA.gov/public-utilities/billing (Select Online Bill Pay with E-Z PAY).



E-Z PAY
option

2. **Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) – Next Steps**

In 2002, DPU implemented Automated Meter Reading (AMR), which is a drive-by system used to collect reads for billing purposes. Technology has improved over the years and DPU is now preparing to move towards the next generation of AMR, which is AMI. Upgrading to an AMI system will allow DPU to be more efficient, responsive and customer focused through the use of real-time alerts and enhanced customer engagement. We are excited about the benefits of this new technology and the results it will deliver.

3. **CivicReady**

This is a routine and emergency notification/alert system that will allow DPU to communicate in real time about planned and unplanned utility work in neighborhoods and communities. As a customer, you will have the option of receiving alerts via email, SMS or landline. See the enclosed **Utility Talk** newsletter for more details.

I'm excited about what's in store for 2024. Please follow us on our social media accounts to learn more about the many upcoming programs, utility events and customer-focused initiatives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be of service to you.

Yours In Service,

April Bingham, MPA
Senior Director