

October 1, 2014 - Letter to the Editor - Benefits of water meters

The current assortment of opinions about water meters has me baffled. I presume it stems from the fact that North Bay is probably about 50 years behind the rest of Ontario in using meters to bill for the usage of water. Meters have been used for decades to bill for electricity usage and water is no different.

Those expressing opinions about water meters obviously have done little or no research into the subject. The issues being brought up have already been dealt with ages ago by 99% of other municipalities.

There are three main reasons which support the use of meters. One is that personal usage of water is paid for by the person that uses it. Two is that it encourages reduction in water usage and maintenance by individuals of their own systems. The third reason is that it allows municipalities to identify and pinpoint specific points in the network where water leakage is occurring, enabling them to find and fix problem areas.

The opinions against water meters being expressed in letters to the editor and on blogs, for the most part, are not based in reality and reflect a poor understanding of the situation.

Meters are not a cash grab as some have suggested. Meters provide a more sensible method of apportioning the cost of the water/waste water system to residents. The costs to run the system will continue to be an issue regardless of the method used to apportion that cost. Municipalities are mandated by the Province to recover only the costs of operating the water/waste water system. Therefore, the total amount of these costs will always be an issue regardless of the billing system. Are supply costs too high, are wages too high, is the system being run efficiently? These questions will be at issue just as they always are when any municipal budget is debated.

Water leakage on the homeowner's side of the meter is not the City's responsibility. It is also not the City's responsibility to inform residents of the need to correct water leakage as some have suggested. Responsible home owners have already repaired any leakage issues and those who have not will be encouraged to do so through the use of meters. Water leakage on the City's side of the meter will be paid for by the City. Instances of this occurring will hopefully decrease as problem areas are identified and repaired. Meters are read remotely so that errors are possible but rare and that issue is not a factor in any decisions regarding meters.

The only issue that ratepayers should make themselves aware of is the ratio of fixed to variable charges in the new water rates. Unless the variable rate is high enough to encourage users to pay attention to their usage, two of the main reasons for meters, payment for water used and reduction in wasteful use of water, will be defeated. If a 60% fixed rate has been suggested, it is totally out of touch with current practice and negates two of the main reasons for the installation of meters. Check the ratios in Sudbury, Ottawa, Guelph and Burlington for examples.

