



Subject: Virtual City Hall – Account Sign-up Incentive

To: Council

From: Corporate Services Department

Report Number: 2021-230

Meeting Date: December 13, 2021

Recommendation:

That Corporate Services Department Report 2021-230 be received as information.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the new Virtual City Hall platform that Customer Service is planning to make available in January 2022.

The City is committed to continuously enhancing the customer service experience and launching Virtual City Hall is one way customer service can meet the needs of residents. As technology advances, everyone can appreciate more and more people are choosing to manage monthly bills online. This added feature not only provides a convenient way to manage monthly City bills, but it also promotes an environmentally friendly alternative by allowing citizens to sign up for paperless billing.

Background:

Customer Service has received feedback that the method of payments currently received by City Hall are limited and the City does not offer a way for citizens to view and manage their City accounts 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Discussion:

Virtual City Hall is a cloud-based platform which will allow residents to create a secure and confidential online account to manage property tax bills, water and wastewater bills, and accounts receivable invoices.

This platform is used by several other municipalities in the Niagara Region. This new online system provides account holders the ability to make full or partial payments in one simple and centralized location. In addition, account holders can:

- sign-up for pre-authorized payments;
- manage monthly bills through their banking institution; and
- access property information provided to the City of Port Colborne by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), including searching for properties to view assessment and tax information.

Appendix A – 2022 Virtual City Hall Presentation provides additional information regarding this new program.

Financial Implications:

The estimated savings of a water/wastewater account receiving bills through Virtual City Hall as opposed to traditional mail is approximately \$12 per year. The estimated savings for the same delivery of a property tax account is approximately \$4 per year. In both calculations staff time is not included. The primary difference in saving is the frequency of invoicing.

The 2022 water and wastewater budget proposed a \$25 dollar incentive to sign up to only receive water/wastewater and property tax bills online. Financial Services identifies the “and property tax bills” is not necessarily clear in the water/wastewater budget documents.

For greater clarity, the credit will be earned as \$15 dollars for signing up for the water/wastewater program and \$10 for signing up for the property tax program. The \$15 cost will be funded from the water and wastewater budgets (split evenly between each budget) and the \$10 cost from the levy (property tax) budget. If an account holder only signs up for water/wastewater billing or property tax billing the account holder will only get the credit for that account.

Customer Service highlights that approximately 500 accounts currently receive invoices through email. These accounts will be moved to Virtual City Hall and Customer Service will be reaching out to assist account holders in establishing a username and password. Similar to the pre-authorized payment credit introduced last year, current account holders receiving invoices through email will receive the incentive credit(s) as outlined above.

Financial Services is planning to apply the incentive credits on the April, September, and December billings.

In the event of non-payment, a paper invoice will be sent after 3 months.

Public Engagement:

The City will notify citizens of the Virtual City Hall platform and the bill credit incentive via the following channels: social media, media release, mail inserts, website carousel, and public launch event at the City of Port Colborne Public Library.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Service and Simplicity - Quality and Innovative Delivery of Customer Service
 - Value: Financial Management to Achieve Financial Sustainability
 - People: Supporting and Investing in Human Capital
 - Governance: Communications, Engagement, and Decision-Making
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Conclusion:

Customer Service looks forward to providing the residents of the City of Port Colborne with this new platform.

Appendices:

- a. Appendix A – 2022 Virtual City Hall Presentation

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Wright
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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.