

Transcript

***On West Gray*, Episode 26: The Meter Infrastructure Program (MIP) w/Nathan Madenwald & Brien Kiser**

Runtime: 12 minutes

Tiffany Vrska 0:15

Music. What's up everybody? Welcome to On West Gray, the monthly podcast about all things local government in the city of Norman. I'm your host, Tiffany Vrska, Chief Communications Officer for the city of Norman, and we appreciate you joining us today. We have guests with us from the city of Norman utilities department and city of Norman contractor utilities. The Norman utilities authority has recently launched the meter Infrastructure Program, or MIP, which we'll be exploring more today, and which brings these two teams together. Gentlemen, welcome to the show.

Nathan Madenwald 0:47

Thank you. Yeah. Nathan manwald, Project Manager for the MIP project for city of Norman, happy to be here. And

Brien Kiser 0:54

I'm Brien, and I work for utilities, and I'm here to help you guys out in implementing the project.

Tiffany Vrska 0:59

Awesome. Well, we again, appreciate you all being with us and sharing some knowledge on what this project's all about today. So let's get into it. MIP. Nathan, can you tell us about MIP, what it is, how long it's been in the works? Yeah.

Nathan Madenwald 1:15

So the MIP project is our program where we're upgrading or replacing water meters. So that way we can have those meters provide information remotely, wirelessly, to to our system. So that way we can get accurate and timely bills. It's a project that we've had in the works since 2021 when we did our feasibility with E source determine it was the best pass forward for the city. And now we're here in 2024, we're about to get boots on the ground. We've spent a lot of time working on software and integration and making sure those things are working. And then utilities will get going here in the next few months, where they'll start slowly installing, and then they'll ramp up as we get a little bit further along,

Tiffany Vrska 1:55

all right? And we're talking about advanced meters, or smart meters. So how many are being upgraded or replaced as part of this project across Norman,

Nathan Madenwald 2:05

city of Norman, with our customers, we have about 42,000 water meters in the ground, and we'll be touching all of those 42,000

Tiffany Vrska 2:12

All right, so Brian, can you speak a little bit more to what advanced meters or smart meters are? Can you tell us about how they work.

Brien Kiser 2:21

Yeah, absolutely. So smart meters in order to understand that they do a lot. So let's talk about what they're not first. So currently, you have a large piece of metal in the ground, and those water meters are measuring water as it flows through by a dial, just like the old mechanical watches, the old mechanical clocks where you wind up and it calculates how much you're using, how much goes through it. That's the way that it's currently calculating. So meter readers have to come by every single month look inside that pit and read what's on the dial. The customer, the user, won't know how much they've used until the end of the month. So at the end of every single month, they'll get a bill and then realize whether it's high, whether it's low, or how much usage that they used. So the smart meters, they're digital, so they're capturing meters. They're capturing reads every single hour. So the customers are going to be able to see online the amount of water that they're using by hour, they'll be able to capture, identify those things that they may be able to turn off, or some things that are turned on. So let me give you an idea, an example, so a real life example. Last week, I was here helping out the city, so when I got home, I saw water that was running down my street, so obviously I looked quickly to try to determine what was going on. Was it my house? Was it the neighbor's house? I could easily see that this was coming from my house. I had continuous flow through my meters. After looking at that, after doing a little bit of research, I realized that my sprinkler system was broken, so I quickly walked out and started working on my sprinkler system. And that was my weekend. So that's how the smart meters work.

Tiffany Vrska 4:06

Sounds like a pretty fun weekend. I'm not gonna lie, fixing a sprinkler system, my goodness, so I'm glad that you got to the problem very quickly, which is what our customers will be able to do with this new upgrade. Um, so in regard to that new portal, when will that that is a facet of this project, this kind of long term project. So when will that part be ready? It's not quite ready on the front end. Is that correct?

Brien Kiser 4:33

Not ready on the front end. We want to give the customers a lot of data that they can look at. It's not useful to look at data that just started that they may not have a history of what they're looking at. So we're planning on implementing that sometime around March, between March and May of next year. Okay,

Tiffany Vrska 4:51

wonderful, and it'll be as simple as logging in, being able to see your water usage, being able to see. Your water bill standing at as far as money wise, will they be able to see anything else through that portal?

Brien Kiser 5:08

They'll be able to see alerts and alarms. For example, I had a leak, so I had an alert on my meter saying that I had a continual usage on my water bill. Gotcha.

Tiffany Vrska 5:18

So you logged in and there's an alert right there saying, Hey, your your meter has been continuously running. You might want to check this

Brien Kiser 5:26

out. You might want to check it out absolutely. Okay, awesome.

Tiffany Vrska 5:29

So there's, there's just so many benefits to this program. Nathan, What benefit do you think will be most noticeable to the customer? Do you think it's that, that alert feature? I

Nathan Madenwald 5:40

think it's that timely and accurate data that will allow them to get alerts to better understand if there's a problem with their system and how they're using water, so that way they can make decisions on how to address something, rather than getting something one month later after it's already occurred. Gotcha. And

Tiffany Vrska 5:55

this, you know, these smart meters will be new to Norman, but they're, quite common. And I think some other larger cities or cities applicable to Norman. So are these kind of the industry standard? Now, they've

Brien Kiser 6:08

been starting since around 2000 the early 2000s so I've been implementing these since the since the 2000s in my city, it has a water smart meter program that was implemented approximately two years ago.

Tiffany Vrska 6:22

All right? And it's so far so good, right? So

Brien Kiser 6:27

far it's going tremendous. We're getting a lot of good feedback from the customers. They enjoy it, and I enjoy it, awesome.

Tiffany Vrska 6:33

So how is this program being funded? Nathan, I understand, I believe we received a grant of sorts to kind of offset the long term costs for our customers.

Nathan Madenwald 6:43

Yeah, that's correct. So city council, we presented to them an application to apply through the Bureau of Reclamation for Water Smart grant. We were successful, and we're receiving \$2 million in grant funding. So that's stuff. Will have to do some requirements to meet their their needs, but we won't have to pay that back. So that's a benefit to our customers. The remainder of the project, we're doing with a fairly low interest loan from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board under their State Revolving Fund program. So \$50 million for that, we'll pay that back using revenues from water rates and charges.

Tiffany Vrska 7:13

Okay? And there has been a couple questions that came in as far as the meter readers that we have today. How are we kind of restructuring their division to ensure that nobody is losing their job during this upgrade?

Nathan Madenwald 7:29

Yeah, that's correct. So nobody is losing their job. We found a higher and better use for them in our line maintenance division, so they've actually got a higher, higher job class as part as a result of this project. And so we'll use them. At first. We're going to see how the program goes and see troubleshooting, understand how the meters work, and then as we can move them to different job functions as we see appropriate Okay,

Tiffany Vrska 7:51

and one more time, in case we mentioned it but I missed it. How long? What is the term of this program? When do we think that it'll be completed in full.

Nathan Madenwald 8:02

Yeah. So right now, we're kind of doing some of the soft stuff here, working in the background, where we're doing some of the softwares and integrations. But this month we're going to start seeing them slowly roll into some installation so people will start seeing boots on the ground. We're going to do that through the rest of this year, and then when we get past kind of the winter where we have some of that worse weather, then they're going to really get going on installations. We see that going out through pretty much all of 2025 and wrapping up close to the end of the year,

Tiffany Vrska 8:29

wonderful. And we have already sent communications to all of our utility customers, right? So they should have gotten a letter in the mail, kind of outlining and what this will look like. So can you speak to what the installation process will be like for folks, sure?

Brien Kiser 8:47

So a few weeks before the installation, we'll be sending out a postcard, so the customer will know that we're coming through their area. So the installation process is we work in teams, small teams, and we work through different areas of the city, so we work together. And as Nathan said, we'll be building up to a speed of about 1000 meters per week at some point, probably next year, we're going to start off slow, make sure the process goes well. There's no need for anybody to be at home. So we'll be exchanging the meters. It takes approximately 30 minutes. There will be a slight outage. During that time, there are going to be a slight interruption of the water usage, probably for about 15 minutes.

We're going to turn the waters back on. Once we're complete, we're going to leave a door hanger on the customer's door so that they know that we've been there. Now I recommend, after we've exchanged the meter, to turn the water on, run the water through the line. Sometimes a little bit of air can get in the lines, and you might hear popping as you as you turn on the water for the first time, so it helps clear out that line and make sure that it's running smoothly.

Tiffany Vrska 9:51

Awesome. And all of that is outlined. We touch on it in the letter that initial communication to everybody, and then the postcards that you. Referenced that'll be going per neighborhood, as your guys are rolling through certain areas of town that will be forthcoming as well. And so folks should have lots of good information on paper as far as what to do, including those door hangers that'll be left so very important to us that we have those open lines of communication with our customers during this process. Well, is there anything else, gentlemen, that we would like to add make sure that folks know about regarding MIP, just

Nathan Madenwald 10:29

that if they want to get a little bit more information, we have stuff available on our website at Norman, okay.gov, forward slash MIP. There's some frequently asked questions there, so if people want to go through those, and if they're not able to get those solved, then there's contact information there, or they can send an email to Norman MIP at Norman ok.gov,

Tiffany Vrska 10:50

awesome. And we will be those frequently asked questions as more questions come in. And we work through this process, it's a working document, so we can add on to that, to again, make sure that everybody knows what's going on. Nathan Bryant, thanks for being with us today.

Brien Kiser 11:05

Thank you, Tiffany.

Nathan Madenwald 11:06

I appreciate it. Thank you so much for having us.

Tiffany Vrska 11:08

We're looking forward to following the progress of MIP, and we'll kindly remind all community members to visit NormanOK.gov/MIP to see updates or get more information questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent into PublicAffairs@NormanOK.gov. Shouts to our producer and editor, Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office until next time, stay engaged, stay informed, and always remember to cast your ballot. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thank you for Joining us On West Gray. You

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>