

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**  
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

|                      |  |   |                                 |
|----------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>AGENDA TITLE:</b> | Discussion of Seattle City Light Billing Concerns – Sponsored by Councilmembers McGlashan and Scully |   |                                 |
| <b>DEPARTMENT:</b>   | City Manager's Office  |   |                                 |
| <b>PRESENTED BY:</b> | John Norris, Assistant City Manager  |   |                                 |
| <b>ACTION:</b>       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance   | <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution     | <input type="checkbox"/> Motion |
|                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion   | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing |                                 |

**PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT**

Councilmembers McGlashan and Scully requested that staff reach out to Seattle City Light to request that they present information and answer questions from the Council regarding billing concerns that they are hearing from community members. Specifically, concerns have been vocalized that electric bills received by some Shoreline residents have been hundreds of dollars higher than bills received historically. Staff has had some preliminary discussions with Seattle City Light staff, and their staff has explained that some of these issues may be due to the implementation of a new billing system that was installed at the end of 2017. Other issues may also be driving some of these concerns.

Tonight, Council will be joined by Kelly Enright, Director of Customer Care, to help provide more information about some of the concerns that Council is hearing and support the utility can provide Shoreline ratepayers.

**RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There is no financial impact for this item.

**RECOMMENDATION**

No action is required tonight. Staff recommends that Council ask questions of Seattle City Light staff regarding billing concerns that they are hearing from community members.

Approved By:            City Manager **DT**    City Attorney **MK**

## **BACKGROUND**

Councilmembers McGlashan and Scully requested that staff reach out to Seattle City Light to request that they present information and answer questions from the Council regarding billing concerns that they are hearing from community members. Specifically, concerns have been vocalized that electric bills received by some Shoreline residents have been hundreds of dollars higher than bills received historically. Staff has had some preliminary discussions with Seattle City Light staff, and their staff has explained that some of these issues may be due to the implementation of a new billing system that was installed at the end of 2017. Other issues may also be driving some of these concerns.

Councilmembers have also heard from some community members that they feel the new advanced (or smart) electric meters installed by Seattle City Light in the first quarter of 2018 may also be causing some of these billing issues. Seattle City Light staff can also provide Council an update on the implementation of smart meters in Shoreline and whether or not they may be causing any billing issues.

## **DISCUSSION**

Tonight, Council will be joined by Kelly Enright, Director of Customer Care, to help provide background on the billing system transition, more information about some of the concerns that Council is hearing and support the utility can provide Shoreline ratepayers. Ms. Enright will share the information contained in the presentation that is attached to this staff report as Attachment A. Ms. Enright will also provide information on how many Shoreline residents may have had billing issues or other concerns that have been addressed by City Light.

## **RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There is no financial impact for this item.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

No action is required tonight. Staff recommends that Council ask questions of Seattle City Light staff regarding billing concerns that they are hearing from community members.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Seattle City Light – Shoreline City Council Presentation



Seattle City Light

Attachment A

# CUSTOMER BILLING ISSUES/CONCERNS

City of Shoreline City Council Meeting

June 25, 2018

# INTRODUCTION

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- Background
- Account Services
- Billing Backlog
- Mitigation Efforts
- Advanced Meter updates

# CUSTOMER RESPONSE OVERVIEW

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- City Light contracts with Seattle Public Utilities to handle incoming calls for:
  - billing issues
  - payment plans
  - sets up and closes accounts
  - outage response
- City Light responsible for
  - back office
  - credit and collections
  - streetlight response
  - meter reading



# ACCOUNT SERVICES

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- Responsible for account management for all 450,000+ customers including:
  - Validation
    - 2.9 million bills produced in 2017
    - Process 10k to 13k reads daily
  - New Accounts and Meter Sets
    - 8000 moves a month on average
    - Increase in short term moves
  - Cash/service management
    - (refunds, Green Up, rate changes etc.)
    - Utility Credit refunds on behalf of Seattle Public Utilities

# SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN LAST THREE YEARS

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- Completely new billing system (Fall 2016)
  - Employees still acclimating
  - Some business processes are more complicated
  - Every account must have current read validated
- Unprecedented Construction/new account growth
  - 7400 construction requests in 2017
  - More than 26,000 meters added
- Net (solar) metering customers grew from 700 to 3,300 – more complex billing and state incentive payments.
- Efforts to increase participation in Utility Discount Program enrollment resulted going from 14,000 to over 33,000.
- Advanced Metering deployment commenced in October 2016.

# BACKLOG DRIVERS

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- Customer Self-Service Portal originally scheduled to be available by March 2017
  - IT requirements
- Staffing level of 48 FTE has not changed in (10) years.
- Limitations around use of temporary staff and overall hiring process.
- Volume of work exceeds work force capacity during technology transition.
- Loss of key senior leaders with significant experience creating more expedites and escalations.
- Account setup volume is always high in early winter due to peaks in returning student population in the Fall.

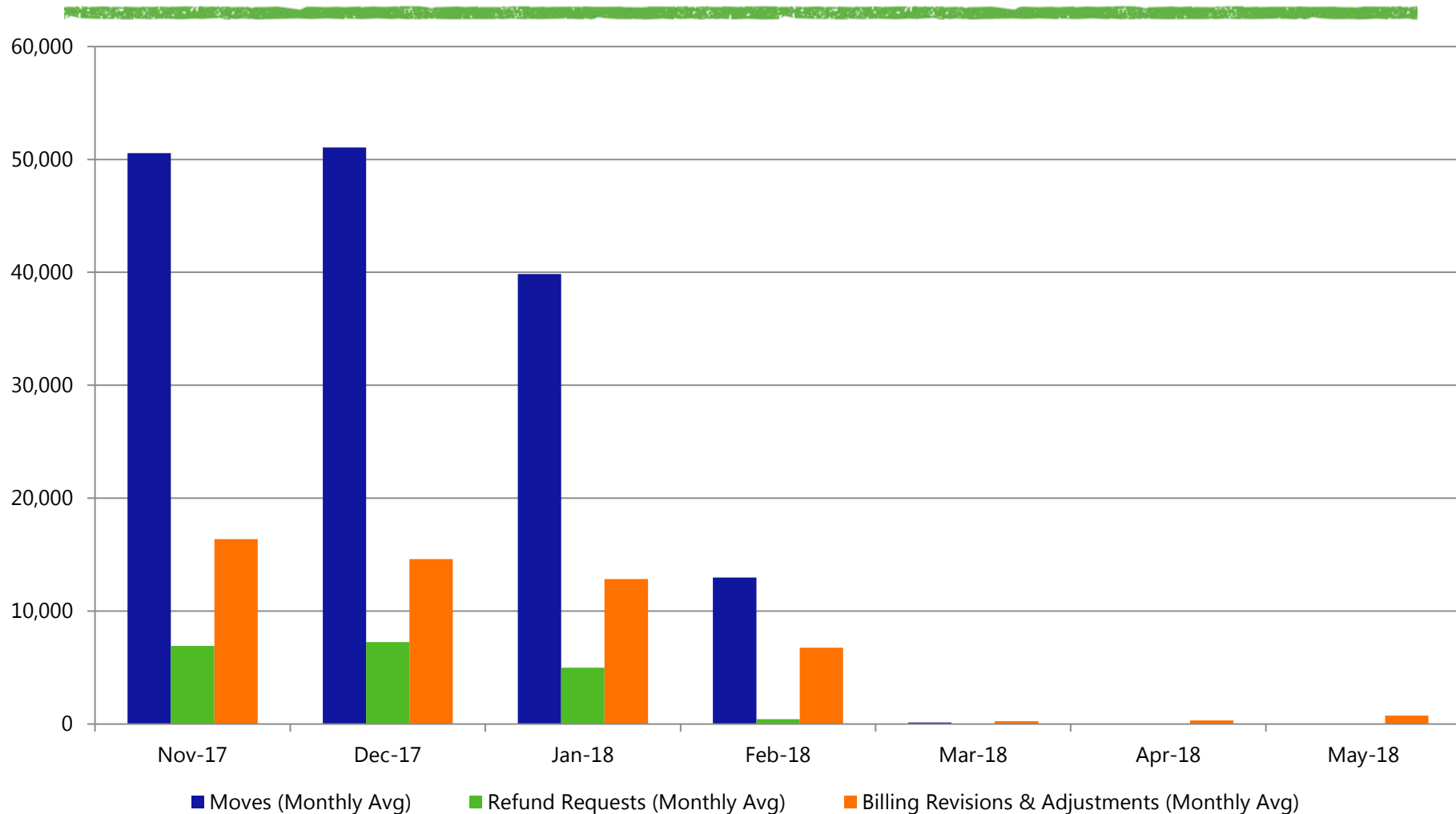


# GETTING BACK ON TRACK

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- Extra Resources
  - 7 Temporary employees/Advanced Metering Team
  - Contact Center provided support on Saturdays
  - Many Customer Care employees worked 6 or 7 days a week
- Disconnection notices suspended and collections team re-deployed.
- Reads from Advanced Metering being used where manual meter reads are not available.
- Key backlog (moves, refunds and billing exceptions) reduced to target performance of 10 business days by early March.

# CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS BACKLOG PROGRESS



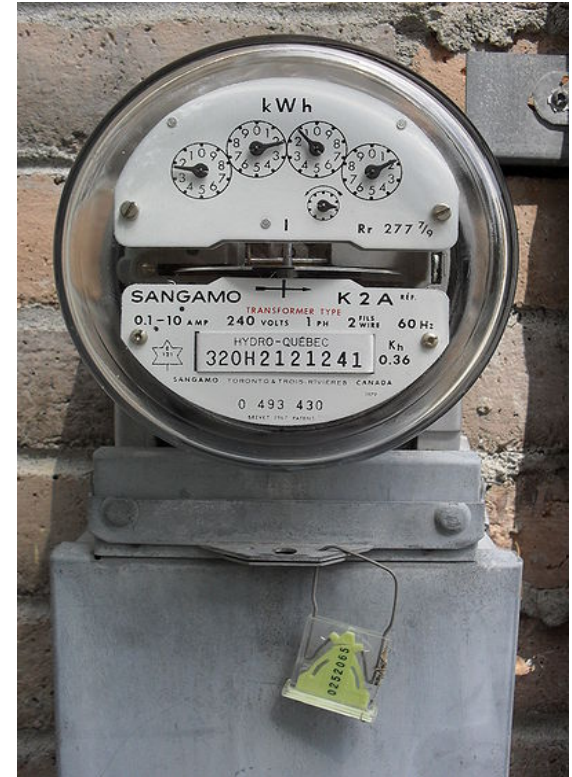
# CUSTOMER FACTS AT A GLANCE FROM SHORELINE

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- In the previous 12 months there have been 364 escalated contacts:
  - billing issues 102
  - payment related including arrangements 21
  - sets up and closes accounts 127
  - outage/power 46
  - Meter Reading and Meters (including AMI) 16
  - other 52
- Customers who have opted out of AMI 169
  - average residential bill is \$205.83 vs \$188.40 in 2017
  - Too soon to determine if AMI has had a billing impact

# WHY ADVANCED METERING?

- Metering is a core function for every utility.
- The current electro-mechanical meters are obsolete and out of production.
- As meters age, we lose revenue by under-measuring usage.
- The majority of the complaints SCL receives were and continue to be billing related.
- Meter reading at the premise has high labor costs, employee safety risks, and does not support our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint.

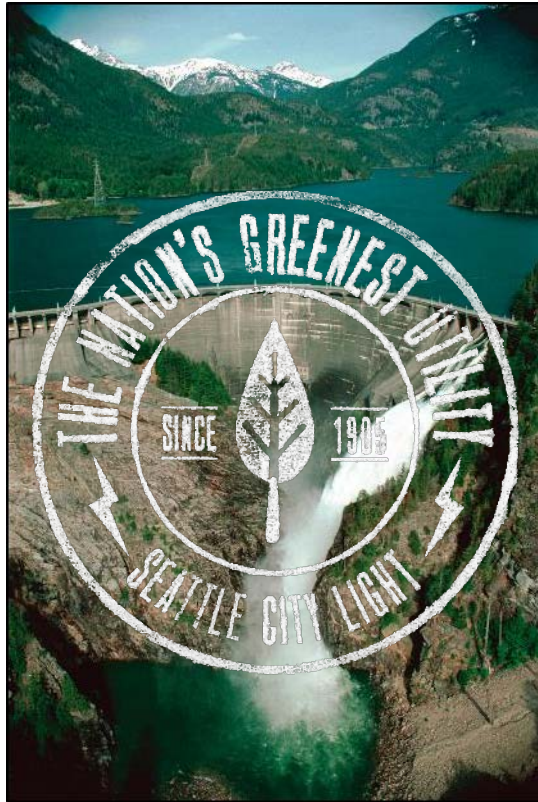


# PROGRAM STATUS

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- Meter Installations
  - Approximately 230,000 meters installed
  - 842 Customers have Opted-Out (0.4%)
- AMI Network Integration with billing system completed in May.
- Privacy Impact Assessment completed and available on the City of Seattle's Privacy Program Website.
- Mass Deployment of Meters began on August 5, 2017. On track to complete deployment by Q4 2018.
- Many of Shoreline's Meters were exchanged earlier this year but will need to go back to the ones where the meter type was not available.

# ADVANCED METERS OFFER MANY BENEFITS TO BOTH THE CUSTOMER AND THE UTILITY



## Customer Benefits

- Accurate and timely billing
- Empower customers to make energy-saving choices
- Improved outage response
- Service enhancements

## Utility Benefits

- Improved Safety
- Improved Load Forecasting
- Operational Efficiencies



# FUTURE PROJECTIONS

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- Because of the billing system integration with Advanced metering system that occurred in late May.
  - Every meter, every day reading
  - Eliminates the need for validation staff to verify every read
- Customer Self Service Portal will auto populate move in/move out application into billing system.
- Other billing system automations for refund and validation processes that will reduce manual entries.

# OUR COMMITMENT

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- If any customer has a concern about their bills please contact us at [www.seattle.gov/light](http://www.seattle.gov/light) and select the Contact US Box.
- Customers may also call 206/684-3000 to speak with a live agent.
- City Light will provide energy audits and/or extended payment plans if a billing issue is significant.



## OUR VISION

To set the standard—to deliver the best customer service experience of any utility in the nation.

## OUR MISSION

Seattle City Light is dedicated to exceeding our customers' expectations in producing and delivering environmentally responsible, safe, low-cost and reliable power.

## OUR VALUES

Excellence, Accountability, Trust and Stewardship.

