



NEWS RELEASE

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New Software to Provide Better Service

Later this month, Culpeper town employees will begin intensive training on new software that officials say will improve customer service and allow payment options online previously unavailable to utility customers and taxpayers.

“It will allow us to work more efficiently,” said Culpeper Town Treasurer Ron Mabry.

The new software places many administrative, billing and payment functions under one umbrella instead of different software programs used in the past.

The software will combine some of the following functions to streamline operations:

- Accounts payable and receivable
- Utility billing
- Budgeting
- Purchase orders
- Human resources functions
- Payroll

Much like a household budget, the software also will allow the town to more quickly keep tabs on its expenses and revenue and assist in creation of new budgets.

But above all, the software program will be more user-friendly for both the customer service representatives in the treasurer’s office and customers. Town officials expect to go-live with new software in time for tax season. When new real estate and personal property tax bills are mailed the first week in December, Mabry wants people to be able

to avoid long lines at the office and have the ability to pay online from home, if they choose to do so.

A posting on the town's Web site will link taxpayers who want to pay online.

"We want to make it easier for the citizens when they click that link," said Mabry. "You can do it in the middle of the night."

However, there will be a convenience fee added to the bill for that service, he said. The amount of that fee will be clearly listed before the customer submits the payment. Also during the process, there will be repeated reminders about the additional fee charged for online payment.

A recurring direct debit program currently available, but largely unused, allows for direct payment of utility bills from checking accounts. The new program will still allow that payment method.

Another facet of the software will allow it to integrate with the automatic electric and water meter reading project. Instead of relying on meter readers reading each individual meter and entering the data in a handheld device, the new system will allow for real-time readings and also assist in scheduling disconnections and reconnections in a more efficient way.

Beginning Oct. 19, employees in the treasurer's office, and select employees from the Public Works and Water departments will undergo a weeklong intensive training session on the new software.

Due to the nature and intensity of the training, the treasurer's office will close to the public all day on Wednesday, Oct. 21. Ads will be placed in newspapers, signs posted on the doors of Town Hall and a message posted on the town's Web site. Customers will still be able to make payments through the drop box located outside Town Hall. Mabry said that day was selected since no bills are due on that date and no disconnections or reconnections are scheduled. He hopes the one-day closure causes few disruptions for customers.

When totally implemented, the new software package, which is budgeted at \$165,300, will provide customers and the town greater opportunity to streamline many financial functions.

"Much of this transition will be invisible to the average citizen, but it will lead to greater efficiency and improve customer service and that is what we want," said Mabry.

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