

The Washington Post

PRINCE WILLIAM EXTRA! SUNDAY, MAY 18, 2008

Manassas, Residents to Monitor Water, Electric Usage Remotely \$5 Million Project To Cut Consumption

By [Jennifer Buske](#)
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, May 18, 2008; Page PW03

A simple click of a mouse might soon be all it takes for Manassas residents to turn their home into a more environmentally friendly place.

Manassas is launching a "smart grid" project that will allow residents to continuously monitor their water and electric usage, with the goal of reducing consumption, utilities director Michael C. Moon said.

The City Council recently approved the project, which has an upfront cost of \$5 million, as part of the 2009-14 Capital Improvement Plan. Once completed, the project is estimated to save the city more than \$1 million annually, Moon said.

"The city had to come up with a strategic plan to address load conservation," Moon said. "We want people to get excited because we think what we are doing is the right thing to do and is where localities will be heading in the future."

Over the next two years, Manassas will be moving to advanced metering infrastructure, said Gregg Paulson, an assistant director in the Utility Department. The system will allow the department and customers to read water and electric meters remotely on a continuous basis, Paulson said. "Collector" boxes throughout the city will send a signal to the 15,000 electric and 12,500 water meters in Manassas. All the data are sent to a server that residents and city officials can view online.

"This will allow us to not have to send people out to read meters," Paulson said. "We can also remotely connect or disconnect meters and detect leaks with this, things we can't do now."

Traditionally, meters are read monthly when three technicians visit city neighborhoods. Two other technicians are deployed to connect and disconnect meters.

The idea behind the system is that if residents are able to monitor their water and electric usage, they will be more likely to conserve, Moon said. Manassas will also set a usage-rate schedule, which Moon said the city hopes will deter people from using large amounts of water and electricity during peak times.

"Not only will we be able to read with less manpower, but it's attractive because it will keep utility costs low," Moon said.

He said residents will be able to access the Web site's data for a fee, about \$1 to \$4 a month. Residents can get free access if they subscribe to the city's Internet service or join the new Demand Response Program. That program takes the meter system one step further by allowing city officials to put a device on home water heaters and systems for heating, ventilating and air conditioning to allow residents and city officials to control and monitor those devices remotely, Moon said.

Paulson said once the program is complete, it will save the city \$250,000 in operating costs, \$500,000 in water and nearly \$1 million in electricity annually.

The system could help residents reduce overall demand by 10 to 20 percent, depending on how involved in the program people get, Moon said.

"Manassas is out in front in Virginia on this," Moon said. "Some municipalities are sitting back to see what happens. But Manassas is committed, and it's the right choice to do right now."

Dominion Virginia Power spokesman Dan Genest said that none of its customers uses the meter system but that the utility will be launching a similar "critical peak pricing" program in 1,000 households this summer.

[Baltimore Gas and Electric](#) and Pepco recently initiated similar pilot programs in Maryland and the District. Pepco spokesman [Robert Dobkin](#) said the company, which serves 750,000 homes in the District and [Prince George's](#) and Montgomery counties, is partnering with others and installing 1,500 meters to run the test program.

"It's too early to get results," Dobkin said. "But it's intended to help customers better manage their energy use and their bills, in turn helping the environment. It benefits our company as well because we can better monitor the system."

"We are very excited," Moon said. "It provides people with a conservation method, and, as we do this, we will reduce our demand and our carbon footprint as a city."

Inform the Utility – Empower the Customer