

TO: Sebastopol City Councilmembers

Mayor Neysa Hinton, Vice Mayor Diana Rich, Sandra Maurer, Jill McLewis, and Stephen Zollman

FROM: Patricia Dines

DATE: June 26, 2023

**RE: June 27, 2023 City Council Meeting/Budget — Idea for saving thousands of dollars during this budget conversation**

Dear City Councilmembers —

I have an idea that I think could save the City many thousands of dollars during this budget conversation. **It could help you avoid cuts to other essential programs!**

**I've recently learned that City staff is planning to start having water bills mailed monthly** — once the smart water meters are fully installed, which is expected to be later this year. (Right now, the water bills are mailed bi-monthly, with bills being calculated and sent to half the town each month.)

**I found this plan surprising, in light of the City's budget crisis. It seems to me that this would double the printing and postage costs for the water bills. How much would that increase costs? \$5,000? \$10,000?**

**I asked Administrative Services Director Ana Kwong if any financial analysis or “pros and cons” evaluation had been done of this change, and she didn't have that information available.** She said that maybe something was somewhere in the 2021 discussion about installing the smart water meters. She also said that the reason for this change was to provide residents with more frequent information on their water usage.

**But, in the light of your current budget challenges, I think it's reasonable to ask --**

- Can't smart meters offer that kind of information, for those who want it?
- Is this information really worth the many thousands of dollars it will cost? Is that really a fiscal priority now?

**It seems that this change and cost increase should be reconsidered in this current public budget conversation.**

**And it seems prudent to at least require that the Council be provided with an official cost estimate, and a cost/benefit analysis, and that this plan require their overt approval before it proceeds.**

I hope that this information is helpful to your budget evaluation process.

Best regards -

*Patricia Dines*  
*Sebastopol, CA*