City of Santa Barbara
Public Works Department

Memorandum

DATE: July 18, 2024

TO: Water Commission

VIA: Joshua Haggmark, Water Resources Manager

FROM: Dakota Corey, Water Supply and Services Manager

SUBJECT: Daupler Dispatch Services Pilot Project

An essential element of operating a 24/7 water and wastewater utility is being able to efficiently and effectively dispatch staff resources in response to customer needs and emergencies. This supports one of the Water Resources Division's core values of building trust and high regard with the community.

We are excited to share a new initiative designed to enhance our customer dispatch services. The Water Resources Customer Service Steering Committee has explored options to streamline our call-handling and dispatch process. To further evaluate the feasibility of these options, the Water Resources team is embarking on a one-year pilot, intended to test if a new call service integrated with the Water Resources response management system can improve customer service and allow for better tracking of customer calls while reducing operating costs.

Background

Our daytime dispatch center (known internally as Control 10) answers approximately 1,800 calls for Water Resources related service per year between 7:00 AM and 3:00 PM on weekdays. A typical call for service averages about 20 minutes to take down the call information and deploy the appropriate resources. Call volume during natural disasters increase dramatically depending on the severity of the event (i.e. wind or rain events, flooding, wildfires, etc.). Currently, Control 10 also receive calls for other City services (tree limbs down, bee hives, human feces cleanup, traffic control for major car accidents, etc.) that contribute to additional calls (280 calls in Calendar Year 2023 or 15%) that were not related to Water Resources.

After-hours dispatch services (3:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. on weekdays and 24 hours per day on weekends) (known internally as Control 14) account for an additional 1,000 calls per year. These calls are currently answered and dispatched by Echo Communications (Echo). When Echo receives calls, incident details are dispatched to the water operator on duty (Emergency Service Worker (ESW) who will acknowledge the call and respond accordingly.

In 2019, Water Resources initiated the use of limited features of the Daupler Response Management System (Daupler) to assist with the efficient deployment of operators for water resources related incidents and emergencies after-hours and on weekends. Daupler has become the primary reporting tool for recordkeeping of each incident, from dispatch to resolution, and modernizing the recordkeeping process from hardcopy logs. When Daupler is populated by a dispatcher it immediately notifies the ESW. The ESW can then investigate the emergency and if warranted, initiate a request for additional support (operators on stand-by) through Daupler (i.e. water main break). Daupler has proven to be very effective and efficient in helping to coordinate staff resources in response to an emergency.

Daupler Platform

The Daupler platform contains a suite of features to communicate, track, and manage responses to emergencies across several industries, including utility providers. Some of the features and services are:

- Nation-wide answering services - Daupler is utilized by 150+ utilities across the United States, including 11 in California.
- Quick response time to calls – Connect with callers in less than 3 rings (approx. 10 seconds).
- Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology reduces the time and improves the quality of customer interactions to get key information for efficient and timely response.
- Daupler's technology eliminates the need for any City staff dispatcher, reducing City labor costs and callout times.
- Call centers are not located locally, which is a benefit during a local emergency when local communication equipment might be overwhelmed.

Pilot Project

Water Resources is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the high level of customer service that is currently being provided to and expected by our customers. In light of the success with a Daupler, beginning in Fiscal Year 2025, Water Resources will expand its evaluation of Daupler by conducting a one-year Pilot Project (Pilot) to utilize them for managing daytime calls, dispatch to appropriate workgroups, and enter incidents into the Daupler platform. The Pilot aims to improve our efficiency and response times from the initial call to the resolution of the issue and document the effectiveness of the response.

The Pilot fundamentally changes how we interact with our customers who call the Water Resources Division during the daytime; instead of speaking with City Staff, Daupler's call service staff will receive the call, enter the details, and initiate the response digitally. To ensure the one-year Pilot meets the objectives of the study while supporting customer service, City staff will maintain continuous communication and a collaborative working relationship with Daupler throughout the Pilot. Throughout the Pilot, we will be assessing the performance of the pilot by evaluating the following criteria:

- **Customer Satisfaction Survey:** Conduct follow-up intermittent surveys of customers to assess if their experience aligned with our goals of building trust and high regard.

- **Enhanced Efficiency:** Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of using Daupler call-centers to distribute calls to workgroups and departments.

- **24/7 Incident Report Platform Management:** Regularly review the incident reports to confirm sufficient details are being gathered for our operators to efficiently respond to the incident and the reporting caller.

- **Streamlining Customer Service:** Evaluate the time needed to receive and make initial contact with the reporting caller.

Additional Benefits to Water Resources Efficiency

The Pilot will also serve to improve the day-time chain of communication and response procedures across the City. Currently, the public are accustomed to Control 10 acting as the central point of contact for reporting issues and non-life-threatening emergencies. Water Resources sees value in expanding the types of issues Daupler is managing and seeking to implement Daupler as a tool that can benefit all workgroups and departments within the City that provide incident response services. While we anticipate the Daupler day-time dispatch pilot will have minor impacts to other City departments, it will require some upfront coordination and ongoing support. All workgroups and departments currently receiving support from Control 10 will need to provide a primary point of contact for initial incident dispatching. Workgroups will also provide a staff phone listing, allowing for the incident to be escalated if the response is not in a timely manner, both can be incorporated into the Pilot. We anticipate the Pilot will have a soft and slow rollout in the beginning.

The City recently rolled out a Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) platform, called SB Connect. This platform was developed to help streamline non-emergency requests for service and provide an opportunity for customers to provide feedback on services. As part of the Pilot we hope to explore having Daupler monitor CRM requests to expedite response times.

Financial Impacts

Staff negotiated a cost of $74,500, which includes the current $35,000 for the after-hours dispatch incident reporting platform. The new daytime dispatch service will add $39,500 to our existing contract, to implement the daytime dispatch services. Sufficient funding is available in the Water Operating Fund to cover the costs of the software during the Pilot, and a vacant Operations Assistant position is being held open creating an additional savings pending the outcome of the Pilot.

Upon completion of the one-year Pilot, staff will return to the Water Commission with the findings and recommendations.