



# Pipeline Express

Providing reliable, quality water and services at a reasonable cost.

## Exciting News! SPRWS Launches Social Media Sites

By Josh Cobb

Saint Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) is thrilled to announce the launch of our brand-new Facebook and Instagram platforms, alongside a revitalized presence on LinkedIn. These exciting changes mark a significant step forward in our commitment to transparency, community engagement, and keeping our customers informed in real time.

Our social media presence is expanding to better serve the 450,000 people who rely on us every day for clean, reliable, and affordable water.

### Here's what you can expect to see:

- **Community Engagement Events:** Get the latest on events featuring our beloved mascot, Water Willy, our Water Wagon, and other outreach initiatives.
- **Lead-Free SPRWS Outreach:** Learn more about our efforts to replace lead service lines and ensure safe water for everyone.
- **Online Bill Pay Portal:** Updates and tips for using our new, convenient online bill payment system.

- **Major Investments at McCarrons Treatment Facility:** Updates on improvements and innovations that ensure top-tier water quality.
- **Real-Time Updates:** Stay informed about everything from infrastructure improvements to emergency notifications and community news.
- **Engaging Posts:** Fun graphics and posts about holidays, water and sustainability-related holidays, and fun facts about our utility!

Our new Facebook page, "Saint Paul Regional Water Services - SPRWS," and Instagram account, @stpaulregionalwater, went live in January, and we are excited to connect with you! Whether you're a resident, a business, or just a fan of clean water, these platforms will make it easier than ever to stay in the loop and engage with us.

We're doubling down on our efforts to build strong community connections, share the incredible work of our nearly 300 employees, and ensure you're always informed about what's happening at SPRWS.



### How You Can Help

- **Like and Follow Us:** Visit us on Facebook and Instagram, and don't forget to check out our refreshed LinkedIn account.
- **Spread the Word:** Share our pages with your friends, family, and networks to help us reach even more of our community.

Together, we can make 2025 a year of transparency, innovation, and stronger connections. Tap into the conversation today!

# Shut-offs suspended indefinitely: Certifying Unpaid Charges to Property Taxes

By Rich Rowland and Derek Olson

On January 14, the Board of Water Commissioners (Board) voted in favor to suspend the shut off process indefinitely for delinquent accounts.

The recommendation to suspend the shut off process for delinquent accounts was based on a cost benefit analysis of both the shut off process and the tax certification process where the tax certification process was found to be the most cost-effective process to collect delinquent water bills. In addition, the Board wished to adopt measures that value the well-being of its customers where the social and health impacts of the shut off process on vulnerable populations including children, elderly individuals and low-income households did not align with our commitment to provide reliable, quality water and services to all our customers.

To align with the change of policy, the Customer Service Department concluded 2024 with a critical financial task: certifying unpaid water charges to property taxes. This annual process plays a vital role in ensuring the financial stability of the water utility by recovering overdue funds, all while maintaining service continuity for customers.

Certification totals for 2024 for unpaid water charges in Ramsey



County, which encompasses Saint Paul, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, and Maplewood totaled \$3,830,349 and were certified to the property taxes of 5,504 homeowners.

Certification totals for 2024 for unpaid water charges in Dakota County, which encompasses West Saint Paul and Mendota Heights totaled \$313,788 and were certified to the property taxes of 424 homeowners.

Although the certification process is a highly effective method to ensure overdue funds are recovered, it is in the customers' and utility's best interests to avoid delinquency in the first place.

To address the increasing certification rate, SPRWS increased funding to the WaterWorks Program for year 2025. With the additional funding, customers experiencing an economic hardship can receive assistance in paying their water bills to help prevent disadvantaged customers from additional fees and fines that are related to the tax certification process.

## MICHAEL TWU JOINS SPRWS STAFF

Please join us in welcoming Michael as the new assistant business division manager!



By Sandy Kimbrough

We're excited to welcome Michael Twu, our new finance manager and assistant business division manager.

Michael brings over 19 years of leadership experience in higher education and the nonprofit sector. Most recently, he served as the administrative director at the University of Minnesota Law School, where he managed finance and administration for the Law Library, overseeing budgeting, financial planning, and operations.

Before his time in higher education, Michael spent 13+ years in the nonprofit sector, honing his expertise in financial management and mission-driven leadership.

Outside of work, Michael is a big sports fan and stays active through football, weight training, squash, and golf. Be sure to say hello and welcome him to the team!



**\$4,143,637 was certified to taxes in 2024.**



# Water Code Changes: Rules Updated

By Dennis Rosemark

The utility follows a set of rules called the Code of Ordinances of the City of Saint Paul, Part II, Legislative Code Title XI Water Utility, chapters 85 -104. That mouthful of a document governs how we do business. Keeping that document up to date and reflective of our current business practices is essential to doing good business and making sure contractors, customers, and the utility follow our processed and procedures.

However, we found in reviewing the document that there were new business processes that needed to be updated along with language. Beginning in 2019, then engineering lead, Dave Wagner, encouraged staff to do a comprehensive review of the code. Referred to as the Code Change Project, it forged ahead through personnel changes, including general managers Steve Schneider, Pat Shea, and now Racquel Vaske. The changes did not discourage our highly professional stalwart staff, who continued to refine the code to meet today's business practices.

Brent Marsolek, Tom Zangs, Joe Tronson, Rich Hibbard, and Rich Rowland are examples of this staff.

They got the code change project started, navigated it with leadership, found subject matter experts inside and outside of the department, and stayed at the table until they were comfortable with the drafts. They wanted to get it right.

On September 10, 2024, the code changes were presented to the Board of Water Commissioners as a discussion item. Staff looked for any comments and questions from the Board to best prepare the code changes for final approval and received positive comments from the Board.

The code changes include:

- Making the code a friendlier document for not only our staff, but for our customers. Most critical to the project was removing the fees and charges from ordinance and placing them in a resolution. This effort considered radical by some, puts numbers at the finger-tips of the reader.
- Expanding the language of the backflow preventer and outside watering restriction programs for efficiency and compliance.

Water runs a lean operation and will cut the red tape where it can.

- Consolidating and updating the topic of meters to allow our staff to access property to update the meter transmitters. This updating has been sparked by new meter technology.
- Updating gender-neutral titles, referencing the applicable state codes, and clarifying existing procedures.

On January 14, 2025, with the recommendation to approve the project and the final edits to the code in place, with the leadership of Vaske, Dennis Rosemark again presented the project to the Board. The presentation was concise, the staff were positioned to answer any questions, and the Board approved all of the code changes.

These changes move to the Saint Paul City Council for three readings and one public hearing, the new language will then be effective 30 days after City Council approval. Going forward, staff intends to continue work with department leadership to review and update the code.

## Flex Account Alert! Submit Your FSA Claims by Feb. 14

Make sure you get reimbursed for all of the money you put into your 2024 flexible spending account.

You will lose money remaining in your 2024 FSA account you have not claimed by Feb. 14. Flexible spending accounts can be for medical expenses, dependent care, and parking.

If you have an FSA or VEBA/HRA account, you should have received an

email, mailing, or handout from BRI (Benefit Resource, Inc.) or the city on their behalf providing you with instructions on how to check on the balances in your account with them.

If you have not used the site before, go to [www.benefitresource.com](http://www.benefitresource.com) and log in then choose employee and click on the register an account link. Follow the instructions. You will need your social security number, company code

(StPaul), name, zip code, and email or phone number.

Use the site to look up balances and file for reimbursement for 2024 claims.

If you have questions or need assistance, contact BRI customer service at 1-800-473-9595, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. or email BRI at [participantservices@benefitresource.com](mailto:participantservices@benefitresource.com).