

The Value of Your Municipal Utilities

Hint: *lower rates is just one of the reasons*

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The merits and value of local municipal utility services are often overshadowed by other regional or national events.

For those who are not aware, the village of Rantoul owns and operates its own electric, natural gas, water and waste water utilities and has done so, for some, for more than 110 years.

Only 42 communities in Illinois own and operate a municipal electric utility. Even fewer offer the combination of services that the village manages and operates.

With the spike in energy costs and service issues, some communities have sought to establish their own utility but are finding the path to be cumbersome and expensive. The village of Rantoul long ago made those commitments and it is evident in the value of the services provided.

One of the values of municipal services is often found with the price of service, so this would be a logical point to begin, as price is the one instrument of measure that affects customers each month.

The village's utility rates are reviewed periodically and established by the village board. The rates are developed to cover operating and maintenance expenses, capital improvements, and depreciation costs for future replacement of facilities. Any "revenue" above the annual expenses are not distributed to share holders abroad, but re-invested back into the village systems and operations. This allows the rates to remain competitive and the system kept up to date.

For example, the village of Rantoul's electric rates are viewed as very competitive. While costs have risen and load diminished in recent years, Rantoul residential rates remain significantly below the regional costs paid by customers in other towns. Currently, a Rantoul residential customer using 900kWh per month is paying 18.3% less in the winter and 21.3% less in the summer for their electric usage than customers on the Ameren/IP system. This represents a savings of more than \$255 per year.

Such a disparity in rates is not only seen in this region, but also when comparing rates around the Midwest, which have been adversely impacted by deregulation and now the slowing economy.

As for water and waste water rates, the village's rates remain among the lowest in east central Illinois. A recent survey conducted by the engineering firm of Berns, Clancy and Associates in Urbana, indicates that of the 69 participating communities, the village of Rantoul ranked 45th for combined monthly water and sewer charges on a scale where

number one (#1) had the highest charges. Some of the smaller municipally operated systems may have lower costs, but may not be softening or treating potable water in the same manner as Rantoul.

The village of Rantoul offers local utility crews and service personnel to respond to customer's needs and inquiries. The utility personnel and staff are headquartered here in the village and are part of the community and available to assist during the day and readily available to respond to after-hours service interruptions.

Offering municipal services also provide the opportunity to speak face-to-face with a local representative if there is a billing question or a service need. There is no need to depend on an out of area, 800 number to discuss a need, as the village's local utility office and village employees are available to address your concern.

Municipal field personnel tend to be self-reliant, seeking to accomplish tasks with in-house resources and experience than to seek outside aid. This "will-do" approach is displayed in staff's willingness to play a role in providing ancillary services and support throughout the community.

This support might be witnessed in rebuilding the ball field lighting at a park; assisting a not-for-profit entity in replacing their flag pole assembly; hanging and maintaining Christmas decorations or seasonal banners for the Chamber; operating and maintaining the communities' streetlights; supporting the preparation of community events; assisting other divisions and departments with manpower, equipment and expertise; responding promptly to service interruptions; but most importantly never forgetting the mission of meeting the service needs through low-cost and reliable utility services to our residents.

A community with the vision to establish and successfully operate their utilities displays a unique and ongoing commitment to invest in its citizens; to invest in its community; to believe in its future.

The value and reliability of utility services is just another reason to come join us in Rantoul.