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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 28, 2014

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Evansville Water and Sewer Utility reports findings from customer survey

Feedback will inform and shape improvements to operations, customer service and communication

EVANSVILLE, Ind. – In February 2014, the Evansville Water & Sewer Utility (EWSU) administered an online survey to gather customer feedback on water and sewer service, gauge awareness about planned updates to improve the City's water and sewer system, and identify opportunities to improve EWSU customer service and communication. The Utility collected 1,023 completed surveys. The sampling of participants was reflective of Evansville census data.

"The timing of this research study was important," said Allen Mounts, director of EWSU. "In the early part of this year, we had the attention of the community and our customers for a variety of reasons."

In January, new water rates went into effect, and sewer rates went up to help fund state and federally mandated operational improvements to comply with the Clean Water Act. That same month, the Utility worked vigilantly to maintain water quality as a chemical plume – from a spill upriver – passed along the Ohio River. Additionally during that time, severe winter weather conditions caused a record-breaking number of water main breaks and other disruptive issues to the system.

"Evansville Water and Sewer Utility customers had a lot to say this winter about their service, their rates and the way the Utility operates. The incredible participation in this survey exceeded our expectations. It's clear our customers wanted to be heard," Mounts said. "While feedback from customers was not all positive, it is incredibly valuable. We will use it to inform and shape operational and customer service improvements moving forward," he added.

Summary of findings

Key findings are outlined below. For a more detailed summary of findings, visit <http://www.evansville.in.gov/index.aspx?page=3237>.

Overview:

- 1,023 completed surveys were collected Feb. 3 to 24, 2014.
- 50 customers supplied their contact information and requested personal follow-up from the Utility via phone or email. Follow-up contact has been conducted or attempted with those customers.

Most favorable attributes:

Customers expressed the most positive sentiments toward EWSU for:

- Providing safe and reliable water services to customers.
- Treating customers with courtesy and respect.

Least favorable attributes:

According to customers, EWSU fared least favorably for:

- Being a financially sound organization.
- Planning for the future growth and needs of Evansville.

The federal mandate and *Renew Evansville*:

The City of Evansville and EWSU are under a federal mandate to comply with the Clean Water Act of 1972, update the City's aging sewer system and improve operations. It will be the largest capital improvement project in Evansville's history. [*Renew Evansville*](#) is EWSU's plan to address those needs.

- 61% of customers stated they had heard of the federal mandate, and feedback suggests customers have a good understanding of what the city must accomplish through the plan.
- 38% of customers cited having seen or heard something about *Renew Evansville*.
- The community has a high expectation for completing the federally mandated projects quickly, with only 14% of people understanding it will take more than 20 years to complete.

Water and sewer rates:

Although Evansville's water and sewer rates are lower than many nearby Indiana cities, survey feedback suggests the majority of EWSU customers believe their rates are higher. (See graphics.)

- 54% expressed opinions that EWSU water rates are higher than other cities.
- 62% of respondents expressed opinions that EWSU sewer rates are higher than other cities.

Paying bills:

- While customers indicated they pay their EWSU bills in a variety of ways, the majority [54%] indicated they pay via mail.

- Those using some method of online payment or recurring payments had the most favorable opinions regarding options for paying their bills.

Communication with customers:

- 47% of customers indicated they prefer to receive information from EWSU on their monthly bill.
- 30% prefer receiving email communication from the Utility.

Opportunities for potential services:

Customers expressed interest in a variety of potential services that could be offered by EWSU, including:

- Budget billing plan that evens out payments each month [33%].
- Paperless billing [33%].
- Monthly newsletters with tips for homeowners [33%].

“There were no major surprises in the data,” Mounts said. “But the research very clearly affirmed areas the Utility is performing well in and where we can improve,” he added.

Mounts said EWSU has already begun information-gathering on many of the services customers expressed interest in, including a more standard 8 ½” x 11” customer bill, which would enable more opportunities to communicate with customers about their service, conservation tips and important updates. Additionally, EWSU is reviewing text messaging services and an app, which would provide a new means for communication with customers on mobile devices.

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