



# GET TO KNOW YOUR CITY

A Special Publication for City of Barnesville Residents • Issue 1 • April 2012

We hope that you will enjoy this “Get to Know Your City” informational pamphlet. The idea for this publication came from new City Council members based on their visits with residents and questions they had about the operations of the City. This publication provides some general background on City functions. If you have questions that you would like the City to address in the future, feel free to contact Barnesville City Administrator Mike Rietz at 354-2292.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT CITY HALL?



In all communities, large and small, City Hall is the hub of the community where residents can come with a wide variety of questions ranging from water service to building fences; potholes to City parks. Folks are able to apply for building

permits, ask about voting registration and find out who represents them on the City Council.

## WE'RE A VERY UNIQUE COMMUNITY

Generally speaking, most communities will provide their residents with water, sanitary and storm sewer service and garbage pick-up. What is very unusual in Barnesville's case are all the additional utilities which the City owns and provides including **electric, telephone, cable television, broadband and internet.** In fact, the City of Barnesville is one of few, if not the only city in the United States to provide all of these utilities to their residents.

## VS. INDEPENDENT UTILITY COMPANIES....

What you commonly find in most towns is large, independent utility companies providing utility services. For example, Xcel Energy and US West serve hundreds of towns, large and small, in multiple states. In Barnesville's case, the revenues from the City-run utilities are reinvested into local system improvements or funding other City services.

*“When you pay your utility bills, your money stays home!”*

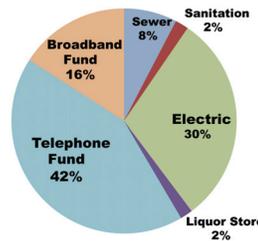
## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**The City has a monopoly on all the utilities, that can't be good for residents.**

In the case of the electric and telephone companies, it was City Council members over 100 years ago that had the foresight to provide residents with these important services. In other cities, one electric company is generally granted the exclusive right to serve that city. There are several reasons why the City's ownership of these utilities still makes sense:

1. **LOWER TAXES** - Each of these utilities generate profit. Nearly all of those profits are transferred to the City's general fund and are used to run the City; thereby keeping the property taxes lower.

### 2011 Enterprise Transfers to the General Fund



Telephone	334,500
Electric	237,000
Broadband	125,000
Sewer	60,000
Sanitation	15,000
Liquor Store	14,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$786,000</b>

2. **QUALITY SERVICE** - The City continually upgrades and reinvests in these utilities ensuring that residents have quality service. Small communities in the region who were served by US West were for years paying long distance charges to use the internet; while Barnesville was among the first to offer toll-free internet access. This reinvestment sets us apart from other small towns.
3. **LOWER COST** - Finally, centralized utilities are highly efficient with lower overhead costs, which means lower overall utility costs for the residents, not to mention the convenience of City Hall being a “One Stop Shop” for all utility services.

Year	Event
1881	Village of Barnesville is incorporated.
1889	First fire department is established, today, the restored steam pumper is part of the new Fire Museum.
1898	First electrical plant is installed in basement of Old City Hall, it was moved because it created too much noise for the upstairs Opera House.
1901	Barnesville becomes First City in Minnesota to own Municipal Phone System.
1906	City Water Tower is built at a cost of \$60,000.
1935	Blue Eagle Lake is constructed as a WPA project by damming Willow Creek.
1937	Barnesville Municipal Liquor Store opens after prohibition ends.
1949	Barnesville's first City Library opens its doors.
1954	The City purchases first Police Car.
1961	Willow Creek Golf Course opens in June with 88 golfers in attendance.
1969	City purchases Ambulance Service from Dobmeier Funeral Home.

## STAFFING CHANGES WITH THE UTILITIES

As the City has expanded the number of utilities that they own and operate, City leaders have continually looked for ways to streamline operations and reduce the City's costs.

To enhance efficiency, one full-time TEC (Telephone, Electric, Cable) Manager oversees all three of these utilities with the support of a TEC assistant and billing clerk. The TEC Manager's wages are divided among the three utilities, as is a portion of the TEC assistant and billing clerk's wages.

**ELECTRIC** - The City has owned the power company for over 100 years and maintained the system with City employees. In 2004, Barnesville signed a contract with Otter Tail Power to maintain the City's electric system. This reduced staffing from two full-time City employees to what is currently a 15 hour a week contracted lineman.

**WATER & SEWER** - Since the beginning of time, City employees were used to operate the City's water and sewer systems. In 2005, the City signed a contract with PeopleService, a company out of Omaha, Nebraska who operates water and sewer systems for 100 cities in five states.

**CABLE TV** - In the 1990's, cable TV service was provided by Spectrum Cablevision out of Dilworth. Community leaders recognized that the cable system was quickly slipping behind in terms of technology and channels. Through the assistance of the EDA in 1998, an offer was accepted to purchase the company. This has ensured that Barnesville has quality cable TV service. One full-time staff member was added to operate and maintain the system.

**TELEPHONE & INTERNET** - In the early years of internet service, Barnesville residents were provided internet service through Red River Telephone. In 2003, the City took over providing broadband and internet. Existing telephone staff were trained to provide internet service.

**GARBAGE** - For the last 30 years, Fuchs Sanitation out of Glyndon has provided Barnesville residents with garbage collection. While many cities provide their own garbage collection, Barnesville believes contracting is the most cost effective way to provide this service.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS continued

### So why do my utility bills seem so high?

The City frequently studies rates in other communities and finds our rates to be comparable. Remember that your bill is for services from five different companies, which is what makes the total appear so high. Again, in most other communities you would be writing separate checks to the City, electric company, telephone company, cable television company and your broadband provider!

### Why are there so many staff at City Hall?

Barnesville is growing! From 2000 to 2010, our population grew by 400 people. In addition to the regular "City stuff", staff are supporting customers of four growing companies -

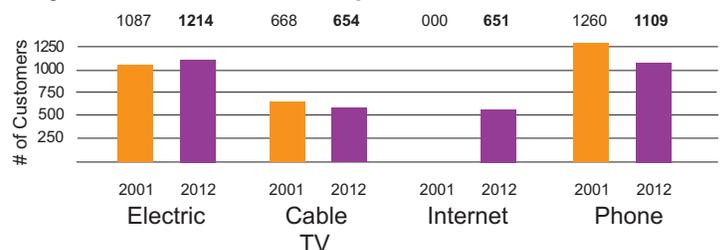
**Electric** - 1214 customers    **Cable TV** - 654 customers  
**Telephone** - 1109 customers    **Internet** - 651 customers

Besides customer service, staff are processing all the bills and payments for each of the utilities, meaning a very large number of transactions.

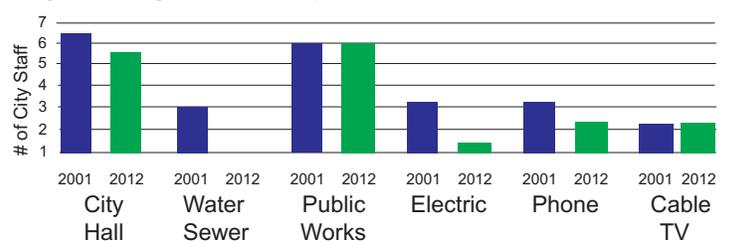
### MORE CUSTOMERS SERVED WITH LESS STAFF

As the population has grown and our services being offered have expanded, the number of customers has grown.

#### City Customers: 2001 compared to 2012



#### City Staffing: 2001 compared to 2012



**1993** City Hall moves into newly renovated building.

**1996** Toll free, dial-up Internet service is introduced.

**1998** City Purchases Cable Television system from Spectrum Cable.

**2001** High Speed DSL service is offered to residents.

**2006** City builds new water tower on east side of town-old water tower is demolished.

**2007** City of Barnesville celebrates its 125th Birthday!

**2010** City of Barnesville joins Facebook.

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### In reviewing City Council minutes, it seems like employee wages are high. Is that contributing to the high utility bills?

The City works closely with the League of Minnesota Cities on a variety of matters, including employee wages.

Each year the League releases a wage survey which is made available to the City Administrator. This document is reviewed relative to existing staff as well as when hiring new employees.

In all cases City of Barnesville employees are at the lower end of the ranges. In some cases, length of employee service does impact wage levels. The City is fortunate to have a number of long term employees.