

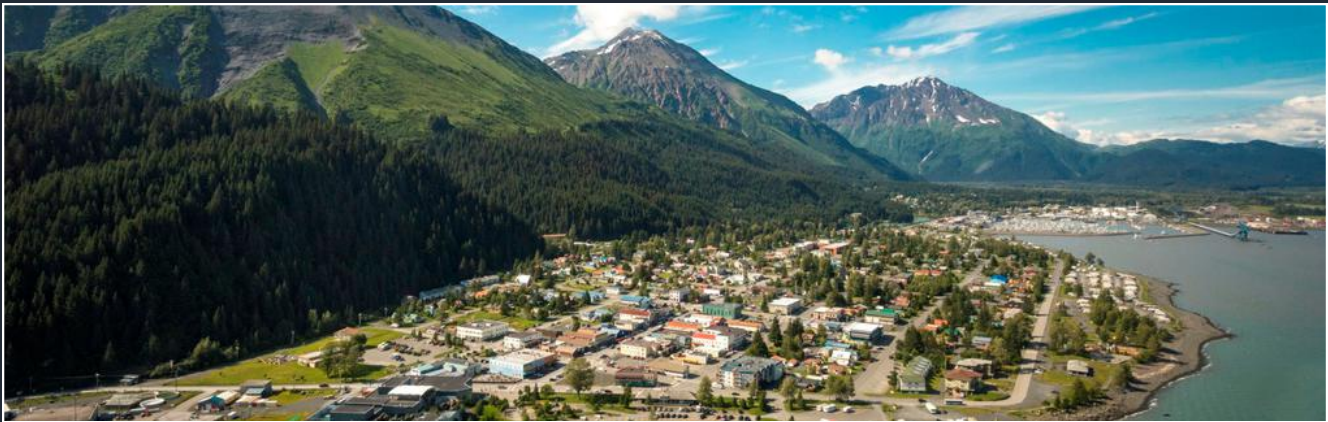
customerassist

# From Billing Bottlenecks to Optimized Operations at the City of Seward

## *A CustomerAssist Case Study*



Nestled on the shores of Resurrection Bay, the City of Seward, Alaska (the City) is a small but vibrant coastal city surrounded by snow-capped mountains, sparkling glaciers, and pristine waters. The fourth-largest city in the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the City of Seward maintains a total land area of 14.4 square miles. For more than 85 years, the City has been responsible for managing utility services, including water, sewer, electricity, and waste removal, and the City provides electricity to approximately 3,000 residential and business customers.



## Business Challenge

Seward and the surrounding area have grown considerably since the City's founding, and the utility faced substantial challenges managing customer billing for the growing community. To improve billing processes and gain efficiencies, the City conducted a formal billing assessment.

In recent years, the City had experienced a shortage of staff for billing operations. With a small pool of potential employees from the local community, hiring and retaining skilled utility desk personnel has become a persistent issue. The City's utility desk performs multiple functions – along with managing billing and finance tasks, staff are responsible for customer service – leading to a potential overload of responsibilities. Understaffed and stretched too thin, the utility desk had less time to devote to learning the intricacies of utility billing. Consequently, the City faced a roadblock to gaining in-house expertise for complex billing processes, such as net metering and consolidated billing, and struggled to drive further billing program efficiencies and optimizations.

To ensure accurate, efficient billing and collections for customer accounts, the City recognized the pressing need for a long-term billing solution with increased capacity and flexibility.

# The Util-Assist Solution

The City embarked on an exhaustive search for a reliable utility billing solution provider starting locally in Alaska, then expanding the search throughout the United States and Canada. During the process, the City discovered Util-Assist's fully managed utility billing service, **CustomerAssist**. CustomerAssist checked all the boxes to effectively manage the City's billing operations, including:



**Billing:** Util-Assist handles the entire billing process, generating bills and ensuring their accurate delivery to customers. Supervisory staff ensure proper validations are upheld.



**Account Management:** Util-Assist takes charge of managing customer accounts, ensuring accurate and up-to-date information.



**Collections:** Util-Assist oversees the collection of outstanding payments, implementing effective strategies and processes.



**Administration Services:** Util-Assist manages administrative tasks related to customer account changes, such as move-in and move-out processes.



**Contact Center:** CustomerAssist includes a dedicated contact center to handle customer inquiries and concerns and provide support for billing and utility services.

Another key advantage was the billing software solution. The City uses NorthStar™ Utilities Solutions' billing platform, a utility industry-specific solution built and delivered by utility professionals and in use daily by over 300 utilities to manage more than 3.5M accounts. CustomerAssist is delivered using the NorthStar solution, ensuring a seamless transition and limiting the learning curve for City personnel. Util-Assist billing staff are experts in NorthStar functionality – serving as an extension of City staff, the Util-Assist team would be able to deliver expert advice on best practices to bolster the City's billing processes, increase program efficiency, and manage complex billing processes.

As a promising solution to meet the City's pressing needs, Util-Assist was selected by the City to deliver billing services for all utility accounts – water, sewer, and electric.

# The Result

The benefits to the City's billing practices were immediate. The City is now supported by a dedicated team of Util-Assist utility billing professionals, ensuring that the City is never left short-handed. City personnel are alleviated from the demanding and time-consuming complexities of managing utility billing, and the City's utility desk is again able to focus on core utility business and customer service. To heighten the overall customer experience, the City maintains a position for in-person payments, serving as the on-site face of utility billing. As a next step, the City plans to work with Util-Assist to engineer new processes and create efficiencies, thanks to dedicated, expert staff on the NorthStar billing solution.

## Contact Us



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## About Util-Assist

Util-Assist's solutions merge technology with strategy to streamline processes, boost productivity, enable data-driven business decisions, and deliver enhanced customer experiences, transforming how utilities operate and deliver value to their customers. Driving digital innovation with professional services and managed services for electric, water, and gas, Util-Assist is shaping the utility of the future.

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