



conroe courier - news

Council approves online payment service

By Nancy Flake

Published: 07.22.10

Conroe residents and business owners who drive downtown or to Municipal Court to pay utility bills or traffic fines soon will be able to save time and gas by paying online.

On Thursday, the City Council approved an online payment system that will make it easier for customers to pay, while eliminating about \$47,000 in credit card processing fees the city has been absorbing annually, said Steve Williams, city finance director.

Williams and other members of a committee have researched a system the past year. The council approved the committee's recommendation of PayConnexion/JP Morgan Chase, which is used by the cities of Houston, Galveston, Baytown and Pasadena and Galveston County.

While PayConnexion accepts credit cards, customers still can pay by check, cash, money order or account draft, either in person or by sending payments through the mail, Williams said.

"I expect we'll set up kiosks, including a computer in the lobby here (at City Hall)," Williams said.

Customers using PayConnexion would pay a "convenience fee" for each transaction – depending on the amount of the transaction – similar to those charged by utility providers such as Entergy Texas and CenterPoint Energy.

For example, a utility payment of \$65 would incur a \$3 convenience fee, while a municipal court fine payment of \$268 would incur an \$8 convenience fee, according to information presented to the council.

Customers seeking permits also would be able to pay via the online system.

The city would have to pay a one-time fee of \$8,800 for the software interface, Williams said, plus annual software maintenance fees of \$2,200.

In other council news:

Cates recognition: The council recognized former Municipal Court Judge James Cates for his 15 years of service, proclaiming Thursday as "Judge James Cates Day."

Cates recently was defeated in an election runoff by Michael Davis.

Former Mayors Carter Moore, who appointed Cates in 1994, and Tommy Metcalf spoke about what

Print Page



"Annie" cast member Victoria Elizabeth Westbrook, 3, is handed a stack of invitations to distribute to Conroe City Council members by Carolyn Wong, of Stage Right of Texas, during Thursday morning's City Council meeting. The play begins tonight and runs through Aug. 8 at the Crighton Theatre in downtown Conroe. See The Ticket in today's Courier for more on "Annie."

Cates has meant to the city.

Metcalf credited Cates for initiating the Omnibase system, which collects traffic fines for municipalities. The collection of those fines helped ease a budget shortfall in 2004.

"We were able to hire five new police officers for our Rapid Response Team," Metcalf said. "That allowed us to drastically reduce crime in town ... while we had a population spike of 30 percent. That's why (several companies) located here, creating thousands of jobs."

"Annie" cast: The young cast members of "Annie," the final production of 2009-10 for Stage Right of Texas, presented personal invitations to their show at the Crighton Theatre to the council.

Leads Hope Harris, of Katy, and Kaylie King, of The Woodlands, who will alternate playing Annie, performed the song "Tomorrow."

The show starts today with an 8 p.m. performance and runs through Aug. 8 on Friday and Saturday nights, with two Sunday matinees at 2 p.m Aug. 1 and 8.

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