

SUCCESS STORY



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# City of Fort Smith Modernizes Service Delivery with Paylt



# Upgrading to a modern payment system

Just over 300 acres of public park space, historical attractions, and a rich heritage make Fort Smith a popular city to live in Arkansas. With almost 90,000 residents, Fort Smith is currently the third largest city in Arkansas, and the city's population continues to grow.

The city's growth, along with changing resident expectations, meant that government services had to evolve. And luckily, their agency had someone championing innovation.

## **Outdated tech wasn't cutting it for Fort Smith administrators or residents.**

The Fort Smith water utilities department manages roughly 36,000 service connections — a big job that includes reading water meters, sanitary sewer, pretreatment, citizen services (bill collection), watershed management, engineering, safety, and more.

The department has a lot on its plate, and the technology they were using wasn't able to keep up with its needs. And since the team was also short-staffed, they needed a solution that could be implemented quickly. Additionally, their previous digital billing system had a lackluster user interface and no mobile payment option.

It wasn't working well for residents or the agency.

## **Fort Smith searches for a solution that solves payment compliance and provides a seamless experience.**

Fort Smith needed technology that would not only improve residents' experience but also help streamline work for staff — requiring forward-thinking teammates and composable software. Lance McAvoy, Fort Smith Utility Director, knew he needed to look 5 years out: How will technology innovations impact the utility department, and ultimately, the city of Fort Smith? McAvoy asked himself, "How do we help the city grow and prosper in the future?"

**Ideally, Fort Smith hoped to leverage one provider to help meet their goals — a partner in technology innovation. Along with modern billing software, Fort Smith was looking for:**

- A forward-thinking company with a deep bench of products, knowledge, and experience
- A partner well-versed in future technologies, trends, and problems
- Great customer service

# Finding the right solution

## Moment of discovery: Fort Smith finds its solution.

After evaluating several other solutions, McAvoy and his team had an “aha moment” when they reviewed PayIt’s technology and company mission. PayIt’s value proposition encompassed much of what they envisioned for Fort Smith: a great user experience, interoperability, built-in compliance, and high accessibility standards.

## Fort Smith leverages a new solution with PayIt.

With great customer service, the ability to consolidate multiple government services into one experience, and an enterprising attitude, McAvoy considers PayIt “the gold standard” in this space. “Other providers were not as robust or forward-thinking,” said McAvoy.

Fort Smith launched with digital utility services, making it simple for residents to pay their water bills digitally and receive payment notifications.

Fort Smith is utilizing interactive voice response (IVR) so residents have a simple option to pay over the phone if desired. And since PayIt, not the city, takes on data and compliance risk, there’s less for the agency to worry about.

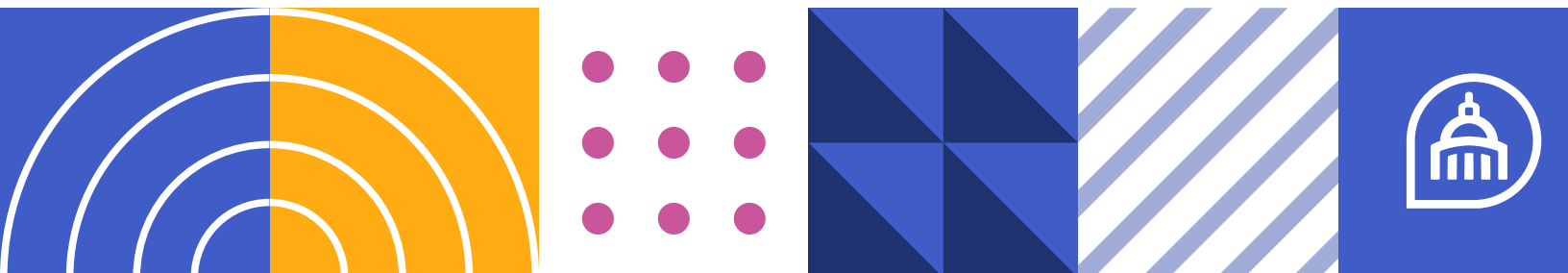
Along with the useful and user-friendly technology, McAvoy appreciates PayIt’s unique business model: PayIt doesn’t make money until the government agency does, so there’s a real motivation for teamwork.

Fort Smith recently went through a massive ERP upgrade in 2022, and adding PayIt’s solution was a huge part of the agency’s digital transformation.

**“The investment PayIt is willing to make is above and beyond.”**



**Lance McAvoy,**  
Fort Smith’s Utility Director



# Establishing a partnership

Historically, Fort Smith hasn't had great experiences with tech rollouts. When McAvoy started exploring SaaS solutions, he knew Fort Smith's backend technology was outdated, and their agency had worked with other tech providers in the space with less than stellar results.

"As we experienced challenges, PayIt helped us through it. They didn't make hollow promises, and worked with the data we had available to get the system up and running as quickly as possible," said McAvoy.

As McAvoy and his team had conversations about whether tasks or deadlines were feasible or not, he was comforted knowing that the PayIt team was ok saying no. If certain tasks were not doable in a specific way or timeframe, they gave Fort Smith honest assessments, suggestions, and alternative approaches – something McAvoy was impressed with. The PayIt team acts with integrity and "holds themselves accountable," said McAvoy.

There was weekly communication between the tech teams at Fort Smith and PayIt. And as launch day got closer, PayIt came on site and held collaborative working sessions, helping the city's IT team keep the launch smooth and on schedule.

"Had it not been for PayIt helping, we would have not been successful," said McAvoy. Fort Smith's IT team and the PayIt team regularly convened to get a solution figured out. It was a true collaboration.

PayIt Fort Smith was activated on May 31st, and the official launch was on June 1st. The first resident signed up at 12:05 a.m.

**I can't think of anybody that hasn't said 'I have ownership in this.' We've called PayIt at 9 pm at night, and someone has been there.**



**Lance McAvoy,**  
Fort Smith's Utility Director



# The city reports promising results

As of March 2023, the agency has achieved an adoption rate of 45% (and all signs point to continued adoption). Compared to the solution they used previously (which had an adoption rate of 24%), PayIt Fort Smith has made huge strides in adoption in a much shorter amount of time.

## Both residents and staff have good things to say.

McAvoy is excited to see the solution meeting the expectations of both the city administration and Fort Smith residents. Residents have commented on social media, noting how simple it is to navigate, and the finance department has given rave reviews, reporting that it helps with bank reconciliation, making their jobs easier.

It's been such a success, in fact, that the city administration is on board with moving more services to the PayIt digital platform — giving Fort Smith residents one place for efficient, simple, and cohesive interactions with their government.

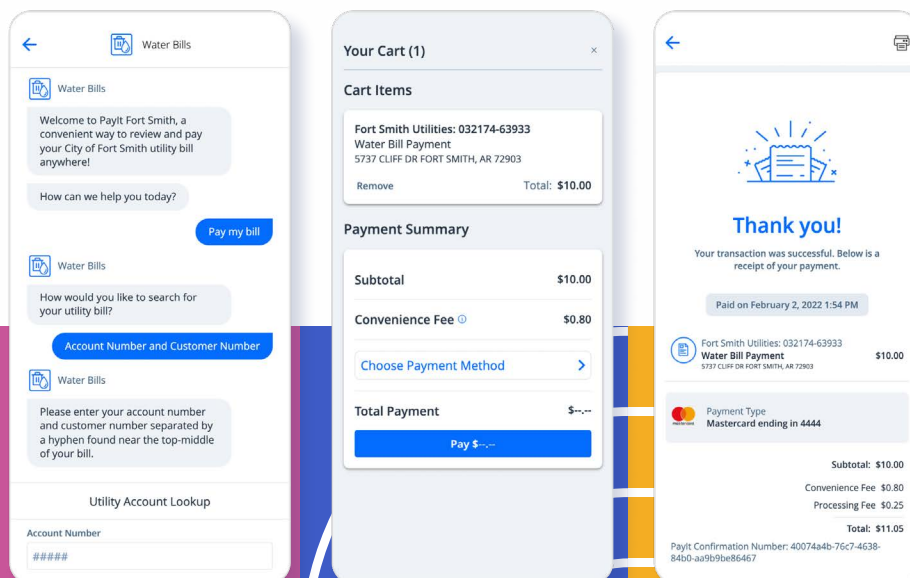
# What's next?

Short-term, Fort Smith is looking to move the adoption needle closer to 60%. In the near future, part of Fort Smith's modernization plan is to expand digital utility services to include monitoring water usage and giving residents the ability to manage the start and stop of water services online (versus having to visit the office in person or call).

Longer-term, Fort Smith is working to accept payments for additional government services online.

Moving all of these services into one platform will help city administration, as they (like other areas) deal with staff shortages. Along with helping to alleviate stress on understaffed departments, streamlining the platform gives residents a more intuitive experience.

If tasks can be done online in a single system it makes everything from department accounting to paying water bills more efficient.



# Advice from Fort Smith's experience with PayIt.

McAvoy has been an innovation champion for Fort Smith, and he has some great advice for other government leaders hoping to inspire change: Know what your expectations are, know what you want, and reach out to others that have gone through it.

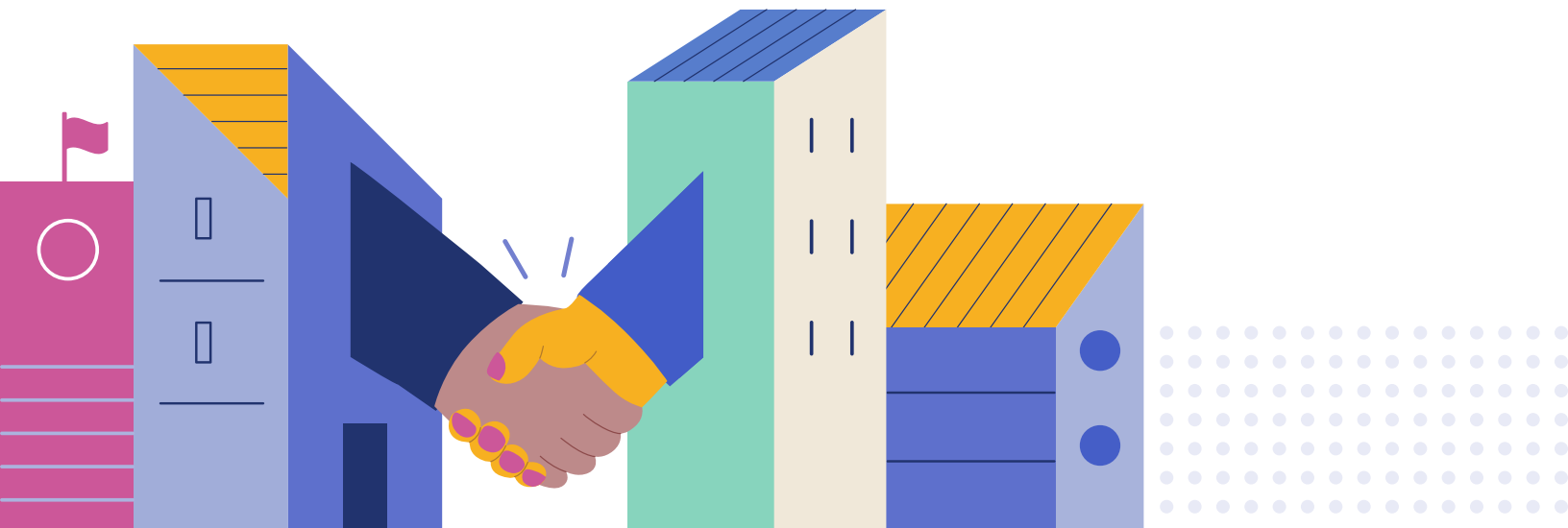
He also suggested being extremely thoughtful about how and when agencies launch new technology. He suggests double-checking that everything is ready. Set yourself up for success, and if something doesn't test right, take a step back and analyze it. "You have one shot to launch it right," said McAvoy.

Listen to the staff, and listen to your vendor. (For the record, when Fort Smith did launch, it launched without a hiccup.)

By partnering with PayIt, Fort Smith has jump-started its modernization efforts. They've combined thoughtful leadership and a dedicated tech partner to find success.

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**“Know that PayIt is there as a partner. They will not launch until it's a truly good product that will be successful,” said McAvoy.**



## About PayIt

PayIt is the solution state and local government agencies use to take the friction out of resident transactions. Our composable customer experience platform enables agencies to collect revenue faster, improve efficiency and sustainability, and give people the smooth digital experience they have come to expect online. PayIt integrates into any back-office system, launches in about 90 days, and provides residents with a single GovWallet™ to store digital licenses and registrations, transaction history, receipts, and payment methods for multiple agencies. Serving more than 80 million residents in North America, we have received awards from Fast Company, StateScoop, and have been listed in the GovTech 100 for 7 years and counting.



To learn more, visit [www.payitgov.com](http://www.payitgov.com)

