



Staff Report

February 16, 2021 Council Workshop

Utility Assistance Program Presentation

Presenter: Cathy Huber Nickerson, Finance Director

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BACKGROUND: This presentation is to review what the City's utility assistance obligations are, current state, options available and a staff recommendation to move forward.

SUMMARY: This presentation will discuss the City's utility delinquencies, options provided by law and the Governor's emergency proclamations as well as proposed plan to help bring utility billing relief to families in the community who need assistance. In addition, a plan to allow residents to contribute to utility bill relief efforts.

EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS:

What are the desired results and outcomes for this agenda item? The intent of the presentation is to provide City Council an update of state requirements for utility assistance and provide options for their consideration.

What's the data? What does the data tell us? The data shows several residents are struggling since the COVID-19 pandemic started to pay their utility bill. Once the Governor's emergency proclamations are expired, these residents are at risk of losing their water service.

How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement? If the program is approved, senior citizen organizations, local charities, and the school district will be notified to engage those in need. The City would work with the Camas School District and the City community to inform about the donation opportunity.

Who will benefit from, or be burdened by this agenda item? This agenda item is intended to benefit citizens who struggle to pay their utility bills and provide outlet to those who wish to donate utility bill assistance.

What are the strategies to mitigate any unintended consequences? If the plan is successful, the City may require staffing to assist in implementing the plan in the future.

Does this agenda item have a differential impact on underserved populations, people living with disabilities, and/or communities of color? Please provide available data to illustrate this impact. Yes, this agenda item helps low-income utility customers and senior citizens.

Will this agenda item improve ADA accessibilities for people with disabilities? N/A

What potential hurdles exists in implementing this proposal (include both operational and political)? The City would need to work with legal counsel to develop an interlocal agreement with the Camas School District's Family Community Resource Center and the City for providing utility assistance.

How will you ensure accountabilities, communicate, and evaluate results? The Finance Department will provide annual updates of the program to City Council.

How does this item support a comprehensive plan goal, policy, or other adopted resolution? This item meets the state law requirements as well as the Governor's emergency proclamation on utility assistance.

BUDGET IMPACT: The cost of the program would depend upon the scope of the program. In 2014, Council looked at funding the program annually at \$10,000. These funds would be built into the utility rate structure and is 0.05% of the City's utilities annual operating revenue.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff is looking for direction from Council to pursue an agreement with the Family Community Resource Center in participating with the City to provide utility assistance.