

## COUNCIL ACTION FORM

Meeting Date: November 14, 2024

Staff Contact: Leslie Herring, City Administrator

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**Agenda Item:** Consider approving Letter of Understanding with Johnson County for participation in the Utility Assistance Program for 2025

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### Background/Description of Item

Johnson County, through its Department of Aging and Human Services, provides the Utility Assistance Program to county residents. This program provides financial assistance to avoid utility disconnection to income-qualifying residents. The assistance is available for past due utility bills or assistance with payment plans and the amount is a limited dollar amount annually per household and varies based on funding levels. The assistance is available for electric, water, gas, wastewater and propane utility bills and is not on-going.

### Staff Comments/Recommendation

Data provided by Johnson County's Department of Aging and Human Services indicates that Westwood residents have been participating in this program even though the City has not been contributing financially. In 2024 alone, four (4) Westwood households received assistance through the program, with a total of \$2,191 being distributed in the city. Assistance was provided for electricity, gas, wastewater, and water bills. From data older than 2024, in general this program serves two to four Westwood residents per year. By the City contributing matching funds to the program, the County is able to distribute more financial assistance within Westwood by using both County and City funds.

### Budget Impact

Given the City's survey findings this summer that suggest a majority of residents would welcome programs to help reduce the cost burden of owning and maintaining their home<sup>1</sup>, and the City's FY2025 earmark of \$1,312.81 for the proposed Homelessness Services Center (HSC) (which proposal has since been abandoned), City staff recommend redirecting the amount set aside in the 2025 City budget for the HSC to the Utility Assistance Fund. Signing a Letter of Understanding for 2025 does not commit the City to participate in the program in future years, and the amount the City desires to contribute as a match for Westwood residents receiving assistance can vary from year to year, based on usage rates and City budget capacity.

### Suggested Motion

*I move to authorize the City Administrator to execute the Letter of Understanding with the Johnson County Aging & Human Services for administration of the Utility Assistance Program for the 2025 program year.*

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<sup>1</sup> 55% of survey respondents say they would participate in a program that rebates a portion of City property taxes and 52% say they would participate in a program that would provide grants for making housing improvements. The cost/price of housing in Westwood was further identified as an area of lower ratings when asked about feelings of quality of life.