



Utility Advisory Committee

Utility Customer Assistance Program

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Title

Utility Customer Assistance Program

Report

UAC Deliverable:

Briefing and provide feedback to Finance Committee

Report

Issue:

Whether to provide verbal or written feedback to the Finance Committee on the utility customer assistance program.

Staff Contact:

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Background and Analysis:

Last year, City Council requested that the Utility Advisory Committee (UAC) evaluate the City's utility Lifeline program and recommend potential changes. Specifically, the Council is interested in expanding the program so that rate discounts could apply to more low income households.

The Lifeline program is a City customer assistance program that provides a 50 percent rate reduction for household meeting the following criteria:

- Low income and disabled, or
- Low income and over 62.

The UAC and City Council supported increasing community outreach in order to expand participation, rather than restructure the existing program. With this approach, Council directed staff to continue evaluating more aggressive approaches including restructuring. In 2019, utility staff are taking steps to increase participation:

- An article in the utility bill insert (Five Things)
- A special insert in all residential utility bills
- Informational flyer and applications at City Hall's front counter
- An informational letter to social service organizations

- Further discussion with Thurston County Housing Authority as well as several multifamily property owners
- Investigating what other communities are doing

Council's Finance Committee requests a program update from staff on May 15th. While still early in the year to document potential increased participation, we will provide an update and offer any new ideas for potential implication in 2020.

As we discussed last year, the fact that many renters do not pay utility bills presents a fundamental challenge to reaching the target low income audiences.

Financial Impact:

Not applicable at this time. However, an expanded assistance program would have rate implications.

Attachments:

Lifeline Rate Program flyer