



RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES

Board Memorandum

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

DATE: JUNE 12, 2023

SUBJECT: BILLING DISPUTE APPEAL OF DETERMINATION FOR ELECTRIC METER READINGS AT 5004 GOLDEN AVENUE

ISSUE:

Consider the appeal from Booker T. Cole of 5004 Golden Avenue, Riverside, 92505, in response to the Public Utilities Department determination of findings respective of the electric billing dispute for electric service billed on February 13, 2023 and March 15, 2023, for the account at the same address.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Public Utilities deny the appeal from Booker T. Cole of 5004 Golden Avenue, Riverside, 92505, for electric service billed on February 13, 2023 and March 15, 2023, for the account at the same address and uphold the Public Utilities Department findings that the billings were calculated accurately.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

The process for customers to dispute correctness of any water or electric service bill is directed in the Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 (Attachment 1) for the Disputed Bill Appeal Processes and Water Rule 6 and Electric Rule 6 (Attachment 2) for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills.

BACKGROUND:

On February 24, 2023, Booker T. Cole spoke with Customer Service requesting review of electrical usage, reporting that the address had experienced flickering lights and partial power since December. Staff advised that an investigation would be conducted at the location.

On February 27, 2023, meter technicians tested electric meter 26113948 and consequently followed up directly with him on March 2, 2023. He disclosed that after receiving a large natural gas bill in January he purchased a 1500-watt electric space heater as an alternative heat source. While onsite, technicians observed and showed him the meter disk emulator with the space heater both on and off and explained that the space heater was likely the source of the increased usage. The meter disk emulator provides a visual indication of the rate of energy usage. The emulator

slowed significantly with the space heater turned off and conversely sped up significantly with the space heater on.

Technicians also took amperage readings while the space heater was on and found it was drawing 12 amps continuously. Tests completed on February 27, 2023 show that meter 26113948 passed all the accuracy tests for Full load, Light load and Power factor. As a courtesy, an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) electric meter #343646750 was installed so that usage reads could be collected more frequently, and for Booker T. Cole to have the ability to set up the Home Connect to monitor energy usage.

On March 3, 2023, Customer Service Manager Alma Franco received an email from Booker T. Cole. He noted that a supervisor was called on February 11, 2023, identifying that branches were banding on the wires that someone would return the next day to trim them. He noted that on February 27, 2023, a meter supervisor came to check, everything was great [and] gave suggestions. Booker T. Cole stated that he has never had a billing such as this and asked for Alma Franco to address it.

On March 10, 2023, the Summary of Investigations letter (Attachment 3) from the Customer Service Manager was mailed to Booker T. Cole stating that the results of the investigation indicate that the billings were calculated accurately for electric services provided at 5004 Golden Avenue, no City Electric Rules were found to be misapplied to the billings in question, offered assistance for a payment arrangement plan, and advised that he had 10 days to appeal the decision by contacting the Assistant General Manager for Customer Service.

On March 28, 2023, Customer Service Manager Alma Franco responded via email to a voice message from Booker T. Cole regarding following up on his electrical usage and outstanding questions from response sent March 10, 2023. She provided the usage details for the account which includes the February 27, 2023 AMI electric meter #343646750 installation for ease of monitoring energy management.

Read Date	Meter	Reading	Usage	Rate	Class
3/6/2023	343646750	191	191	100	230
2/27/2023	343646750	0	0	100	230
2/2/2023	26113948	37593	2,282	100	230
1/5/2023	26113948	35311	175	100	230
12/6/2022	26113948	35136	246	100	230

On March 29, 2023, Booker T. Cole emailed Customer Service Manager Alma Franco stating “The investigation is incomplete he tried to summarize Why the charges were so high. He didn't know that 4 other homes were involved. I have all my notes and pictures to prove it. Don't take my word ask your associates. I do have names that's for a later date.”

On March 30, 2023, Booker T. Cole received an email from Customer Service Manager Alma Franco asking for the documentation via email or by sending it to the Customer Service address.

On April 1, 2023, Booker T. Cole emailed four photos and stated that they showed a 4-week reading and that two photos showed the difference between the calendar date and the reading dates. Photos provided were of the AMI electric meter readings:

1. kWh 00182 Noted date March 5, 2023
2. kWh 00361 Noted date March 12, 2023

3. kWh 00524 Noted date of March 19, 2023
4. kWh 00682 Noted date of March 26, 2023

On April 4, 2023, Booker T. Cole emailed an additional photo and indicated that the photos showed what is unacceptable and asked when repairs were done. The photo was a document with columns of data for the Read Date, Meter #, Usage, Unit, Other Unit, and Read Type.

As the photos sent were for the next month's billing cycle, below is the revised review of electric service usage at 5004 Golden Avenue:

Read Date	Meter	Reading	Usage	Rate	Class
4/5/2023	343646750	891	700	100	230
3/6/2023	343646750	191	191	100	230
2/27/2023	343646750	0	0	100	230
2/2/2023	26113948	37593	2,282	100	230

On April 4, 2023, Booker T. Cole emailed Customer Service Manager Alma Franco for a response to his April 1, 2023 email. On April 4, 2023, Customer Service Manager Alma Franco emailed to advise that the documentation Booker T. Cole submitted was under review and a response would be sent that week.

On April 5, 2023, Customer Service Manager Alma Franco emailed and spoke with Booker T. Cole to advise that a tag generated for the past due balance on the account; however, steps were taken to temporarily pause this as the charges are pending dispute review (Attachment 4).

On April 10, 2023, the Public Utilities Assistant General Manager mailed the summary of investigation and letter of findings to Booker T. Cole (Attachment 5). On April 11, 2023, Alma Franco responded to an email from Booker T. Cole for information on the account dispute to advise that the bill dispute letter was mailed on April 10, 2023 (Attachment 6).

DISCUSSION:

On April 17, 2023, Booker T. Cole sent Public Utilities Department administrative staff an email following a voicemail message to confirm that staff received his request to dispute the April 10, 2023 Summary of Investigations and Letter of Findings.

On May 3, 2023, Booker T. Cole emailed staff to confirm receipt of mailed documents and to request a copy of the work order for the February 12th or 13th response to 5004 Golden Avenue (Attachment 7).

On May 4, 2023, Booker T. Cole contacted Customer Service to inquire as to why the electric service was disconnected at 5004 Golden Avenue. The service was mistakenly disconnected by staff and was immediately reconnected, and the account placed on hold pending the outcome of the billing dispute (Attachment 8)

On May 11, 2023, the work orders Booker T. Cole requested were emailed to him (Attachment 9).

On or about May 1, 2023, staff received a mailed package of documents from Booker T. Cole respective to the Board of Public Utilities review of the billing dispute (Attachment 10).

On May 11, 2023, the Notice of Hearing with the attachments was mailed regular and certified mail to Booker T Cole (Attachment 11).

The public posting of June 12, 2023, Public Utilities Board agenda is scheduled for the evening of May 31, 2023. A Notice of Hearing, along with the Board Agenda, Board Report and all of the attachments, will be mailed certified and regular mail to Booker T. Cole on June 1, 2023.

The appeal procedure order of discussion is included in Board Standing Rule Section 7.A.3. Appeal Order of Discussion:

- 1) Staff presentation, information and reports
- 2) Appellant presentation, comments and information
- 3) Public comments
- 4) Closing statements by appellant
- 5) Closure of public testimony
- 6) RPU Board members, including questions, discussion, motion, and action

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The Bill Dispute process contributes to **Strategic Priority No. 5 - High Performing Government** and **Goal 5.3** to Enhance communication and collaboration with community members to improve transparency, build public trust, and encourage shared decision-making.

These processes align with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – The appeal process is transparent and reflects how decisions are based on sound policy, inclusive of the involvement of City Boards & Commissions. The efforts to improve this policy include ensuring timely and reliable information.
2. **Equity** – This appeal process ensures that all customers have equal access to the process and therefore shares in the benefits available to all customers.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The appeal processes are designed to allow the customers a method to dispute Water and Electric bill charges inclusive of all investigative measures to ensure fiscal responsibility for ratepayers.
4. **Innovation** – The appeal process recommendations are inclusive to new communication technology and the team will continue to use the approved process to provide innovative options to improve the experience to meet the community’s changing needs for faster and more convenient methods of communicating.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – The process recommendations include the allowance for digital customer communication which reduces the carbon footprint of requiring paper copies or mailed documents thereby contributing towards sustainability.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommendations in this report.

Prepared by: Carlie Myers, Utilities Assistant General Manager
Approved by: Todd M. Corbin, Utilities General Manager
Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Certifies availability
of funds: Edward Enriquez, Interim Assistant City Manager/Chief Financial
Officer/City Treasurer

Attachments:

1. Electric Rule 21
2. Electric Rule 6
3. March 10, 2023, Customer Service Manager Summary of Investigation and Letter of findings
4. April 5, 2023, email from Alma Franco
5. April 10, 2023, Assistant General Manager Summary of Investigation and Letter of findings
6. April 11, 2023, email from Alma Franco
7. May 3, 2023, email from Carlie Myers
8. May 4, 2023, email from Booker T. Cole
9. May 11, 2023, email from Carlie Myers
10. May 1, 2023, discovery document from Booker T. Cole
11. May 11, 2023 Notice of Hearing
12. Presentation