

# Attachment 3

## City Council Joint Workshop with the Board of Public Utilities November 28, 2017

### Low-Income and Fixed Income Assistance

Consistent with AB 1890 (1996), RPU generates over \$12.5 million per year through its Public Benefits Charge to fund energy efficiency, low-income assistance, research and development, and renewable energy programs. Roughly \$1.5 million, or 12% of total public benefit funds, currently are budgeted to provide direct support for 5,000 low-income families per year. Staff is proposing to enhance RPU's low-income and fixed income assistance programs to assist up to 11,000 families per year by shifting about \$2 million from solar and other available public benefit funds. This would increase the share of total public benefit funds used for low-income and fixed income assistance from 12% to 28%. This shift will not decrease funding for other public benefit programs that support all customers, including middle-income residents and small businesses.

When the rate plan was first presented in August 2017, Board and Council members expressed concern regarding the impact of the proposed rate increase on Riverside's low-income and fixed income customers, and directed staff to enhance outreach efforts and explore ways to better serve these communities.

In response, staff convened two meetings of community stakeholders to discuss how RPU can improve its outreach to low-income and fixed income customers and increase participation in its public benefits programs and services. Over 30 community and staff members attended these meetings, representing the following organizations and city departments:

- Community Action Partnership (CAP) of Riverside County
- Community Connect
- Fair Housing Council of Riverside County
- Family Service Association
- Family Resource Center, Riverside Unified School District
- GRID Alternatives Inland Empire
- Habitat for Humanity Riverside
- Janet Goeske Foundation
- La Sierra University Church
- Latino Network
- Path of Life Ministries
- Riverside Board of Public Utilities
- Riverside Community Health Foundation
- Riverside County Children Services Division
- Riverside City/RPU Executive Management, Community & Economic Development, Customer Relations/Marketing, Public Benefits, Account Management

Community members described the challenges facing Riverside's low-income and fixed income customers, including high-stress environments, multi-generational and multi-familial households, immediate financial needs, lack of affordable housing, rental accommodations, language barriers, and distrust in government programs. Key takeaways from these meetings were that RPU programs must be simple and easily accessible, directly address customer needs, and be consistently assessed.

Meeting participants identified areas of potential solutions for RPU, including enhanced partnerships, communications through local nonprofits, near-term opportunities to expand as well as simplify existing programs, and long-term opportunities to develop new programs and measure effectiveness. Finally, community members assisted staff in prioritizing program enhancements and actions to fit within RPU's existing and projected budgets and resources.

Agendas, presentations, and meeting notes are available for download on the following webpage:  
<http://www.riversideca.gov/utilities/rateplan/documents.asp>.

With Board and Council approval, staff proposes 1) to maintain the existing suite of energy efficiency programs available to all customers, including middle-income residents and small businesses, and 2) to increase support to low-income and fixed income customers by making the following program changes that will lessen the impact of the rate increase:

1. Enhance the existing Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy (SHARE) Program by implementing the following changes:
  - a. Increase eligibility from 150% to 200% of the Federal poverty level;
  - b. Change the \$150 annual electric bill credit to a \$14 monthly electric bill credit;
  - c. Add annual deposit assistance and emergency assistance (up to \$150/year);
  - d. Add a \$2.25 monthly water bill credit; and
  - e. Work with Community Action Partnership (CAP) to create more convenient options for customers to sign up for program benefits (e.g., additional sign-up locations, secure online application).
2. Enhance the existing Energy Saving Assistance Program (ESAP) by implementing the following changes:
  - a. Align program eligibility with SHARE and partner agency programs; and
  - b. Automatically sign up customers who qualify for the SHARE program.

Additionally, staff is preparing a comprehensive multi-media and multi-lingual outreach campaign specifically targeting our low-income and fixed income customers, to ensure they are aware of these program changes and how they can sign up. Due to expanded eligibility requirements, program alignment, and outreach, staff expects SHARE program participation to more than double – from 4,500 to more than 10,000 customers – and ESAP program participation to quintuple – from 200 to more than 1,000 customers.

Funding for these electric low-income program enhancements will come out of existing public benefits funds, including funds originally dedicated to solar rebates which are set to expire at the end of this calendar year (see below bar chart for details). The annual estimated cost for the water low-income program is \$150,000 and will be funded with wholesale water revenues.

Finally, staff proposes to initiate a multi-year effort to prepare a needs assessment, fully develop community partnerships, coordinate an ongoing stakeholder process to identify future program and outreach opportunities, and develop benchmarks and metrics to inform program adjustments and changes. Areas to explore will include, but not be limited to, additional ESAP enhancements, prioritized roll-out of new technologies, financing options, income-qualified services, affordable housing incentives, job training and paid internships, community solar installations, and demonstration projects.

RE-ALLOCATION OF PUBLIC BENEFIT FUNDING TO IMPROVE SUPPORT  
FOR LOW AND FIXED INCOME CUSTOMERS

