



RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES

Board Memorandum

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

DATE: MARCH 8, 2021

SUBJECT: INCREASE THE SHARING HOUSEHOLDS ASSIST RIVERSIDE'S ENERGY PROGRAM'S ELECTRIC EMERGENCY/DEPOSIT CREDIT FROM \$150 TO \$250 DUE TO THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ISSUE:

Consider approval of an increase in the Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy (SHARE) Program's Emergency/Deposit Credit from \$150 to \$250 due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Public Utilities recommend to the City Council the authorization of an increase to the Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy Program's Emergency/Deposit Credit from \$150 to \$250 per year for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic State of Emergency.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

Assembly Bill (AB) 1890 was adopted in 1996, which required publicly owned utilities to collect and spend Public Benefits Charge funds for low-income assistance, energy efficiency and conservation programs, renewable energy, and research, development and demonstration projects.

BACKGROUND:

Riverside Public Utilities (RPU) established the Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy (SHARE) Program in 1989 to provide low-income residents with utility bill assistance. The SHARE Program was initially only supported with funding from direct customer contributions and donations. In 1999, RPU expanded the program with the utilization of a portion of the Public Benefits Charge funds in order to assist more customers. The SHARE program consists of two elements – a larger emergency/deposit assistance credit that is currently \$150 and additional monthly bill credits of \$15 on electric bills and \$2.75 on water bills.

On May 22, 2018, the City Council approved changes to the SHARE Program to address the concerns that the then-proposed rate increases would impact low- and fixed income customers. The program enhancements included adjusting the income qualifications as well as instituting

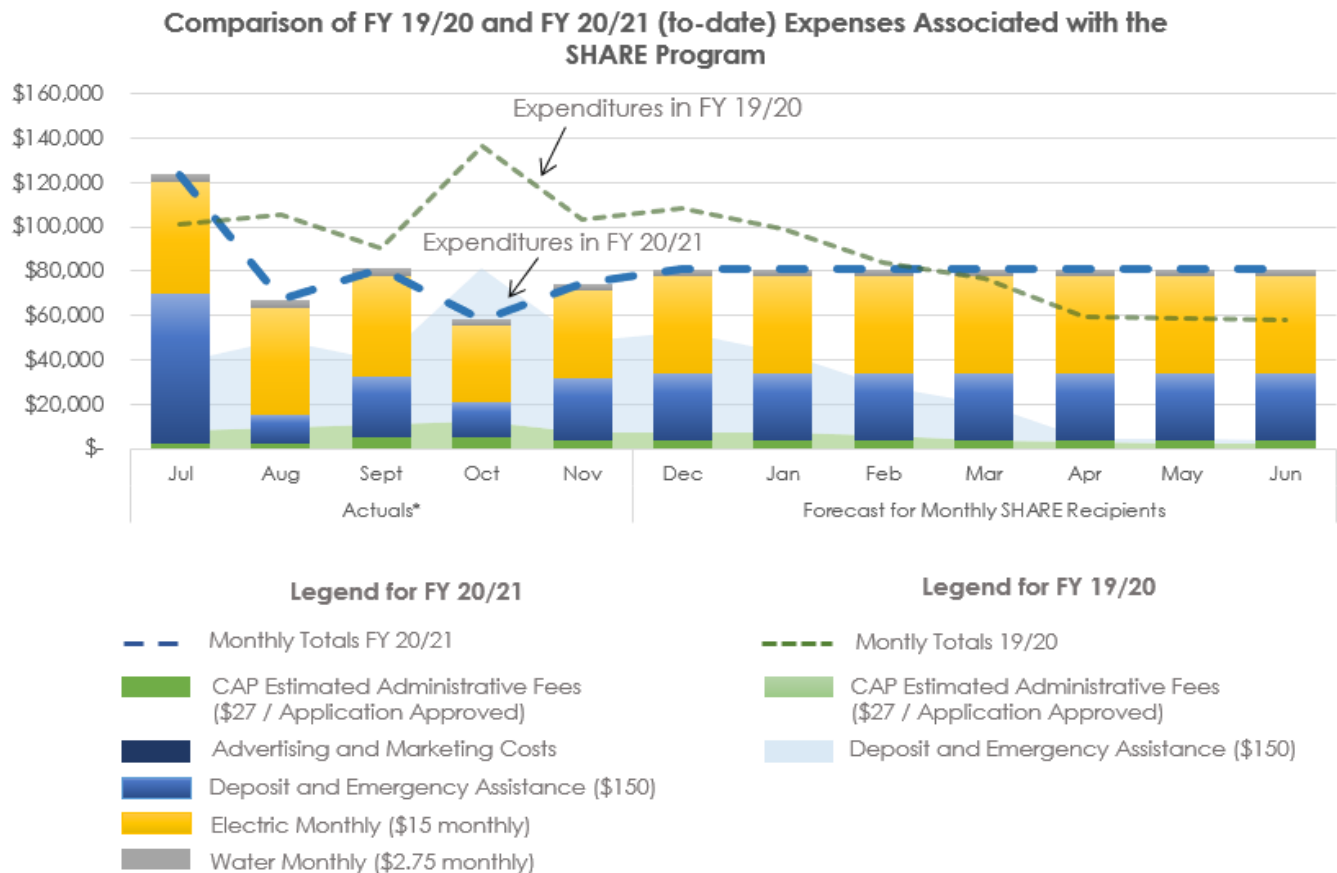
new monthly bill credits for both electric and water service. The expanded income limits changed from 150% of the Federal Poverty Level to 200% Federal Poverty Level. The new monthly bill credits included a credit of \$14 per month for income-eligible electric customers and \$2.25 per month for income-eligible water customers. These program changes were available to customers on July 1, 2018.

On July 2, 2019, the City Council approved the first increase to the SHARE electric monthly credit from \$14.00 to \$14.50 and the water monthly credit from \$2.25 to \$2.50 effective July 3, 2019.

On July 16, 2020, RPU General Manager approved to temporarily update the SHARE program guidelines to allow for an urgent notice to qualify customers for the \$150 emergency assistance.

On July 21, 2020, the City Council approved the second increase to the SHARE electric monthly credit from \$14.50 to \$15.00 and the water monthly credit from \$2.50 to \$2.75 effective July 22, 2020.

The SHARE emergency/deposit assistance has been \$150 since the inception of the program in 1989. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the delinquency collection process was suspended until further notice by the City Council. Effective, July 16, 2020 the SHARE program guidelines were updated to allow an urgent notice to qualify customers for the \$150 emergency assistance. Once the COVID-19 state of emergency ceases to exist, RPU will revert back to the current program guidelines upon management approval.



* CAP Administrative Fee for FY 20/21 is Estimated based on Approved Applications.

DISCUSSION:

In order to alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on RPU's low-income customers, RPU staff proposes to increase the SHARE emergency/deposit credit from \$150 to \$250 for the duration of the state emergency. Many low-income customers are continuing to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and do not qualify for the Emergency Recovery Assistance Program (ERAP). The financial need experienced by customers in need of assistance with bills is greater than the \$150 provided by the emergency/deposit credit. The original amount has not been increased in over 30 years.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency through December 2020, approximately 1,156 customers have been approved for the deposit/emergency assistance. If the \$100 increase is approved, a total \$115,600 will be retroactively applied to the 1,156 customer accounts.

Over \$450,000 has been expended for the SHARE program from July through December 2020.

Funding for both programs will remain the same as approved for the last fiscal year. Annual funding will be \$2.95 million per year. This includes \$2.55 million for electric customer assistance and \$250,000 for the County's administration fee from the Public Benefits Charge funding. An additional \$150,000 from wholesale water sales revenue is allocated for the water customer assistance.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The total fiscal impact is \$2,950,000. Sufficient funds are available in Public Utilities Account No. 6020100-456010 (Electric) and 6200000-456075 (Water).

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Approved by:	Todd M. Corbin, Utilities General Manager
Approved by:	Al Zelinka, FAICP, City Manager
Approved as to form:	Kristi J. Smith, Interim City Attorney

Certifies availability of funds:	Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer
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Attachment:	Presentation
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