



RIVERSIDE PUBLIC UTILITIES

Customer Relations/Finance Committee

CUSTOMER RELATIONS/FINANCE COMMITTEE

DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2021

SUBJECT: PUBLIC UTILITIES BILL APPEAL PROCESS – WATER RULE 17 AND ELECTRIC RULE 21

ISSUE:

Consider receiving an update on the Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Customer Relations/Finance Committee:

1. Receive an introduction on the Bill Dispute processes in Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21; and
2. Provide feedback to staff regarding the recommended changes or direction on other changes to be provided to the Board of Public Utilities at a public hearing.

BACKGROUND:

The Riverside Public Utilities Bill Dispute Appeal Rules are adopted by the Board of Public Utilities and approved by City Council. The current processes for Water Rule 17 (Attachment 1) and Electric Rule 21 (Attachment 2) were adopted by Board of Public Utilities on October 16, 2009, Board Resolution No. 2009-03.

DISCUSSION:

Staff will present the current bill dispute processes and include staff recommendations for Committee consideration to update the billing dispute rules listed below.

Staff recommendations for general clean up items are:

1. Update the Customer Service billing address from 3460 Orange Street to 3901 Orange Street,
2. Allow the use of electronic mail for Customer initiated processes,
3. Replace all references to Public Utilities Director to Public Utilities General Manager;
4. Replace all references to the Assistant General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities to the Public Utilities Assistant General Manager for Customer Service and Business Systems; and

5. Update the Assistant General Manager and General Manager's address from 3901 Orange Street to 3750 University Avenue,

Current Rules, Section A:

Customers who believe their utility bill is in error must first contact the Customer Services Division by telephone, in writing, or in person within five days after receiving their bill and initiate a complaint or request an investigation concerning the bill.

Staff recommendation:

Double the time allowed, changing from five days to ten days after receiving the bill to initiate a bill dispute.

Current Rules, Section C:

A Review Manager will be designated to conduct an investigation of the Customer's billing dispute. The Review Manager will be the Customer Service Manager, or Customer Service Supervisor, and the investigation may involve other staff at a higher level in the organization. The investigation will include consideration of whether the Customer may amortize the unpaid balance over a reasonable period of time, not to exceed twelve months, but usually over a shorter time period.

Staff recommendations:

Combine the expected actions for Section C to Section B, thus eliminating an extra review period.

Current Rules, Section D:

The results of this determination will be communicated to the Customer in writing.

Staff recommendation:

Include that the results of this determination be communicated to the Customer in writing within ten days.

Current Rules, Section E:

If the billing dispute is not satisfactorily resolved with the Assistant General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities or his/her representative, the Customer may request a review by the Public Utilities Director by sending a written statement within five days of mailing the Assistant General Manager, Finance determination to: Public Utilities Director, 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501. Upon timely receipt of this written statement, the Public Utilities Director will make his determination and communicate said determination to the Customer in writing.

Staff recommendations:

Double the time allowed, changing from five days to ten days after receipt of the Assistant General Manager Letter and to include that the results of the General Manager's determination be communicated to the Customer in writing within ten days.

Current Rules, Section F:

If the Customer is not satisfied with the findings of the Public Utilities Director, the Customer may appeal to the Board of Public Utilities. The appeal must be submitted in writing to the Public Utilities Director, Secretary of the Board of Public Utilities, together with the reasons for the dispute within ten days following mailing of the Public Utilities Director's determination. In the absence of a timely filed appeal, the Director's determination shall be final. Upon receipt of a timely appeal, the matter will be reviewed by the Board of Public Utilities within 45 days of receipt. A written decision of the Board of Public Utilities shall be delivered to the Customer by personal delivery or certified mail within fifteen days following the appeal hearing. The decision of the Board of Public

Utilities is subject to appeal to the City Council pursuant to Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code.

Staff recommendations:

1. Add language to the Board of Public Utilities process to include that the matter will be reviewed by the Board of Public at a public Board meeting within 45 days of receipt and that the Customer will receive notification of the appeal date, time, and location.
2. Correct the final decision language to “The City Council has designated the Board of Public Utilities as the appropriate governing body to decide on the appeal pursuant to Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code. The determination of the Board of Public Utilities will be the final decision.”

The Committee recommendations for potential changes to these processes will need to be forwarded to the Board of Public Utilities for review at a publicly noticed Board agenda.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

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

These processes aligns 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 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 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 this update.

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Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Certifies availability
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Attachments:

1. Water Rule 17 – Bill Dispute Appeal Process
2. Electric Rule 21 – Bill Dispute Appeal Process
3. Public Utilities Code 10010
4. Presentation