



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

Rely on us.

TO: Commissioners Brown, Carlson, Mital, Simpson and Helgeson
FROM: Rene Gonzalez, Customer Solutions Manager; Anna Wade, Business Line Manager
DATE: August 24, 2018
SUBJECT: Limited Income Initiative Update
OBJECTIVE: Information Only

Issue

This update is provided to ensure ongoing alignment between Board direction and staff progress relating to the limited income program initiative.

Background

EWEB offers support to limited income ratepayers through bill pay assistance, education and energy efficiency incentives. At the June Board meeting, an evaluation of current programs was presented within the context of alternative strategies for delivering bill assistance and customer education. In the ensuing discussion, Commissioners responded with comments and preferences relating to program goals, scope and areas of focus and concern. This direction provided necessary guidance from which staff have pursued opportunities for EWEBs limited income offerings.

Discussion

In developing a vision for future programs, management has codified four elements of the limited income strategy; Energy Burden, Peak Burden, Crisis Relief and Education.

Energy Burden:

Energy burden is the weight of a customer's utility expenses relative to income. In order to have a positive impact on energy burden, EWEBs tactical approach must be multifaceted, combining crisis relief with billing strategies, education and energy efficiency awareness and investment. Energy burden represents EWEBs renewed, holistic approach to affordability, including our participation in the creation of affordable and efficient housing choices for limited income customers.

Peak Burden:

The winter heating season produces an affordability crisis every year for many of EWEBs customers. In order to proactively address seasonal volatility, Staff are pursuing a leveled billing program. While this program would be available and encouraged for all EWEB customers, limited income customers would be the target audience for promotional enrollment efforts.

Crisis Relief:

In addition to developing new programs and services, staff continues to explore solutions to improve and streamline existing internal and external processes.

As part of EWEB's review and analysis process, staff has met with numerous stakeholders, including multiple meetings with personnel from Lane County Health & Human Services Department (HSD). In doing so, EWEB staff has been transparent regarding the potential options being considered to meet our objectives. HSD has expressed concerns due to potential impacts to their existing operating model.

EWEB values the long standing partnership with HSD, and acknowledges the value of their role in servicing EWEB's limited-income customers with a broad range of support. Together, EWEB and HSD have identified potential opportunities which will enable us to better support our community through utility assistance. For example, EWEB and HSD are pursuing the viability of "deemed" income verification, where a customer can show documentation for other programs and services as a form of preapproval for EWEBs internal programs.

Focused education:

As directed by the Board, staff has reviewed current educational material and prioritized EWEBs areas of focus. Delivered content should support a customer's understanding of billing structure, the condition of their dwelling, and the options and resources available to address customer needs.

The most effective venue for the delivery for energy education is within the home. EWEBs Energy Specialist staff are best equipped to provide this education in tandem with the home energy audit.

Each of these four elements to the limited income strategy are essential to meeting customer needs. A successful program will require explicit and intentional coordination of the four elements. Today, EWEBs internal programs for bill assistance, energy efficiency and education operate somewhat autonomously from one another. Staff are developing internal processes and considering staffing resources to adopt an energy burden approach to affordability.

Request for Board Action

No action is requested at this time; Staff requests Commissioners' feedback on the general direction and progress relating to the limited income program initiative.