



APPROVED 4-8-20

MINUTES
City of Tacoma
Public Utility Board Meeting
March 17, 2020
8:30 a.m.

Chair Larkin called the special Public Utility Board meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. in the auditorium at Tacoma Public Utilities.

Present: Karen Larkin Bryan Flint, Christine Cooley, Carlos Watson, Mark Patterson

The meeting was quorate.

Amended Resolution U-11149 – A Resolution related to creating an Emergency Assistance Program during the period of the state of emergency declared by the City of Tacoma in response to COVID-19 in order to allow more households to qualify for assistance.

Board Member Patterson moved to adopt the resolution; seconded by Board Member Flint. Mr. Patterson moved to enter second amended Resolution U-11149 to include a fund for low-income assistance and a fund for Water Utility operations; seconded by Mr. Flint. Voice vote to enter the second amended resolution taken and carried.

Tom Morrill, Chief Deputy City Attorney summarized the resolution. This action provides for the creation of an emergency assistance program allowing additional households to receive assistance due to the COVID-19 emergency. There will be fewer requirements and higher income standards to allow more people to access these funds. One million dollars is being allocated and staff will continue to watch the situation to see if that amount needs to be adjusted. Steve Hatcher, Customer Services Manager, added that TPU is taking measures to protect staff, customers, and continue service. One of those steps is effective at close of business today, the TPU lobby will be closed to all customers and there is no projected time for it to reopen. To apply for assistance, customers can go to the online form and submit the application electronically. Another option is to phone 253-502-8600. The emergency funding is in addition to, not in lieu of, current assistance programs. Anyone currently qualified can also apply for this additional assistance. This resolution moves the federal poverty level from 150 percent to 200 percent. Late fees have also been stopped. For customers on the discount rate, their accounts have been locked and they're not subject to disconnection. In response to a Board request, Mr. Hatcher repeated the ways customers can contact TPU and stated that phone hours have been extended to 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mr. Hatcher also added that 47 percent of Power customers and 43 percent of Water customers are estimated to

be eligible for assistance. In response to a Board comment about bi-monthly billing and how bills could be received after the emergency is over, Director Flowers stated that those challenges are recognized. TPU will want to allow adequate time for customers to access assistance, even after the emergency declaration is over. This can be applied retroactively to give customers time to seek assistance and communicate challenges. If the funding runs out, staff will revisit this resolution with the Board. Mr. Hatcher added that TPU is offering an extended payment plan for customers. Customers will have up to 12 weeks to set up a payment plan for any outstanding balances; this is for all customers regardless of income qualifications. Chair Larkin stated that this assistance is for residential customers, not commercial customers. Mr. Hatcher confirmed that, but added that the extended payment plan will be offered for commercial customers, but not the assistance plans. Board Member Flint thanked staff for responding so quickly to the situation with this resolution. Many are living in poverty and approximately 91 percent of people cannot work from home. The lower-income population is most impacted by this crisis; Mr. Flint concluded with positive remarks about the resolution. In response to a Board inquiry about communicating this message, Director Flowers stated that there is a broad media release going out. The message is also on social media and will be included in the Mayor's 11:00 press conference. Public Affairs has communicated with all governments in the TPU service territory, community organizations, and neighborhood councils. Mr. Hatcher added that field crews will also communicate this material as they encounter customers. Mr. Patterson requested to see this information provided in multiple languages and to also have the application in multiple languages. Mr. Morrill shared that this resolution will appear before the City Council at its evening meeting tonight. Board Member Cooley thanked staff for the quick response for this resolution and made positive remarks. Chair Larkin shared that small businesses are mandated to be closed and we need to communicate with them about the extended payment plans and to make a special effort to conduct outreach to them. In closing, Chair Larkin stated that information can be obtained at mytpu.org/COVID19 or by calling 253-502-8600.

Voice vote was taken and carried; second amended Resolution U-11149 was passed unanimously.

Adjournment

There being no further business or comments, the Public Utility Board was adjourned at 8:49 a.m. until Wednesday, March 25, 2020 for a study session is at 3:00 p.m. at Tacoma Public Utilities, followed by the regular meeting at 6:30 p.m. at Tacoma Public Utilities.

Approved:



Karen Larkin, Chair



Mark Patterson, Secretary