

RESOLUTION 3291

A RESOLUTION OF THE BEND CITY COUNCIL ESTABLISHING COVID-19 RECOVERY UTILITY PAYMENT PLANS

Findings

- A. On March 16, 2020, the City Manager of the City of Bend issued an Administrative Order Declaring a State of Emergency in the City of Bend ("Emergency Order") resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other things, the Emergency Order suspended water service shut-offs and utility collection actions, including the institution of late fees, and penalties, while the Emergency Order was in effect.
- B. Following the expiration of the Emergency Order on June 30, 2021, and due to the negative financial impacts resulting from COVID-19, the City's Utility Director further extended water service shut-offs and collection actions through July 1, 2022.
- C. Over the course of the pandemic, the City has seen past due balances grow, both in numbers of accounts and amounts owed. Currently, more than 2,500 customers remain in delinquent status with an aggregated outstanding balance of approximately \$1 million.
- D. The City is acting now to provide utility relief programs to help those still facing financial hardship bring their accounts current and avoid water service shut-off and collection activities. The goal of these programs is to provide the tools to help customers manage their bills through a combination of utility assistance and bill management programs while allowing the City to meet our fiduciary responsibility to collect payments.
- E. While there are several state, local, and nonprofit utility billing assistance programs available to income eligible residential customers, there is still concern that there will not be enough assistance for all customers and that as a result some will be forced to choose between water and other necessities like food, medicine, and housing.
- F. To help mitigate the financial impacts of COVID-19 and prevent against a tidal wave of water shut-offs on or after July 1, 2022, the Bend City Council now wishes to direct the City Manager to come up with an installment payment plan program to assist residential and commercial customers manage payment of current and past-due balances while avoiding water shut-offs and additional late fees or penalties.
- G. It is a Council goal to use an equity lens for access to all City services, and to expand outreach to all community members, especially those in underserved communities. Accordingly, the installment payment plan program will include

eligibility criteria and generally applicable terms and conditions that are fair and ensure equitable access to all city utility customers.

Now, therefore, based on the above findings,


THE CITY OF BEND RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

- Section 1. The City Manager is authorized to establish an installment payment plan program ("Payment Plan Program" or "Program") available to utility customers carrying past-due balances as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Section 2. The City Manager will work with the Utility Department, the Finance Department, and the City Manager's Office to develop a Payment Plan Program that is fair and equitable to City utility customers while also meeting the City's fiduciary responsibility to collect utility payments.
- Section 3. Once established, the terms and conditions of the Payment Plan Program will be available on the City's website and upon request to the City's Utility Billing Department. In addition, the City will establish and implement a communications plan prior to July 1, 2022, to ensure Program availability is known widely in the city, including to marginalized or underserved communities.
- Section 4. The Program will become effective on the date approved by Council and will remain in effect until July 1, 2024, unless further extended by the City Manager. No further Council authorization is necessary unless the Program is extended for more than six months past July 1, 2024.

Adopted by a vote of the Bend City Council on April 6, 2022.

YES: Mayor Sally Russell
Mayor Pro Tem Gena Goodman-Campbell
Councilor Barb Campbell
Councilor Melanie Kebler
Councilor Anthony Broadman
Councilor Megan Perkins
Councilor Rita Schenkelberg


NO: none


Sally Russell, Mayor

ATTEST:


Robyn Christie, City Recorder

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


Mary A. Winters, City Attorney