



County of Los Alamos

Council Meeting Staff Report

May 20, 2020

Agenda No.:	7.A
Indexes (Council Goals):	DPU FY2020 - 3.0 Be a Customer Service Oriented Organization that is Communicative, Efficient, and Transparent
Presenters:	Bob Westervelt
Legislative File:	12982-20

Title

Briefing on the Utilities Assistance Program

Recommended Action

None - discussion item only

Staff Recommendation

None - discussion item only

Body

In the past two years the BPU has taken action to expand the availability of funds available to support the community through the Utilities Assistance Program. While initially established to provide assistance for Gas and Electric services only, the program has been expanded to make assistance available for all services. "One Time Assistance" was added to allow for utilization of the fund to help customers with an unanticipated financial situation that results in a short-term financial need. A program to provide year around assistance for qualifying customers over age 65 was added. Most recently, the use of the median household income of the "Los Alamos Census Designated Place" as the financial criteria instead of the "Santa Fe Metropolitan Statistical Area" was adopted, raising the qualifying income threshold and allowing for more households to potentially qualify. The Addition of account holders qualified through the Social Security Administration for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for eligibility for year around assistance was also added with that last revision.

The UAP is funded entirely by voluntary donations from Los Alamos residents and customers. In the current COVID-19 situation, while several of Los Alamos' largest employers have continued operations in one form or another and many resident's income has been unaffected, there remains a likelihood that there will be many residents with increasing financial need. Both the Board and the Council have expressed concern and desire to explore how the fund may be utilized to provide more assistance and to more people if needed, but to do so additional donations would need to be received. We have already conducted some outreach to make sure citizens that may be in need are aware of the assistance available, and also to solicited additional contributions. The attached presentation provides an overview of the program history, current status, and recent activity. Also attached are the current authorizing rule, and the current UAP application.

Alternatives

None - discussion item only

Fiscal and Staff Impact

Since the program is funded entirely through voluntary contributions, budgetary fiscal impact is minimal - simply the modest amount of staff time expended to administer the program, and with the

recent addition of “Donate Now” the incremental credit card fees paid by the department to the credit card transaction processor. These fees are not expected to exceed \$500 in the course of an entire fiscal year.

Attachments

A - UAP Presentation BPU May 2020

B - Rule GR18 - Utilities Assistance Program

C - UAP Application