



Minutes for March 4, 2021

Members attending the meeting:

Christina Bouler, Mark Campen, Tiki Dixon, Coral Getino, Erin Gill, Barbara Kelly, Terry Ledford, Gwen McKenzie, Amy Midis, Kent Minault, David Myers, Mike Odom, Felecia Outsey, Haseeb Qureshi, Dr. Stephen Smith

Others in attendance:

Facilitator: Dr. Bill Lyons

KUB Staff: Gabriel Bolas, Tiffany Martin, Elba Marshall

Old Business

None

New Business

The Community Advisory Panel met at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom on March 4, 2021.

Dr. Lyons welcomed the panel members and asked if anyone had any corrections to the meeting minutes from last month's meeting. There were no corrections.

Dr. Lyons recognized Tiffany Martin, KUB Vice President and Chief Customer Officer, for an overview of KUB's customer programs and assistance for low-income customers.

Tiffany provided information on KUB's customer service division and efforts to serve low-income customers, including KUB's customer counselor staff who work full-time to connect customers in need to resources that can assist them and initiatives such as Project Help, weatherization assistance programs, KUB's new Toilet Replacement Program, and free energy savings workshops.

Christina Bouler asked about the waiting list for weatherization assistance and how KUB determines which energy efficiency measures are cost effective. Tiffany shared there are approximately 3,000 customers on the waiting list. The average cost to weatherize a home is around \$10,000, and KUB's programs follow U.S. Department of Energy standards for energy efficiency measures.

Erin Gill commented on the significant increase in funding for weatherization assistance and it being beyond what City of Knoxville Smarter Cities stakeholders envisioned several years ago.

Dr. Lyons asked Tiffany if she felt the weatherization or bill payment assistance is more effective in helping customers. Tiffany expressed the weatherization services help customers because they provide a longer-term solution for saving energy and reducing bills. However, bill payment assistance will always be important for situations where customers need help for other reasons, such as a health crisis or loss of a job.

Kent Minault noted with the weatherization assistance waiting list of nearly 3,000 customers and current pace of work being around 200 homes per year it would take a very long time to serve everyone in need. Tiffany agreed but also noted the success related to the significant increase in funding over the last several years so that many more customers are being served than were able to be served in the past.

Christina Bouler noted with the average cost to weatherize a home being around \$10,000 and the average customer bill savings, the return on investment is lengthy and likely exceeds the life of some of the homes. Tiffany agreed it's a big investment, but the service reduces the need for emergency bill payment assistance and also benefits the environment by saving energy.

Haseeb Qureshi asked if there were plans to show more data and also anecdotal information from customers about how their lives are improved by the weatherization. Tiffany confirmed KUB does have testimonials from customers and is also working on more data, especially as the number of homes served is growing.

Tiffany continued her presentation to share information related to KUB's pandemic relief efforts for customers, including a moratorium on shut offs for non-payment, deferral of rate increases (along with delay of some utility infrastructure projects), and waiving transaction fees for various payment methods. She discussed automatic payment plans established for all customers with past due balances (with no interest), maintaining customer credit ratings to pre-pandemic levels, and permanent elimination of door notice and payment processing fees. Tiffany described KUB's work to provide funds for the \$12 million customers needed for bill payment assistance, including nearly \$6 million in federal funding and Community Cares grants in partnership with local agencies.

Amy Midis asked if KUB is applying interest to extended payment plans established for customers, and Tiffany confirmed there are no interest charges.

Haseeb Qureshi asked if KUB is partnering with CAC on the bill payment assistance programs, and Tiffany confirmed yes.

Tiffany described KUB's \$6 million COVID Utility Relief Effort (CURE). CURE was put in place by KUB to fill the gap in funds needed to assist both residential and business customers behind on bills due to the pandemic.

Haseeb Qureshi asked if KUB was working with organizations like the Knoxville Area Urban League to get the word out and Tiffany confirmed this has been done. He also shared a thought that it may be helpful to allow other customers to contribute through their

KUB bills to help other customers in need of bill payment assistance similar to how customers can support weatherization assistance through Round It Up. Tiffany explained customers can contribute to Project Help currently.

Tiki Dixon expressed appreciation for the large amount of assistance KUB has put in place and inquired how long KUB could sustain this due to the strain on the KUB budget. Tiffany explained KUB is not likely to be able to do more to make funds available but wanted to do as much as possible and will continue to direct customers to resources to assist them.

Kent Minault noted during the pandemic the Sierra Club was advocating across the state for utilities to suspend shut offs, and they were able to share KUB as a good example that had already taken this action.

Dr. Lyons asked the panel members for any other comments or questions. Christina Bouler asked if it was possible for information to be made public about past due balances by census tract. Tiffany noted KUB is currently working with a group to try to make that data available.

Haseeb Qureshi commented that Mike Odom may be able to assist in getting the word out about payment assistance to small businesses. Mike Odom confirmed the Knoxville Chamber is working to do this.

Following the discussion on meeting topics, the Community Advisory Panel adjourned at 7:20 p.m.