

REGULAR MEETING OF THE JEFFERSON UTILITIES COMMISSION, HELD APRIL 12, 2021

On call of the roll, commissioners present were: Pieters, Ganser, Oppermann, Bristol and Neils. Also present were: Utility Manager Adler, Office Manager Statz, City Attorney Rogers and Customer Accounts Clerk Kara Mroz. Absent was: Brandel and Adams. The meeting began at 5:33 p.m.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

MINUTES

It was moved by Comm. Neils and seconded by Comm. Bristol to approve the minutes from the March 8, 2021 meeting. Motion carried on a voice vote. Comm. Ganser abstained due to his absence.

EXPENDITURES

It was moved by Comm. Pieters and seconded by Comm. Ganser to approve the payment of March 2021 bills totaling \$1,301,496.11. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Pieters – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Neils – Aye, Oppermann – Aye, Bristol – Aye)

DISCUSSION – WPPI BILLING ERROR

Utility Manager Adler explained that WPPI has caught a billing error with our purchase power invoice. The total due to WPPI is \$45,490.59. This charge will be billed back via the PCAC mechanism. WPPI will spread the chargeback out over three months.

Comm. Oppermann questioned how this will affect customer's bills.

Utility Manager Adler stated it should only affect customers' by a few dollars.

Office Manager Statz stated WPPI spread the chargeback out over three months to have as minimal effect on customer's bills as possible. She stated customers shouldn't really notice a huge difference on their monthly bills.

Comm. Pieters asked how the error was discovered.

Utility Manager Adler stated there are two meters at the Crawfish substation. Those meters were not showing the same information. After some investigating, it was discovered that the new meter that was installed in January 2020, dropped a couple of decimal places in the readings. While it doesn't seem to be a big deal, those decimal places added up to over \$45,000 in unbilled charges.

Comm. Neils questioned if we would be sending a letter to customers explaining the billing error.

Office Manager Statz stated there was not a plan to do so. She didn't want to draw attention to the issue and cause alarm with customers.

The Utilities Commission was in favor of the method used to back bill Jefferson Utilities for the unbilled costs.

DISCUSSION - TRIP UPDATE

Office Manager Statz introduced Customer Accounts Clerk Kara Mroz to the commission. She stated the rest of what is on the agenda tonight are Ms. Mroz's job duties. She thought it was a great opportunity to put a face to a name for the commission.

Office Manager Statz stated the TRIP program was a huge success this year. She stated the utility collected about \$15,000 from garnishing customer's tax returns. In addition, the utility collected almost \$85,000 from customers making payments to avoid the tax return garnishment. Office Manager Statz stated the TRIP

program will now become a standard part of the collection process moving forward. She stated it has given the utility leverage that we do not otherwise have during the winter months. She stated Ms. Mroz has worked diligently on the program since the beginning of the year and the payoff of about \$100,000 is well worth her time and effort.

Utility Manager Adler stated staff learned about the TRIP program by attending conferences with MEUW and WPPI and talking with other utilities.

Comm. Oppermann stated he was in support of staff going to all the trainings and conferences they could because learning new things, like the TRIP program, benefits the utility.

DISCUSSION – DISCONNECTIONS

Office Manager Statz disconnections will resume, with the first shut off being April 22. In March, Ms. Mroz mailed out 173 letters to customers that were severely past due. The total past due amount of the 173 customers was \$107,420.31. As of March 31, the total past due of 31 days or more was \$95,185.80. Office Manager Statz stated this is the lowest we have seen going to the month of April since 2015. She attributes this to the TRIP program. She was very pleased with these results.

Comm. Oppermann thanked Ms. Mroz and the rest of the office staff for their hard work on the TRIP program.

Comm. Bristol stated a lot of businesses have had to think outside of the box during the pandemic and this is an example of the success that can occur when you are forced to think differently.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION – TEMPORARY LIFT OF TENANT DEFERRED PAYMENT ARRANGEMENT TARIFF RULES

Office Manager Statz stated the Public Service Commission has given utilities the opportunity to temporarily waive deferred payment arrangement rules in their tariffs to help customers catch up on their bills, if they wish. She stated Jefferson Utilities has four criteria in its tariff that state if a tenant customer falls under any of the categories, they are not allowed to have an arrangement.

Office Manager Statz explained she did some data collection to determine how the change would affect Jefferson Utilities. She stated that of the 173 customers Ms. Mroz sent letters to in March, 23 of them were tenants that are not eligible for arrangements. She checked the accounts and found that 20 of those 23 have held large balances during the winter months in previous years. The other three customers have not had great payment histories, but have made efforts to pay. She went on to say that of the 23 customers this change would help only 26% have received energy assistance. The other 74% have either not applied for energy assistance or were denied. It was for those reasons that she was not recommending the utility make any changes to its tariff, in respect to tenant deferred payment arrangement rules. She was looking for feedback on this from the commission.

Comm. Oppermann asked the commission for input on the issue.

Comm. Pieters and Comm. Ganser stated they were not in favor of making any changes to our current practice.

Comm. Neils stated she was not in favor of allowing the changes since most of the customers this would benefit immediately have not made payments during the winter months in the past as well.

Comm. Bristol asked what would happen if the customers could not set up a deferred payment arrangement.

Office Manager Statz stated they would be required to make payment in full. If full payment wasn't made, they would be disconnected.

Comm. Bristol asked what would happen to the balance owed if the customer couldn't pay the balance and were disconnected.

Office Manager Statz explained if the balance went unpaid after disconnection occurred the balance would eventually be transferred to the tax roll for collection.

Comm. Bristol stated he was trying to think about what landlords would want the utility to do.

Comm. Oppermann stated he thought we would just be pushing off the inevitable. He was not in favor of waiving the current tariff rules.

No action was taken on the issue, as the commission did not wish to make any changes to current tariff rules.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION – COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION – JEFFERSON PUBLIC LIBRARY

It was moved by Comm. Ganser and seconded by Comm. Pieters to approve a contribution of \$500 for the summer library program. On call of the roll, motion carried. (Pieters – Aye, Ganser – Aye, Neils – Aye, Oppermann – Aye, Bristol - Aye)

It was moved by Comm. Bristol and seconded by Comm. Neils to adjourn. Motion carried on a voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.