

WALLA WALLA CITY COUNCIL
Work Session Minutes
May 6, 2019

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Clark called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. in the Fulton Community Room, 54 E. Moore Street.

Present: Councilmembers Yazmin Bahena, Riley Clubb, Jerry Cummins, Myron Huie, Steve Moss, Tom Scribner, and Mayor Barbara Clark.

Absent: None

City staff in attendance: City Manager Nabel Shawa, Deputy City Manager Byron Olson, Finance Director Jean Teasdale, Public Works Director Ki Bealey, City Engineer Neal Chavre, Utilities Engineer Frank Nicholson, Civil Engineer Doug Eaton, Customer Service Supervisor Rachel Warren, and City Clerk Kammy Hill.

2. ACTIVE AGENDA

A. Discussion on low-income utility discount.

Andy Baker, Project Manager with FCS Group, reviewed:

- City's existing program is limited to low-income seniors and low-income disabled customers. Maximum household income is 125 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. Eligible customers receive a twenty-percent discount on all utility rates. There are currently 128 households participating in the program which is estimated to be a seventeen percent participation rate at an annual cost of approximately \$41,000.
- The existing program is funded through raised utility rates. It is proposed that if an expanded program is considered, the Council raise the utility tax rate by .5 percent which would provide approximately \$136,000 for a low-income discount program. This will provide the capacity for an additional 296 households to participate.
- Program alternatives for consideration include:
 - Expand existing program from just low-income senior and disabled customers to all low-income households.
 - Income thresholds – leave at 125 percent of Federal poverty guidelines or change.

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- Amount of discount – leave at twenty percent or increase.
- Background demographics of community and 2019 Federal poverty guidelines.
- Financial impact of expanding eligibility requirements; adjustments to income thresholds; and increased discount.
- If program is expanded, it is recommended that the number of participants be capped on a first-come, first-served basis, so impact of expanded program can be analyzed.
- If privacy considerations can be addressed, consider simplifying the application process by leveraging information from other assistance programs, such as the free and reduced school lunch program.

There was discussion on expanding the utility discount program to all low-income customers; components; and implementation approach. It was also suggested that the County be asked to collect City stormwater fees on property tax bills to lower customer utility bills. Staff indicated the legality of collecting this fee if the property owner chooses not to pay would have to be reviewed with legal counsel.

It was the consensus of a majority of Council to have further review done on the impacts and costs of expanding the utility discount program to all low-income customers (at or below 125 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines) at a twenty, thirty, and forty percent discount on utility bills.

B. Proposed process for streetlight requests.

Civil Engineer Eaton reviewed a proposed process and system for rating citizen requests for additional streetlights.

There was discussion on the proposed process and whether the City should be installing the lights or contracting with Pacific Power.

It was a consensus of a majority of Council to have staff move \$10,000 from the general fund to the streets fund to implement the process for handling requests for additional streetlights.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

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4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.