City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Riverside Public Utilities Power Customers to Benefit From Greater Efficiency, Improved Resiliency Via Expanded Use of Public Benefit Funds

New programs approved by City Council will help residents, City save energy, stay safe

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The City of Riverside's biggest addition to the Public Benefit programs offered by Riverside Public Utilities in roughly 30 years will provide RPU electric customers with options to save money, be more energy efficient, increase the resiliency of their properties, and improve community-wide safety.

The programs recently approved by the City Council were studied extensively by a Community Working Group and recommended for passage by the Board of Public Utilities. The community-led effort seeks to make more widespread use of Public Benefits Funds derived from a usage-based charge known as the Public Benefits Charge (PBC), which is required by state law.

RPU has offered numerous energy savings, education, and low-income support programs since the law was passed in 1996. The new programs are the latest and biggest effort by RPU and will complement existing programs and provide thoughtful and research-based assistance to improve the lives of its electric customers.

Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson in April called for the creation of a task force specifically to study the best uses for about $34 million that was available in the Public Benefits Energy Surcharge Fund reserve account. The 14-member group met four times and completed its work in January.

"One of the many benefits of having a local utility is the ability to craft specific programs that work best for your community," Lock Dawson said. "RPU has taken the input from local stakeholders and created a group of programs that emphasize efficiency, savings and community resiliency. I greatly appreciate the efforts of everyone involved."

RPU staff are at work developing specific guidelines for each program and mechanisms through which RPU electric customers will be able access the programs, which include:

* Residential Energy Storage Rebate Program -- $5 million -- a $500/kWh rebate (more for low-income customers) to help pay for installation of energy storage systems (batteries) at homes. The program also increases the resilience of RPU's distribution system.

* Community and Emergency Centers Solar and Battery Rebate Program -- $12 million – will pay for solar and battery storage projects, as well as energy efficiency rebates, to make community centers within Riverside more reliable resources for community members seeking to escape the heat or during emergencies, including during power outages resulting in customers not having reliable air conditioning or the ability to charge medical and other necessary devices.

* Utility Operations Center and City Emergency Operations Center Solar and Battery Rebate Program -- $5 million – Solar and battery storage with microgrid capabilities to maintain operations at crucial facilities when City workers are responding to an emergency during a significant power outage.

* Rebates for Battery Energy Storage or Solar with Battery Energy Storage -- $9 million – a limited number of customers within one residential neighborhood will be chosen to test programs that help residents save money by storing power for use during the late afternoons, when demand for power is greatest and prices are higher.

* Energy Savings Assistance Program (ESAP) and the Mobile Home and Multifamily Program -- $2 million – Adds funding to two existing direct install programs to increase energy savings for low-income and fixed-income households with no out of pocket costs for qualified customers. The funding increase will allow these programs to directly help more people.

* Riverside Universities Research Grant Program -- $1 million -- Expand funding for this program to provide grant-supported research for energy efficiency programs as well as to support new technologies that would help RPU customers.

"Whether it's creating a battery system for your home or seeking shelter at a community center during an emergency, Riverside residents will be well-served by these programs," Mayor Pro Tem Steven Robillard said. "RPU, our local utility, has taken the recommendations from our community and created opportunities for its customers to thrive into the future."

Assembly bill 1890 in 1996 required electric utilities to establish a public benefit charge with each local public owned utility required to establish a minimum charge of 2.85% of electric revenue to be utilized to fund public benefits programming.

The bill called for the money to be used in at least one of four areas: cost-effective demand side management (energy efficiency and energy conservation), new investment in renewable energy, low-income assistance and education, or research, development, and demonstration.

Years before the Assembly bill, RPU already was providing support to low-income customers through the Sharing Households Assist Riverside's Energy (SHARE) program with donations from customers. RPU has provided educational programming explaining utility services since the mid-1990s, and, when the bill passed, expanded more into rebates to improve energy efficiency and support development of renewable energy.

"RPU is truly a locally based utility," General Manager David A. Garcia said. "We look forward to working with the community to implement these programs in the best ways possible."