

MINUTES
CITY OF LAKE WORTH
ELECTRIC UTILITY ADVISORY BOARD
WORKSHOP
July 8th, 2020 – 6:00 PM

The meeting was called to order by Ryan Oblander on the above date at 6:00 PM via Teleconference

ROLL CALL:

Present were members: Ryan Oblander, Ramsay Stevens, Matthew Portilla. Ibrahim Chalhoub and Mark Mezzancello absent for the role call.

Edward Liberty, the Electric Utility Director and Board Liaison was in attendance.

Franco Bellitto, Customer Service Manager was present.

Joel Rutsky, Interim Revenue Protection Manager

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The pledge of allegiance was led by Ramsay Stevens.

AGENDA – Additions/Deletions/Reordering:

The agenda was reordered under new business. New Business Item B: Discussion of credit card fees associated with customer use of credit cards to pay City utility bills moved before New Business Item A: Discussion of a pre-pay plan for customer utility payments

PRESENTATIONS:

There were no presentations on the agenda.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OF NON-AGENDAED ITEMS:

There was no public participation of non-agendaed items.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

EUAB 07.08.20 MINUTES

Action: The motion was made by Ramsay Stevens to approve minutes in the agenda second by Matthew Portilla.

Vote: Unanimous

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

No unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion of a pre-pay plan for customer utility payments

Exceleron CIO, Craig Huston presented staff and board members with a flexible, and convenient pre-payment solution for customers to pay their utility bills. With the implementation of the new Advance Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system, the City sought to provide customers with access their utilities account anytime and anywhere via internet and their mobile device.

With the new service customers will have access to detailed account information on their consumption history and can choose the amount and frequency of payments, thereby obtaining greater control over their utilities service.

Mr. Steven asked does the program have the option of budget billing.

Mr. Huston explained that budget billing is not part of the program as budget billing is an estimate of the customer's yearly consumption broken into 12 monthly payments and in the pre-pay plan customer choose the frequency of payments.

Ryan Oblander asked if customers on the net metering program are able to use the MyUsage App.

Joel Rutsky replied that the City is working with account managers from Exceleron and the Advance Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system to integrate the net metering files. While in the app net metering customers will have access to their daily delivered and received readings.

Lengthy discussion ensued.

Ramsay Stevens and Matt Portilla are in full support of the program and both recommend the pre-pay plan and the MyUsage app program.

Discussion of credit card fees associated with customer use of credit cards to pay City utility bills

Board Liaison opened the discussion stating that one of the nuances in the City is that electric, water, sewer and some of refuse services are included in one common bill. When customers make a payment, this is distributed amongst the various funds that appear on the utility bill. Customer have various options to pay their bill, and credit cards is one of the options. Customer are increasingly paying with credit cards, especially the rewards type credit cards that offer different incentives to their customers.

The credit card company charges the vendor for the transaction and the City as the vendor has historically absorbed these fees. Mr. Liberty expressed concern with costs solely charged to electric utility department and the credit card fees escalating cost.

Franco Bellito, the City Customer Service Manager stated the City pays a much higher rate for credit cards that have rewards program as the transaction go by a percentage of the amount charged.

Ramsay Steven asked staff how much are the credit cards charging for each transaction.

Franco Bellito stated that credit cards that do not offer rewards charge a flat rate of \$1.68 for a maximum transaction limit of up to \$5,000. For reward cards the City is charged about 2.65% of the transaction up to maximum transaction limit of \$5,000.

Mr. Stevens asked what is the average bill for users that have credit card with rewards program. Does staff know the policies followed by other neighboring utilities in this regard.

Franco Bellito responded by stating staff will research the average bill for users that have credit card with rewards program since this information is not readily available, however, Mr. Bellito presented information on policies followed by other neighboring utilities.

Mr. Oblander asked if the City charges customer for the returned check fees. Mr. Bellito stated yes per City's resolution customer are charged for fees incurred by a returned check.

Matthew Portilla asked if staff saw a shift in credit card usage after the City's data breach a few years ago.

Franco Bellito stated the City did notice a drop in credit card usage when the old system was in place but this changed as more customer became familiar with new Paymentus system.

Lengthy discussion ensued.

BOARD COMMENTS:

Mr. Stevens inquired on if the cause of an outage on 6th Avenue South and East of Federal Highway on July 4th was due to fireworks.

Mr. Liberty answer no the outage was due to a failed switch that burned as a result of certain environmental conditions such as salt water which reduces the life of the equipment.

Mr. Oblander inquired on the what seemed to be metal straps around the City's poles.

Board Liaison stated these are not metal straps, it is an animal guard or wrap that helps against wild life creating a fault in the circuit.

Ryan Oblander read public comment from Ana Schaeffer since customer was not in attendance.

Anna Schaefer asked the board to advocate on her behalf to remove the minimum bill charged to net metering customers as it is unfair and it places the charge solely on a small number of customers.

BOARD LIAISON REPORTS AND COMMENTS:

Board Liaison commended the Line department on fantastic job around the City. The crew has work very hard to restore services during the summer months and as part of system reliability improvement project the crew has worked six days a week to switch customers from the 4kV system to 26kV.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45pm.

ATTEST:

Sugey Moreno, Executive Secretary

Minutes Approved:

A digital audio recording of this meeting is available in the Office of the City Clerk.