

Emergency Utility Assistance Program

Background

The Emergency Utility Assistance Program (formerly the Low Income Utility Assistance Program) was originally approved by Council in 2004 to assist City of Salem utility customers facing financial difficulties. Customers were referred to local nonprofit community service agencies, and each agency determined client eligibility and the amount of funding the customer would receive. The program was supported by donations held in a special trust account and used exclusively to provide payment assistance to low income customers. Demand consistently outpaced funds available in the program, so in 2016, the Water/Wastewater Task Force recommended, and Salem Council approved, matching donations with utility rate funds up to \$10,000 per fiscal year. This positive change has provided sufficient and consistent funding for the program to assist qualifying customers with urgent financial needs.

Funding Sources

- Customer / community donations.
- City of Salem utility revenue match of up to \$10,000 per fiscal year.
- All funds are used to assist customers – there are no administration fees.

Program

- Emergency assistance is applied to the utility account for the amount of the delinquent bill or balance up to a maximum of \$150 per 12-month cycle.
- If the delinquent bill / balance is less than \$150, the customer may reapply during the 12-month cycle until the \$150 maximum has been reached.
- Assistance may only be applied to utility rates and charges and may not be applied to fees for violations such as meter tampering, meter obstruction, or meter bypass.

Qualification

Customers who are facing a temporary financial difficulty and cannot pay their utility bill are referred to local nonprofit service agencies that qualify customers for the City of Salem Emergency Utility Assistance Program based on the following criteria:

- Applicant must be the named account holder;
- Utility account must be single-family residential;
- Account must be past due or delinquent;
- Applicant may not be a Salem Housing Authority client or receive housing assistance; and,
- Applicant must meet the income guidelines for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Assistance Provided

Once qualified by the service agency, City of Salem utility billing staff are notified and apply a credit to the account of up to \$150 per 12-month cycle using funds from the trust account.