



# Customer Dispute and Hearings Process

**Low Income Consumer Advocacy Working Group**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

July 2014





# Council Resolution No. 20131212-081

City Manager to work with Discount Steering Committee and other consumer advocates to:

- Propose an appointment process for utility hearings officers
- Review City rules governing the administrative hearings process
- Improve the availability of customer rights information regarding billing disputes and reporting



# Recommendation Process

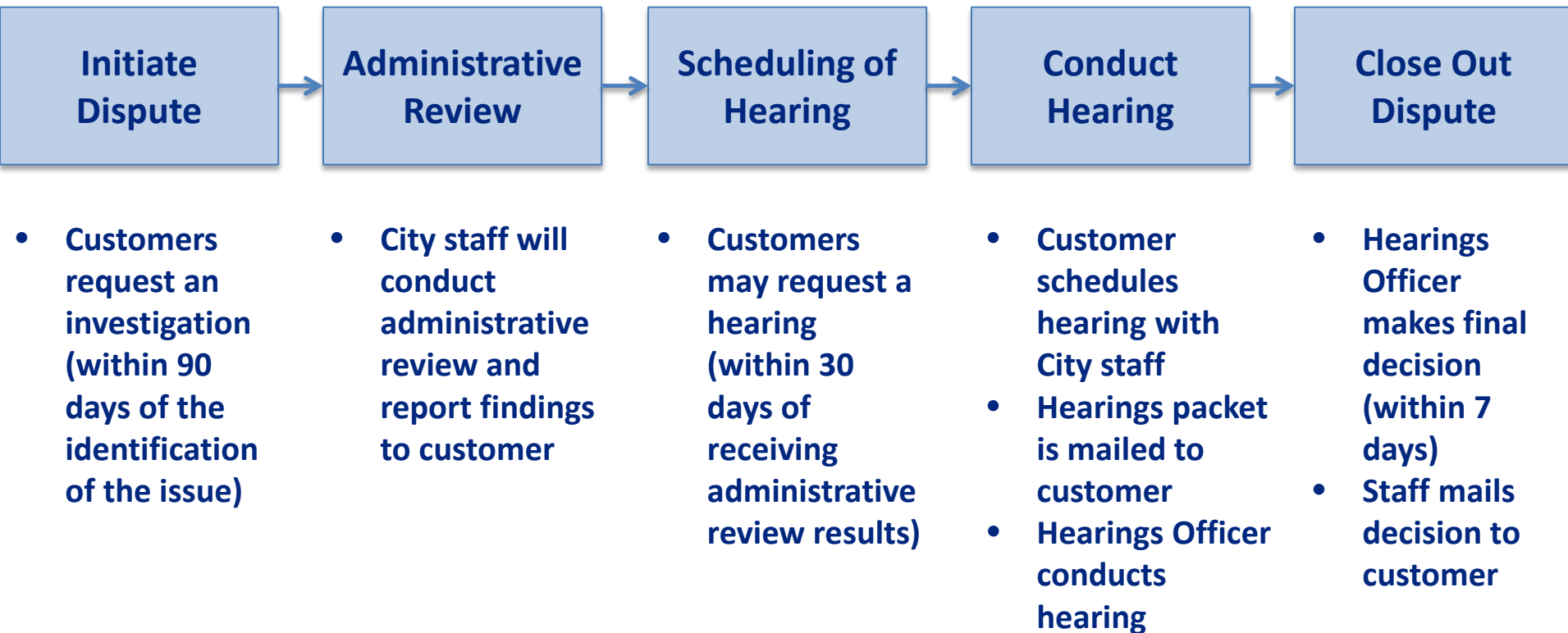
Community advocates met with City staff on May 28, 2014.  
The following items were discussed:

- Current administrative review and hearings process
- Issues with current process
  - Initial administrative review is too informal
  - Availability of hearing's packets prior to the hearing
  - Hearing Officer's do not appear to be independent from Austin Energy
- Possible process improvements

A set of recommendations were identified for consideration.



# Current Dispute and Hearings Process



There are currently two (2) Hearings Officers contracted by Austin Energy to support this process. The Officers conduct hearings for electric bill disputes, water bill disputes, water conservation fines, red light fines, viscous dog fines, code compliance, and APD alarm fees disputes.

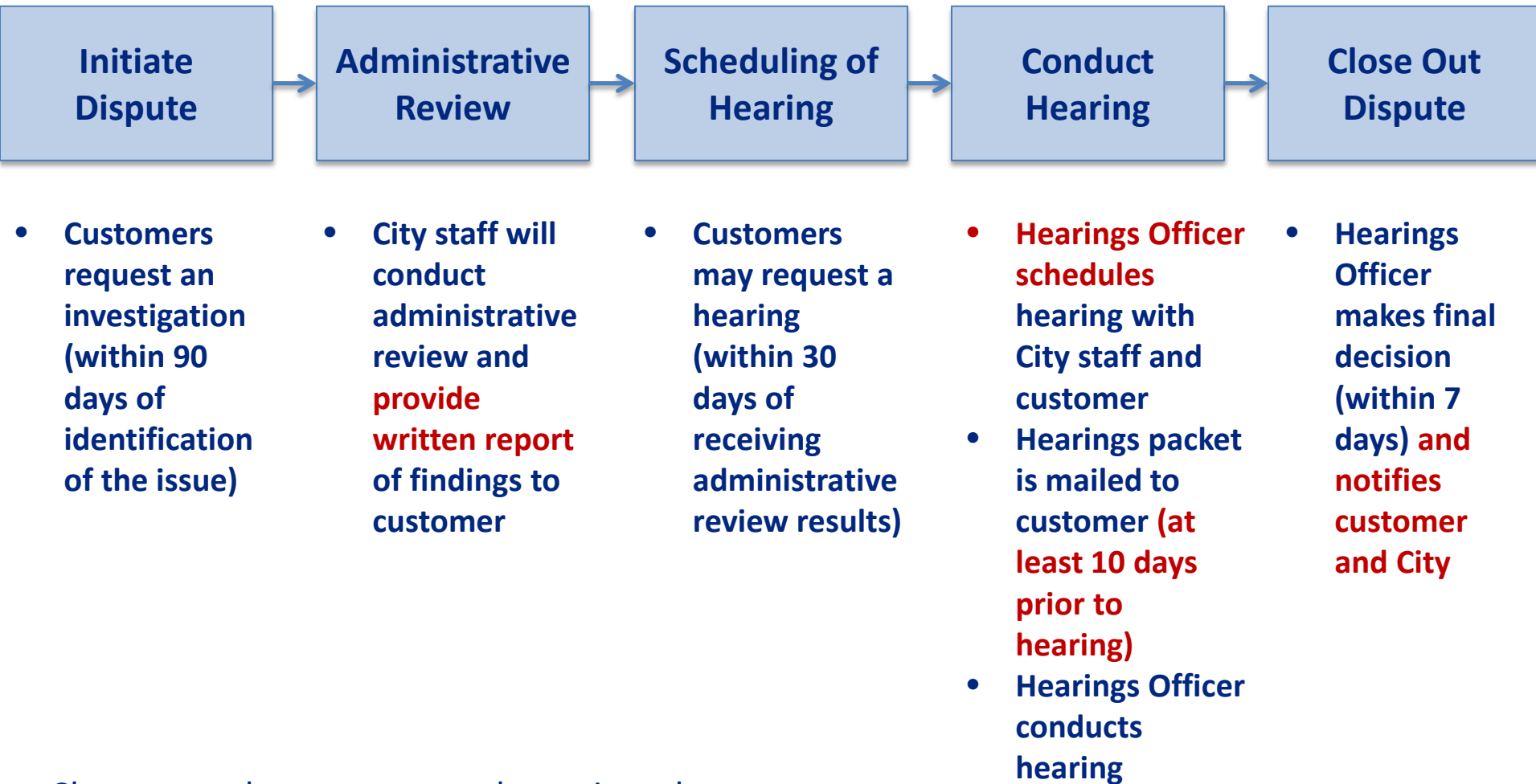


# Committee Recommendations

- 1. Provide results of administrative review to the customer in writing**
- 2. The Hearings Officer will manage the entire hearings process (i.e. communicate with customer and City to schedule the hearings, ensure documents are provided within timelines, etc.)**
- 3. Provide hearings packet to the customer at least 10 days prior to scheduled hearing date; and include supporting information in the packet such as field notes, photos, system records, etc.)**
- 4. Create an ombudsman role to provide support to customers and assist customer through the hearings process**
- 5. Provide general information about the dispute and hearings process in the annual Bill-of-Rights notification to customers**
- 6. Provide additional locations for hearings**
- 7. Develop and provide annual reports on the hearings process and rulings**



# Proposed Dispute and Hearings Process



Changes to the process are shown in red.



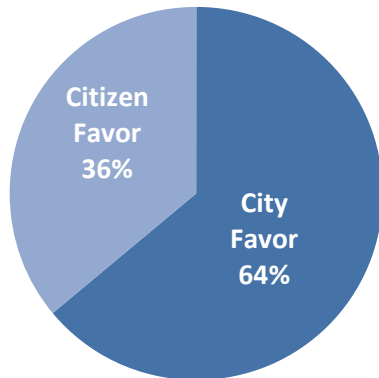
# Implementation

Advocacy Recommendations	Management Response	Impact
1. Provide results of administrative review to the customer in writing	Partially concurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires 2-4 additional FTE's (Potential of over 5,000 written responses a month)</li><li>• City Regulation changes required</li></ul>
2. The Hearings Officer manages the entire hearings process	Concur (Current contract in place through FY16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase in contract cost;</li><li>• More onerous process for customer</li><li>• City Regulation changes required</li></ul>
3. Provide hearings packet to the customer at least 10 days prior to scheduled hearing date	Concur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City Regulation changes required</li></ul>
4. Create an ombudsman for customer support	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>
5. Provide general information about the dispute and hearings process to customers annually	Concur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>
6. Provide additional locations for hearings	Concur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AE is looking to expand to other potential services sites</li></ul>
7. Develop and provide annual reports on the hearings process and rulings	Concur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>

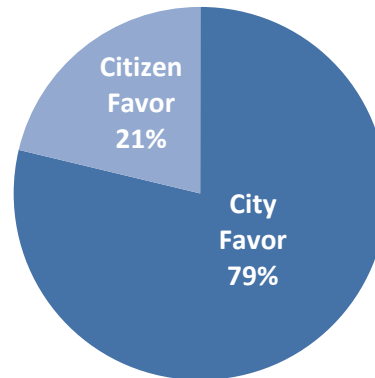


# Hearings Rulings 5-Year Report

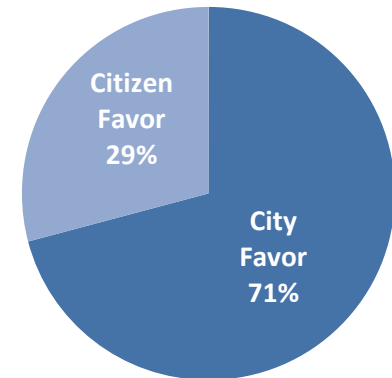
## APD Decisions



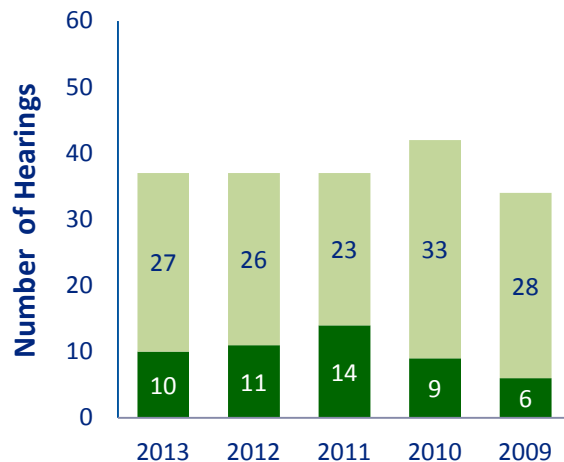
## Water Decisions



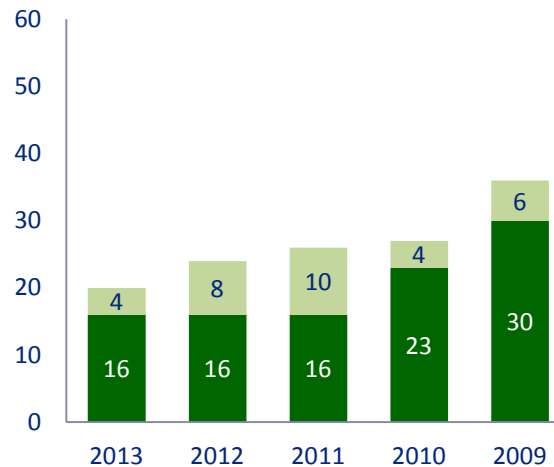
## Electric Decisions



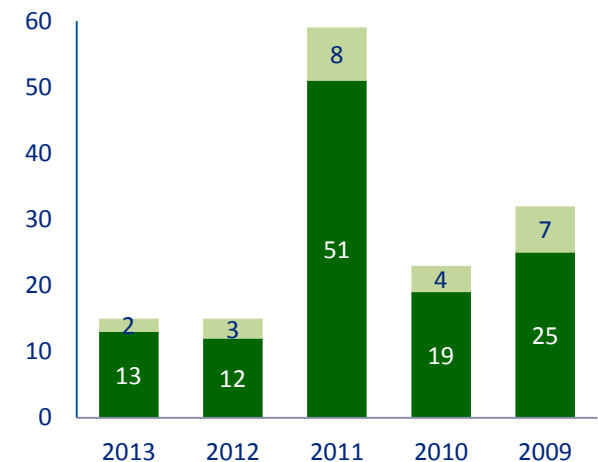
## APD



## Water



## Electric



■ Residential ■ Commercial