



## **LOW INCOME CONSUMER ADVISORY TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES**

**January 16, 2015**

The Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force convened in a regular meeting at Town Lake Center, 721 Barton Springs Road, Room 100, in Austin, Texas. Chairperson, Carol Biedrzycki called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

**Task Force Members in Attendance:** Carol Biedrzycki, Tim Arndt, Dan Pruett, Cyrus Reed, Chris Strand, and Kelly Weiss. Lanetta Cooper, Karen Hadden, and Richard Halpin were not in attendance.

**Staff in Attendance:** Austin Energy staff included Debra Athearn, Sady Bartlett, Toye Goodson-Collins, Liz Jambor, Debbie Kimberly, Denise Kuehn, Stacy Lewis, and Ronnie Mendoza.

Carol Biedrzycki went over housekeeping rules asking that all not speak at the same time during the discussion panel. She would ensure that everyone's questions got answered.

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES-** Carol proposed three changes to the January 9th meeting minutes: on page 1, under Citizen Communications, delete the last sentence because she still wanted to get clarification on whether the members could question staff during Citizen Communications. On page 2, item # 3, first sentence, she wanted to change the words "clarified and corrected" to commented on". On page 2, item # 3, last sentence, instead of "Carol did not want", she asked to change it to "because of time limitations". No changes were made from other members. Carol requested approval of the minutes as amended. Dan Pruett approved and Chris Strand seconded. The minutes were approved as amended. Sady Bartlett informed that there was no rule or procedure in regards to Citizen Communications, noted that it would be a courtesy to answer questions at the time of Citizen Communications so that citizens would not have to wait until the end of the meeting. It was up to the group to decide on what they wanted to do. Carol added that they would see if they could complete Citizen Communications during the allotted time frame but if there was further discussion needed, it could be discussed during agenda item # 6.

### **CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS: GENERAL**

Kent Ambrose, American Conservation & Air- reported completion of 7 jobs out of 2 bundles and there was progress. He saw improvements with Austin Energy (AE) and the staff was willing to listen. The right people were in place. The members questioned Kent on how he determined the customer's need for HVAC. Kent commented that HVAC should be included where it is needed.

Charlie Ford, City Conservation/Totally Cool- reported that communication lines had opened up and he felt optimistic. He felt that customers did not understand their own heating and cooling issues. He would like to see a compromise happen by adding some diagnostic processes to troubleshoot issues. Carol stated that HVAC would be on the next meeting's agenda and encouraged Kent and Charlie to attend with other contractors to offer input.

**2. DISCUSSION PANEL-** Representatives shared information and thoughts on how to improve energy efficiency for low income people. They discussed their low income programs, funding sources, and how they currently work with AE and/or other agencies. Discussion with local non-profit agencies included:

Chantel Bottoms, The United Way for Greater Austin, 211 Service

Topics shared included: Electric payment assistance continued to be top ranked need. Electric bill was ranked # 4 on the list and #2 of unmet needs for clients. Weatherization and home service repairs were 3% (530 out of 130-150k a year) of their calls per year. Questions and discussion followed.

Susan Peterson, Foundation Communities

Topics shared included: Details on development of affordable multifamily housing and work with AE on solar, weatherization, and utility assistance programs. Foundation Communities is the largest private solar owner in Austin. With the component rebates, they are low enough that Foundation Communities can get better deals from contractors outside of the utility's rebate programs.

Weatherization is often provided in a piece-meal approach because the income eligibility requirement for weatherization varies from the housing eligibility requirement (200% of federal poverty guideline versus 30 to 80% of median income.) The organization would like a whole building approach for weatherization and a multifamily rebate program for solar. Requested help with updating customer list to enable efficient and timely energy audits. Questions and discussion followed.

Letitia Brown, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development and Austin Housing Finance Corporation

Topics shared included: Provided chart of home repair programs including the number of units served and funding sources. Spreadsheet of chart was requested to be shared with all the members. Questions and discussion followed.

Jesse Porter, Austin Habitat for Humanity

Topics shared included: Discussed the availability of funding sources for different housing problems. Weatherization should happen last but coordination with AE does not always fit timing. Money for weatherization should come from AE to non-profits to complete weatherization at the appropriate time. He encouraged AE to join non-profit shared database that provided information on previously serviced homes. Questions and discussion followed.

Charles Cloutman, Meals on Wheels and Housing Repair Coalition

Topics shared included: Past and present partnership with AE. Noted inefficient process as homes are repaired then referred back to AE for weatherization. Coordination could be improved. Recommended that Coalition perform the weatherization with AE oversight and offer HVAC and refrigerators to improve quality of living. Questions and discussion followed.

Kathy Stark, Austin Tenants Council

Topics shared included: More renters than owners in Austin but most benefits going to homeowners, wanted balanced approach to assistance. Increase ECAD advertising and outreach to tenants. Rental rates are driven by the market and not from energy efficiency improvements. Task Force requested data on renters versus homeowner weatherization assistance and AE's plan for ECAD outreach to tenants. Questions and discussion followed.

## **BRIEFINGS & REPORTS**

### **3. Committee Reports-**

**Low Income Energy Efficiency Program Committee-**Dan reported on behalf of Lanetta Cooper. He requested discussion on the resolutions (Item # 5 & 6) be rescheduled to the February 6th meeting to allow AE time to review and Lanetta and Richard Halpin would be in attendance. All Task Force members agreed.

**Low-Moderate Income Energy Efficiency Program Committee-**Chris Strand and his committee wanted to request staff to look into on-bill financing and other financing measures. Carol added that on-bill financing was included in the February 6th meeting agenda along with a discussion on refrigerator and HVAC.

**Affordable Rental Property Committee**-Tim Arndt and his committee met to discuss 3 items:

1. Split-Incentive- fully implementing ECAD requirements would help to incentivize the property owners to make improvements and the split incentive would improve property value while reducing operating costs. They wanted to look into energy codes for non- functioning AC units. Cyrus Reed reiterated that code compliance and enforcement could be a tool to get more efficient rental equipment and improve safety.
2. Financing- the State had a new law that allowed for PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing for commercial properties including multifamily properties that have 5 and more units but there is a huge housing sector under 5 units. Cyrus would look into what other communities are doing and come up with ideas. They discussed on-bill financing but thought it may not work for renters because of tenant tenure and turnover. It would just shift the burden from owner to tenant and increase the likelihood of electricity cut- off for nonpayment.
3. First Cost Barriers-single family received much higher maximum rebate per home than multifamily. Possible solutions could include incentives to target smaller properties from duplexes up to 50 units to help cover higher setup costs. Carol would do research on codes, Cyrus would look into financing for under 5 units, and Tim would report on rental in Austin and include financial data.

A discussion followed in regards to on-bill financing. Kelly Weiss thought on-bill financing was good for homeowners but was not supportive of on-bill financing for renters because the debt could be passed on to tenants. Chris mentioned that other co-ops were looking into on-bill financing and it was appealing to multifamily projects. He emphasized that they should not give up on it. Dan asked if there was a mandate for any of the processes that Tim shared. Carol also shared concerns about on-bill financing. She was not in favor of providing loans to those who could not afford to pay and thus they would be liable for their bills and possible electricity cut-offs.

**4. Austin Energy report on the weatherization program including HVAC and refrigerator data and job status-**

Liz Jambor, Data Analytics and Business Intelligence Manager, presented a report on HVAC and refrigerator data. The HVAC topic was discussed in a previous meeting but the members wanted to revisit the subject. Liz shared data which indicated that universal HVAC and refrigerator replacement would not reduce the energy costs for customers. The members responded with additional questions regarding reinstating HVAC replacement. Debbie Kimberly, Vice President of Customer Energy Solutions, offered additional program insight and responded to questions. Questions were submitted by Tim before the meeting convened. Staff would prepare a response to Tim's questions and HVAC would be added to the next meeting's agenda for further discussion.

Denise Kuehn, Energy Efficiency Services Director, gave an updated report on the weatherization job status showing contractor jobs in the pipeline and noted that 50 more jobs were added that morning. She remarked on improvements to the process based on contractor feedback.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Toye Goodson-Collins joined the discussion to offer insight on the resolution submittal process to City Council. She referred to the Task Force's approved operating rules and recommended that they follow their reporting timeline and wait until April and June to submit a full report of their recommendations to Council. She emphasized that it would be more impactful and less confusing to the new Council. Carol would review the idea with Lanetta and also talk with those impacted by resolution. Toye also explained that if the Task Force needed to ask staff to do something, they did not need to submit a resolution to Council. Instead, they could directly ask staff.

**5. Discussion and possible action on a draft resolution, “Study of weatherization cost savings measures”-**

This item was tabled until the February 6th meeting.

**6. Discussion and possible action on a draft resolution, “City Auditor study on improving the efficiency of City programs and/or services addressing affordable housing”-This item was tabled until the February 6th meeting.**

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

**7. Discussion regarding future agenda items including a schedule of topics and issues presented during briefings and citizen communications-** Carol was pleased that Citizen Communications had improved and was more positive. In the next meeting, topics will include on-bill financing and other financial options, HVAC and refrigerator discussion, the draft resolutions, and a monthly weatherization update from AE.

**ADJOURNMENT-** Carol moved to adjourn without objection at 12:05 pm.