



LOW INCOME CONSUMER ADVISORY TASK FORCE

MEETING MINUTES

June 1, 2015

The Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force convened in a special-called meeting at the South Austin Recreation Center, 1100 Cumberland Road, Austin, Texas. Chairperson, Carol Biedrzycki called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m.

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

Staff in Attendance: Ronnie Mendoza, Jeffrey Sanderson and Toye Goodson with Austin Energy; Nancy Cardenas with the Mayor's Office and Ken Craig with Council Member Kitchen's Office.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Biedrzycki welcomed attendees. Task Force members introduced themselves. Ms. Biedrzycki provided a summary of the Task Force recommendations currently being discussed and encouraged attendees to sign up to speak and provide input for the further development of those recommendations.

2. CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS

Andrea Hill – There is no reward for conserving; many rebate programs require customers to pay up-front costs, therefore low-income customers are unable to participate; grants for home repairs are better than loans for low-income customers.

Robert Bayless – Asked about the savings associated with Austin Energy programs and suggested that if the utility was saving money and energy, they should give grants and not loans for customers to repair homes and make them more efficient.

Beki Halpin – Nobody knows about the ECAD ordinance in which landlords are supposed to disclose energy use of apartments to renters or people looking to rent an apartment; Austin and specifically Central Austin is very competitive; would be helpful if people could go online to see energy use of apartment units or homes; suggested placing an article in the bill insert newsletter to all customers.

Mayte Salazar and Dave Cortez – Community Power Forums were being held in low-income areas to educate English and Spanish-speaking customers on how to reduce utility bills; offered to work with the Task Force on such efforts; it's a literacy issue; suggested that a YouTube video in Spanish on how to read a meter or a utility bill would be helpful; PODER had developed good materials; some customers have to choose between buying medication and paying their utility bill; CAP qualifications were not open to people who have the largest amount of debt; program information is not available in Spanish; utility customer service representatives refuse to speak Spanish; people on payment plans are charged late fees; people cannot afford low-interest loans because they have no money to provide up front; Robert Cullick and Stacy Lewis of Austin Energy were helpful with forums held in Districts 2 and 3.

Susan Lippman – concerned about climate change and cited recent flooding; heat waves were silent killers; if Austin Energy cut power to a customer during hot weather, it should trigger a home visit to check on the customer; the Austin Energy app is wonderful but hard to find; it's a two-step process that involves the utility to respond with the downloadable app; it needs to be a one-step process like other apps.

Jan Wenig – represented First Time House, a program designed to place homeless veterans in housing; landlords demand high utility payments without presenting a utility bill; since SNAP was slashed, the veterans no longer qualified for the CAP program; requested that the federal VA program be added as a CAP qualifier so that veterans could receive assistance.

3. CLOSING REMARKS

Ms. Biedrzycki thanked the speakers for their suggestions and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

ADJOURN – Ms. Biedrzycki adjourned the meeting at 7:57 p.m. without objection.