

Dear Task Force Members,

Here are a pair of recommendations I've heard repeatedly in our meetings. I tried to capture them in a cogent form for your consideration. I look forward to discussing them at our next mtg. I have two more that I am still crafting.

Very Best,
Richard Halpin
Task Force Member

DRAFT

Recommendation: Create a one stop integrated, non-silo, city utility customer process"

1. The Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force (LICATF) recommends to the City Council that the City Manager be directed to bring together all city agencies that interface with low income city electric and water utilities customers to break down the city department silos and create an integrated customer response problem solving system. This system should contain a clear and easy to access set of resources that will effectively answer customer questions expeditiously, connect them to the resources they need to help them solve their problem directly and or in tandem with the community consumer advocate. Furthermore the manager is directed to invite community organizations already working on comprehensive energy and water access solutions to be part of the team that creates this one stop customer system.

Background: The LICATF has heard months of complaints from utility customers that the current system is replete with billing errors and often unresponsive to calls and concerns. In fact the current system is often abrupt and even rude to the customer base. This is a historically consistent experience and testimony.

2.. The LICATF recommends to Council that the City Manager direct Austin Energy (AE) to choose, through an open bid process, a community consumer advocate who will deliver comprehensive energy and water bill counseling to low and low mod income rate payers. This counseling partner will be already established in the community with a history of positive interaction, trust and confidence with this rate payer group. Their goal is to efficiently get the information, tools and resources to low and low mod rate payers that they need in a one or two stop approach to help the customer create a plan that will lower their bills and increase their success to pay their bills regularly. This established counseling group should be multi culturally, multi lingual with a track record of excellence in customer/client communication. It should produce an easy to read resource guide with program descriptions and contact information in a multilingual guide that will enable low and low mod income customers to reduce and pay their bills.

Background:

Repeated testimony before the Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force from customers, community leaders, tax & rate payer advocates and experts described a system where rate payers get behind in their bills and do not have a proactive plan to improve their situation. Testimony

also described community resources that could help them help themselves but these resources are not accessible in one easy to use format and process. This is recommendation to improve the ability of these rate payers to pay their bills and not be disconnected.