

Program Ideas for Low-Income Assistance with Water and Sewer Bills

Executive Summary

The team working on the this project included: Shamekia Armstrong of Code Enforcement, Jason Harwell of Public Information Office, Lawa Howard of Human Resources, Bruce Lonnee of Planning, and Hollis Terry of Public Utilities

1. *In the current state of our project, the Public Utilities department has seen an increase of low-income families that are unable to pay their water utility bills and there is currently no assistance offered by ACCUG to which we could provide these families in need.*
2. *The desired state of this issue is to identify a need and administer a program solution for low-income families in need of assistance with paying their utility bills through the partnership of the Salvation Army Project SHARE program and the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County Public Utilities Department.*
3. *Currently, we are accessing the need of the program to determine the financial responsibility to start and sustain the program. We are also gathering data from surrounding counties as to how their program started and the cost associated with it. We are particularly interested in collecting data from Gainesville since they already have a very successful low-income assistance with water and sewer bills program.*
4. *We have identified a solution for low-income assistance for water and sewer bills. The solution is pledging, which can be carried out in the Water business office. Athens-Clarke County citizens can pledge \$1, \$2, \$5 or more to assist low-income households with water and sewer bills on a monthly basis. The program within the Athens-Clarke County Public Utilities Department / Water Business Office only accepts pledges as a way to assist with water and sewer rates. However, there are three options that need to be considered as far as administration of the program:*

1) First option, the contract with the Salvation Army Project SHARES would allow all of the funds to go directly to water and sewer bills.

2) Second option, another contract with Salvation Army Project SHARES could be a hybrid which means a certain amount of funds are set aside for water bills from the pledges and the remaining amount would go to assist with other utilities of citizens within Athens-Clarke County. For example, \$50,000 would go to water and sewer bills of low-income households and the balance would be used to cover electricity bills, rent, medical, or food for Athens-Clarke County residents as needed.

3) Third option, the most common within Georgia is the standard Salvation Army Project SHARES contract. The pledges in this contract would go to a big pool of funds.

These funds would assist Athens-Clarke County citizens with all of their low-income needs. For instance, all pledges made would go towards utility bills, rent, medical, or food for Athens-Clarke County residents as needed.

If approved by the Mayor & Commission, we plan to assist with the initial start-up of the program if needed. We have been working with Michelle Stroud of the Water Business Office and if she needs our support, we would be happy to assist to assure that this program is the success that we strive for it to be.