



APPROVED 6-24-20

MINUTES  
City of Tacoma  
Public Utility Special Board Meeting  
June 10, 2020  
3:00 p.m.

Chair Larkin called the Public Utility Board meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. in the auditorium at Tacoma Public Utilities.

**Present:** Karen Larkin. Via Zoom: Bryan Flint, Christine Cooley, Carlos Watson, Mark Patterson

The meeting was quorate.

### **Reports of the Director**

#### Equity and Inclusion

Director Flowers shared TPU's stance on the topic of equity and inclusion in response to recent events and demonstrations. TPU values being accessible and accountable to the people it serves, meaning that everyone receives equitable access to services that are vital to quality of life. There is more work ahead to help end systematic racism and achieve racial equity as an institution to ensure that people of color share in the quality of life many of us are already privileged with. TPU commits to reflection and growth, to listen and learn, and to plan for lasting change and will engage in thoughtful dialogue with policymakers, leaders, employees, community partners, and the utility industry to ensure the fabric of our institutional systems (policies, procedures, and practices) reflect the needs of the communities of color that we serve. TPU must show up on the side of equality and anti-racism and commit to becoming better allies for the communities of color we serve and for our valuable employees of color who work hard to provide the vital services. Now more than ever it is important that we commit to action and invite the Board and the community to hold us accountable for results. In 2018, TPU stood up a satellite office for the City of Tacoma's Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR) to launch inward and outward-facing initiatives related to equity, inclusion, and diversity. About 40 percent of TPU employees have taken Equity 101 training; the goal is to reach 50 percent by the end of 2020. That work will continue until all employees have received the training and TPU commits to provide training beyond Equity 101. TPU and General Government launched discussions and pop up trainings to discuss ways to enhance the inclusivity of our culture. A diverse, cross-organizational committee of TPU employees convene to prioritize and provide input on equity, inclusion, and diversity initiatives (inward and outward). The committee, under OEHR guidance, led and developed the Equity and Empowerment Strategic Action Plan, and advises on its implementation. The committee will work support the executive team with an assessment of practices and

services at TPU with respect to equity, inclusion, and diversity that will drive future strategic actions. In collaboration with the OEHR, TPU is working to expand the City's Equity Index to include Tacoma Water and Tacoma Power service areas. The Equity Index is used to aid with review of programs and services through an equity lens based off data specific to Tacoma. TPU pursued modifications to hiring processes in collaboration with General Government. The actions include: implicit bias training for hiring panels; instituting diverse hiring panels; and enhancing applicant data collection and review for diversity in the candidate pool. TPU is revamping the internship programs in concert with General Government and mapping out strategies to enhance diversity of the talent pipeline. Working in collaboration with other community organizations and with a targeted focus on diversity, TPU will cultivate a diverse talent pipeline and raise awareness in the community about career opportunities at TPU. In August 2019, the Board adopted its first strategic directive focused on Equity and Inclusion. With its defined outcomes and oversight of TPU policies, the PUB will lead accountability on our activities.

### Covid-19 Update

The Governor approved Pierce County's application to move to Phase 2. While there was not significant impact to work delivery with that change, TPU stands ready to serve the businesses that are reopening. TPU continues coordination with the Governor's phased approach, the Department of Health, and our union partners and will be cautious and phased in the approach to business reconstitution. Employees are cleared to retain work from home status through July 31; the phased progression and other indicators at that time and determine next steps. As previously mentioned, there is a city-wide effort under way to evaluate telework status, determine what procedures need to be developed and identify the desired future state of telework. The Customer Transition Team has started meeting. This team's primary focus will be on transitioning customers from this emergency response phase, wherein customer disconnects are postponed, toward a recovery period that will involve extending payment plans and assisting customers as they work to become current with their utility bills. We will also continue to work to identify resources to alleviate bill payment concerns particularly for low income. As of June 3, Customer Solutions has approved 9,093 of the 11,563 applications received. Reasons applications may not be approved include the applicant lives outside our service territory, is not a customer, has submitted more than one application, or does not meet the income requirements. TPU has awarded \$1,642,861 in emergency assistance. On May 29, the Governor by proclamation amended and extended the emergency proclamation which included postponing disconnects and eliminating late fees until July 28. The Customer Transition Team continues to meet to plan for customer recovery. The team is identifying data sets that will inform our customer recovery period. The team is also identifying communication strategies and programs that could be used to aid customers during recovery.

### Commercial and Industrial Customer Impact Update

Dan Drennan, Marketing and Development Manager, outlined the strategic objectives of economic development: increase awareness of all resources available for business customers; actively engage and partner with economic agencies; coordinate, inform, and plan with internal partners; establish a system of gathering information, distilling it, and conducting broad and thorough outreach; provide data and insights to assist divisions with modeling and planning; and retain and assist businesses. Michael Catsi, Economic Development Manager, shared that Pierce County is the most trade-dependent county in the most trade-dependent state. Approximately 446,000 jobs have been lost in February

in Washington State and up to twenty five percent of small businesses are not expected to reopen. Mr. Catsi outlined the ways TPU is engaged with industry sectors (such as hospitals, hotels, construction, retail, and other businesses) and also outlined organizations with which TPU engages (such as Economic Development Board, Chamber, Local Governments, Port of Tacoma, Washington Department of Commerce). Mr. Catsi then summarized the effects of the Covid-19 emergency on industrial /institutional customers, and local small businesses. The Account Executive / Economic Development (AE-ED) and Business Solutions Office (BSO) have been collaborating to address these issues. The BSO team is handling inbound requests for 12-week repayment extensions while increasing awareness of the mytpu.org/Covid resource web page. Partnering with Customer Solutions, BSO identifies opportunities for residential financial support and provides it as an additional resource. The AE/BSO hardship tracker reports businesses that contacted the BSO for financial assistance for help reducing bills. Finally, the BSO coordinates with field staff to schedule meter reads for closed businesses to ensure timely and accurate billing. The Economic Development office partners in weekly meetings to collate resources and information to support business customers with a focus on the retention of existing businesses. The team is also working with the operational divisions to support prospective development projects. Director Flowers emphasized that staff is participating with both the Chamber of Commerce's Rapid Response Team and Economic Development Board to help inform the business community about resources.

#### Advanced Meter Program Policies

Matt Hubbard, Power Engineer, shared that the purpose of the Opt-Out policy is to provide customers an alternative to a standard advanced meter installation. Based on national and regional statistics, TPU anticipates approximately 0.5 percent of power customers (890 of 178,000) will want to opt-out of having an advanced meter installed. Mr. Hubbard outlined the benefits of having an advanced meter installed. General policy statements were summarized. All customers will be upgraded to advanced metering during mass deployment. New accounts will automatically participate in advanced metering. Electric residential customers will be given the opportunity to opt-out before and after their meter upgrade. Customers will need to sign a form acknowledging fees, terms, and conditions. Customers must opt-out at the account level to be completed by the account holder. Opt-out services will be converted to advanced metering upon move-out or account closing. An opt-out customer moving to a new location will be required to opt-out again. Residential separately metered, domestic use, detached garages will also be eligible to opt-out if the primary residence is opting out. Mr. Hubbard reviewed electric meter options (existing legacy meter, radio off meter) and the electric opt-out timeline. Eligible customers were then summarized. Residential (single family or multi-unit of four units or less) and move-in, new account, and new services are eligible. Residential with more than four units, commercial/industrial, net metering (solar), and temporary services are not eligible. The draft fee recommendation is \$15.00 recurring billing cycle fee. Fee assumptions include meter reading and drive time and meter reading labor and vehicle rates. Fees will be reviewed periodically to align with opt-out cost of service. As discussed at the Board study session of September 11, 2019, TPU will not be providing a water meter opt-out option.

Mr. Drennan, transitioned to the topic of customer-side repairs. During advanced meter implementation, meter installation experts can encounter infrequent issues with customer owned equipment around meter. The proposed policies are intended to address situations where customer-side equipment may need repair for safe service. Corey

Bedient, Assistant Water Division Manager, detailed graphical representations of power and water infrastructure to illustrate what is utility-owned and what is customer-owned equipment. The customer side repair policy will ensure a smooth meter implementation that does not disrupt customer lives or create undue burdens. It will also assist low income customers if issues arise and provide all customer access to resources if needed. The goal is to make sure every customer is covered with an option if an issue arises during meter implementation. Staff proposes three ways to assist customers: advanced meter implementation break-fix policy; water customer grant program; water customer loan program.

Director Flowers concluded her reports by reminding the Board that the 2019 audited annual financial reports for Power, Water, Rail, Fleet, and the Self-Insurance Fund were provided in advance to the Board.

### **Executive Session**

Board Member Flint moved to convene an executive session at 5:15 p.m. for 120 minutes for the purpose of reviewing the performance of a public employee per RCW 42.30.110(1)(g); seconded by Board Member Patterson and approved by the Board. Chair Larkin announced that after the conclusion of the executive session, the Board would not take any further action and the meeting would be adjourned. Chair Larkin moved that at the conclusion of the executive session, the Clerk of the Board is authorized to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Mr. Flint and approved by the Board. The executive session was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business or comments, the Public Utility Board meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm. until Wednesday, June 24, 2020 for a meeting at a time to be determined.

Approved:



---

Karen Larkin, Chair



---

Mark Patterson, Secretary