

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-34

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF GULFPORT, FLORIDA, ESTABLISHING AN INDIVIDUAL UTILITY ASSISTANCE FUND PROGRAM; DECLARING A PRIMARY PUBLIC PURPOSE IN THE EXPENDITURE OF PUBLIC FUNDS; ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE FUND PROGRAM; PROVIDING FOR A BUDGET AMENDMENT; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe acute respiratory illness that can spread among humans through respiratory transmission; and

WHEREAS, the Governor of the State of Florida had promulgated Executive Orders wherein he found that a State of Public Health Emergency exists within the State of Florida and ordered a Safer at Home Order for the State of Florida restricting public movement and business activity; and

WHEREAS, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners declared a State of Emergency and had resolved a Safer at Home Order, limiting non-essential activities and ordering non-essential businesses to close; and

WHEREAS, these orders caused a financial hardship on Gulfport residents; and

WHEREAS, county, state and federal loan programs are being made available but it may take weeks and/or months to realize funds; and

WHEREAS, Gulfport residents are in need of immediate utility bill assistance; and

WHEREAS, the City is desirous of establishing an Individual Utility Assistance Fund Program to provide direct individual utility bill assistance to eligible Gulfport resident, who make application, up to a maximum amount of \$500.00 per household; and

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that the financial assistance to individual Gulfport residents, who apply for funding, is beneficial to the overall economic health of the City of Gulfport.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF GULFPORT, FLORIDA:

Section 1.

The City Council hereby approves an Individual Utility Assistance Fund Program for individual Gulfport residents who make application and are eligible in accordance with the Program guidelines as follows:

Application Process:

In order to be considered, the applicant must have:

- Submitted a completed and signed application, including a narrative which explains the circumstances of the individual's hardship and need for funding.

- A copy of the individual's identification.
- A copy of the individual's most recent City of Gulfport utility bill.
- A board of grant reviewers will evaluate the application and determine if the funds will be awarded.
- The board will consist of three (3) City of Gulfport employees appointed by the City Manager.
- The application period will open two weeks prior to a scheduled interruption in service as follows:

Cycle 1 – Application Open Date: June 24, 2020 – Cutoff Date: July 8, 2020

Cycle 2 – Application Open Date: July 1, 2020 – Cutoff Date: July 15, 2020

Cycle 3 – Application Open Date: July 8, 2020 – Cutoff Date: July 22, 2020

Cycle 4 – Application Open Date: July 15, 2020 – Cutoff Date: July 29, 2020

- Funding of the Program will be reevaluated after the City has cycled a scheduled interruption in service due to non-pay once for every account in the City.

Eligible Applicants:

- Must have suffered an economic hardship.
- Must be within two weeks of a scheduled interruption in water service due to non-payment.
- Must occupy the residence and have the utility account in the applicant's name.
- Must be residential property within the City of Gulfport.
- Must have an active utility account during February 2020 (not on standby).

Ineligible Applicants:

Individuals that are NOT eligible to receive Grant funding, include, but are not limited to:

- Commercial Properties.
- Any individual who has already received the Helping Hand Grant within the past one (1) year (rolling from the date of the grant).
- Any individual that has an outstanding Utility Lien in their name with the City of Gulfport.
- Any individual that has a history of more than five (5) cutoffs within the past three (3) years from the date of application.
- Any individual that has a history of tampering with the meter.

Eligible Use of Funding:

- The Grant will be issued in the form of a credit on the individual's utility bill, and therefore that is the sole use of the grant funding.
- If the eligible applicant has multiple outstanding bills, they may select the two largest bills up to the \$500.00 maximum.

- The credit may not be used for balances transferred from a prior owner.
- Bills generated prior to April 1, 2020, are not eligible for the grant.

Section 2.

The City Council hereby declares a primary public purpose in the expenditure of public funds to establish the Individual Utility Assistance Fund Program to provide direct relief to Gulfport residents, who make application, as a result of the COVID-19 Emergency and that such grant funding is beneficial to the overall economic health of the City of Gulfport.

Section 3.

The City Council hereby authorizes a Budget Amendment to fund the Individual Utility Assistance Fund Program (a grant program available to eligible Gulfport resident, who make application, as a credit towards two (2) monthly utility bills, up to a maximum of \$500.00 per household) in an amount not to exceed \$75,000.00, as attached hereto and made a part of this Resolution as Exhibit A.

Section 4.

The City Manager, and his appointed designees, are authorized to administer the Individual Utility Assistance Fund Program and to review and evaluate applications in compliance with the conditions as set forth in this Resolution and as provided for within the Grant application.

Section 5.

This Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its adoption.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 16th day of June, 2020 by the Council of the City of Gulfport, Florida.

Samuel Henderson, Mayor

ATTEST: Approved 6-16-2020

Lesley DeMuth, City Clerk