

UTILITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

City Council Presentation
July 7, 2020



HISTORY OF PROCEDURES

Prior to March, 2020

- People have 18 days to pay their Electric, Water, Waste/Water, Drainage (Stormwater) and Garbage bills
- If no payment has been made, customers receive a late notice
- Generally, after 28 days, service is terminated
- A 10% late fee is charged to customers' accounts
- City directs low income and any other residential customers to a variety of service agencies, if people need help
- City works with both residential and commercial customers on payment plans, if necessary

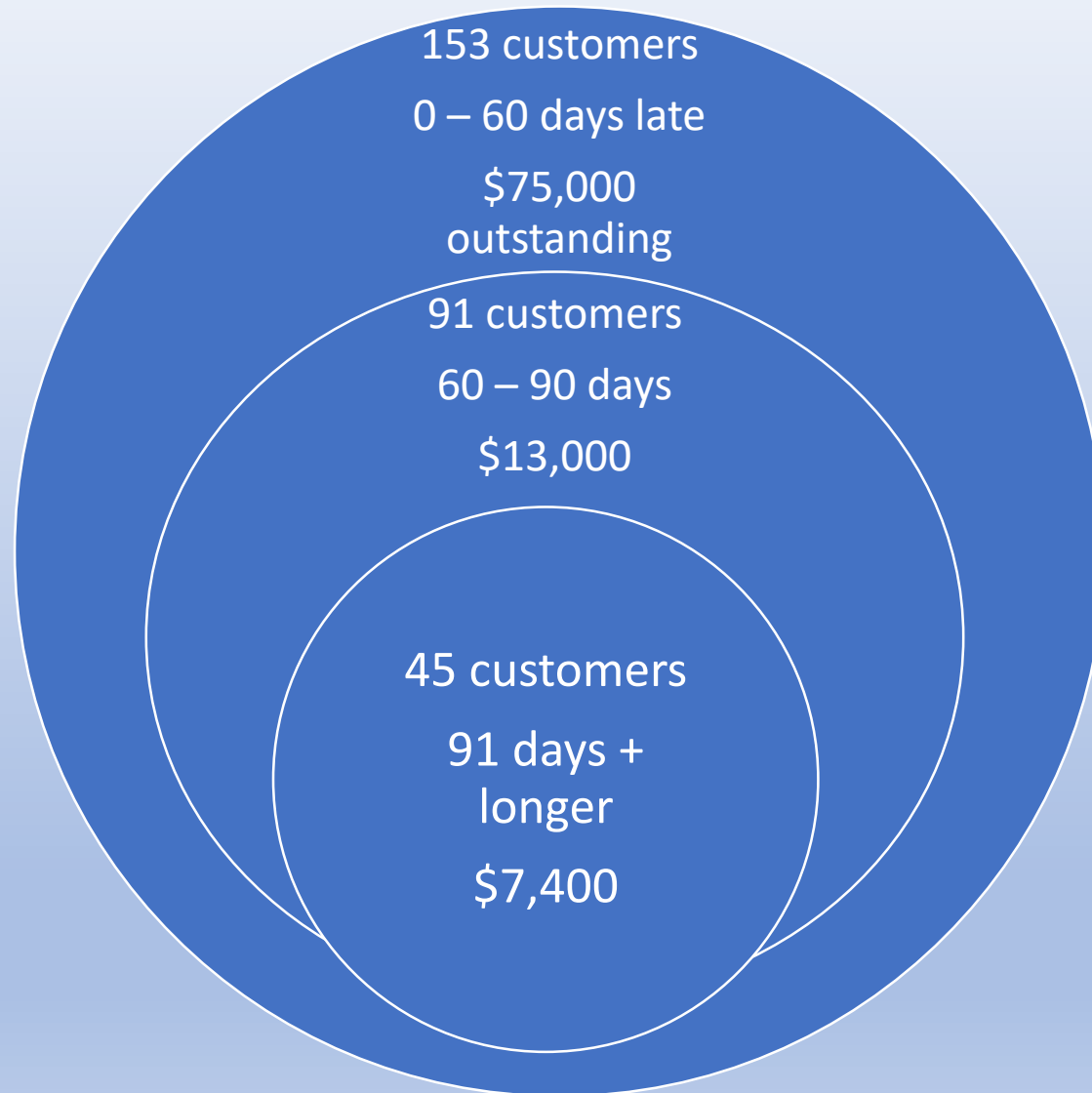
HISTORY OF PROCEDURES

March 2020 to Current

- City halted all termination processes, including sending accounts to collections
- Need to develop a plan to help customers and ensure our utilities do not become unstable
- Late fees are removed, upon request; system charges automatically, we have the technology to remove late fees;
- In recommendations we suggest removal of all late fees from March through end of calendar year; will cost approximately \$20,000 across all utilities
- More commercial than residential customers ask for the late fee removal; probably a case of not knowing they can ask

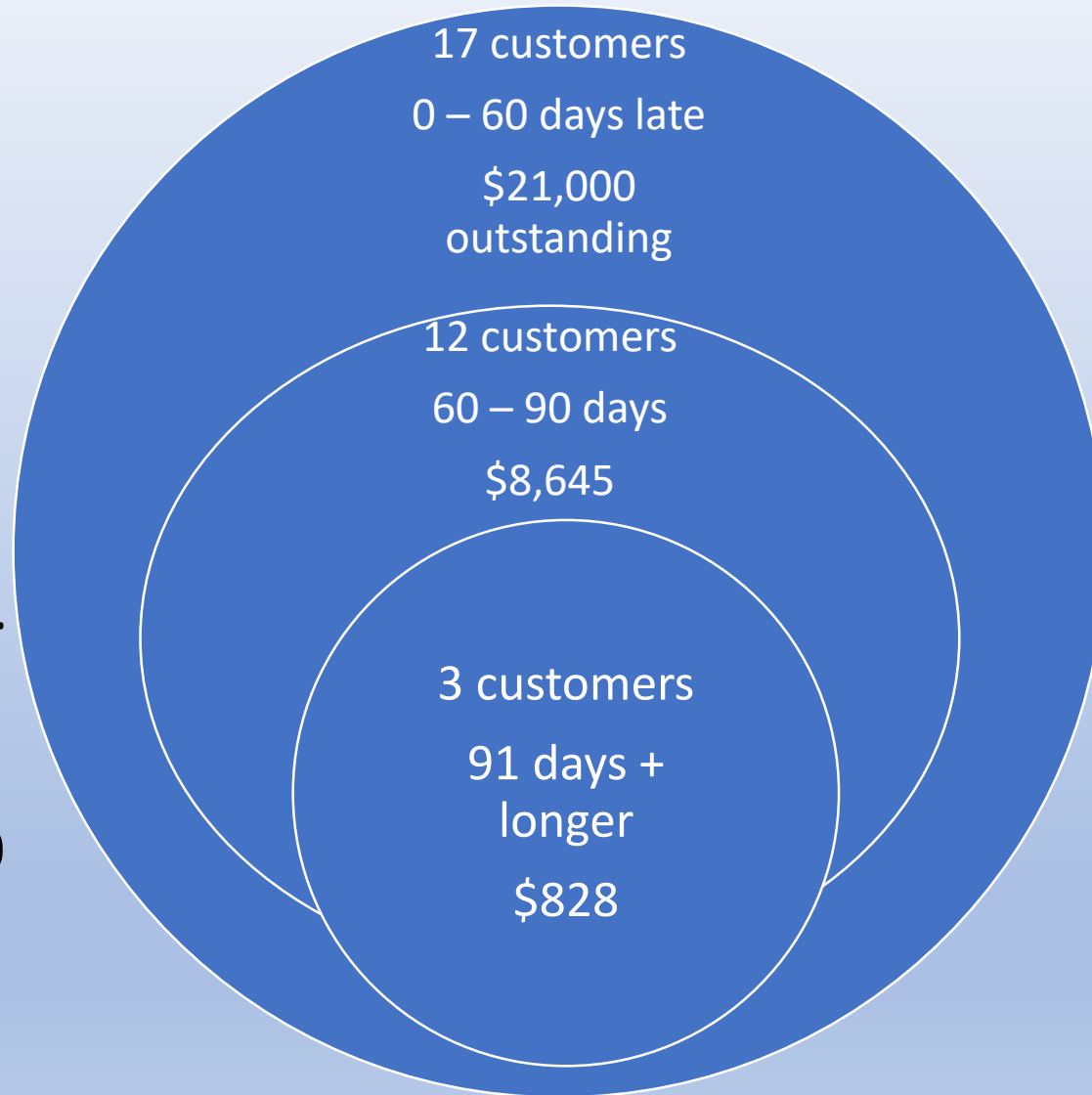
A picture of one cycle of residential customers

- Residential customers tend to be running late on their bills, but only 30% of the customers have not paid their bills after three months
- 140 of the 153 customers have deposits of \$33,000
- We are holding money customers could use to pay their bills



A picture of one cycle of commercial customers

- Only 17% of this cycle's commercial customers (3) are three month in.... arrears
- 12 of the 17 customers have deposits of \$2,800
- Commercial businesses could use their deposit to pay bills



IMMEDIATE CUSTOMER OUTREACH

- Using all mediums, web, paper, emails: create outreach efforts: “Need help to pay your utility bills? Call us!”
- No terminations until, at least, September 30
- Monitor assistance requests as this will inform us as to the level of support our citizens need – help determine duration and level
- Determine next steps in mid September, based upon: economy, student ability to pay, other possible programs

ASSISTANCE OPTIONS

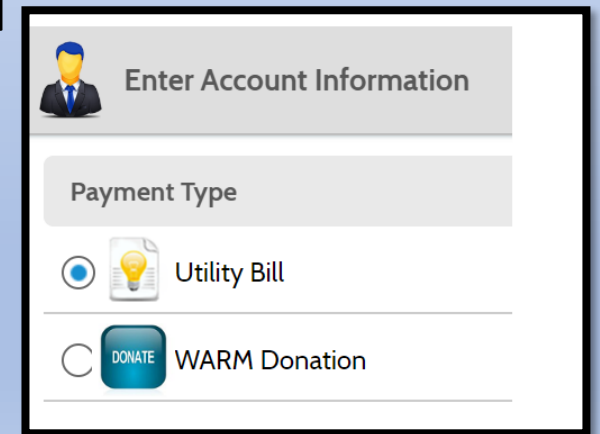
Deposits can be applied to outstanding bills, if customers want

We can offer a payment plan

City has partnership with several agencies that can help with utility payments

“CLICK TO HELP YOUR NEIGHBORS” PROGRAM

- Paper Bills already include a way for people to offer assistance
- Our new software, beginning this week, will include an electronic way to contribute
- Customers are helping more in 2020 than in prior years: \$1,500 as of this period last year – this year \$1,700 in same period
- As part of our program, we will market this
- We will not offer “incentives for giving” This lowers the available assistance funds



The screenshot shows a web form with a header section titled "Enter Account Information" featuring a person icon. Below this is a section labeled "Payment Type" with two radio button options. The first option is "Utility Bill", accompanied by a lightbulb icon and a document icon. The second option is "WARM Donation", accompanied by a blue button labeled "DONATE".

Example

OTHER ACTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Working on changing the Community Action, Inc (CAI) Agreement
 - Current contract only permits us to help low-income residents, using federal guidelines
 - Working with CA on ways to allow broader assistance
 - Any changes will require Council approval: Goal to return contract changes in August
- Working with Economic Development to determine if there are other agencies help in administering a *commercial* assistance program
- Exploring use of CARES money to dedicate to this program



SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS

- GOAL: To have a clear customer process and timeline
- ACTIONS:
 - Continue the “no-termination” process until, at least, September 30
 - Market a “We are here to help” customer outreach program
 - Eliminate all late fees effective March – End of Calendar year
 - Assistance program includes, but is not limited to:
 - Use of deposits
 - Pay plan set up
 - Assistance to help with bills through a third-party(s)
 - No one will be sent to Collections for the remainder of calendar year
 - Working on Agreements to make the use of available assistance more accessible
 - Bring Agreements to Council for consideration in August for both residential and commercial accounts