

In response to the continuing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Brownsville Public Utilities Board (BPUB) voted to extend suspension of service disconnections and late fees and also expanded BPUB's Project SHARE program to allow for more assistance to customers hardest hit by the pandemic at a board meeting held April 13.

BPUB board members voted to expand the scope of the BPUB Project SHARE program using surplus improvement funds. In addition, board members voted to add an amendment to the Project SHARE program to include an emergency rider, giving BPUB the flexibility to issue amended program instructions for a limited time. This includes the ability to waive the current one-time-per-year limit for accounts being able to use SHARE funds.

These measures will allow BPUB to assist customers hardest impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. BPUB staff will coordinate with local agencies to establish clear guidelines for the expanded program, which is intended for residential customers who cannot pay their utility bills due to unemployment or low income from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. A third-party fund administrator will determine customer eligibility.

"It's important for our citizens to know that we understand their struggles, and that we will help them any way that we can. I appreciate the commitment of the BPUB board and administration in dedicating these funds to assist the individuals most affected by this pandemic. It shows once again that Brownsville is a community, and that in times of crisis, we can depend on each other. I would certainly hope that other communities follow our lead," said Brownsville Mayor Trey Mendez, who is also an ex-officio BPUB board member.

The measure that was passed set aside \$2 million to fund the start of this expanded Project SHARE program. Those funds are estimated to be enough for a one-month period.

"So many families are struggling right now. People have lost their jobs. They're worried about so many things. We wanted their utility service to be one of those things that they don't have to worry about right now. BPUB is their hometown utility, and we're here to provide them the support they need at this time," said BPUB Chair Anna E. Oquin.

In addition, BPUB ratified a prior suspension of late payment penalties/fees and service disconnects that was enacted to immediately start assisting customers.

BPUB is encouraging the community to practice social distancing by making account inquiries or paying bills online or by phone to help flatten the curve of COVID-19. For questions about BPUB's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit the BPUB website at www.brownsville-pub.com or call (956) 983-6121.