



### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

#### **Juneau Unplugged: Temporary Avalanche-Related Electric Bill Payment Help for Lower Income Households**

**Is the program “set in stone?”** – NO, this is largely new territory for Juneau. How many people can be helped with CBJ funding, how many eligible people will apply, who needs help the most, what is the right amount of help, how can we help people while promoting conservation, etc. are still only educated guesses. We must recognize that we will have to make changes as we gain experience over the next few weeks and months.

**Is the program sacrificing some precision for quick action?** – Yes, to an acceptable level for an emergency. This is an emergency and we must act as quickly as feasible. US Census data shows a potential of 3,000 to 4,000 Juneau households that could qualify under the current income standard discussed below, so we must have a streamlined and effective process to handle an expected large influx of applications in a short time for the least possible administrative cost. We will have a simple one page application and will require households to submit copies of income verification to ensure that households are eligible.

**What about fraud?** We expect little fraud. None of the money will go to individuals. Periodic payments will be made to AEL&P in the name of customers. The maximum any individual can benefit illegally is a percentage of their actual electric bill. The major threat is falsification of income information. Individuals must sign a certification of accuracy on the application form and will be held accountable for false information.

**What about confidentiality and safety of information?** First, the most sensitive piece of information on an income tax form is social security numbers. These can be blacked out before copies are submitted. We do not need to know social security numbers. The financial information required for this program will not be made available for any other purpose whatsoever.

**Who will the program help?** The program is intended to help those in the greatest financial need. The most reasonable standard of need is the federal poverty guidelines for Juneau. We decided to adopt the standard for assistance at 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. (see application)

**What about low income renters?** The program can only pay into AEL&P accounts. One concern we are trying to address is impacts on households that meet the income standard, but are not direct customers of AEL&P, such as renters who might have to pay rent surcharges. The application addresses this issue, but there must be cooperation with the direct AEL&P customer (for example a landlord).

**How much payment help will be provided? What about incentives for energy conservation?** We must be concerned with the available funding versus a largely



unknown cost of the program. The biggest variables are how many households apply and how large their electric bills are. For at least the first month we plan to pay 70% of the increased cost of each Kilowatt Hour, but this may be subject to change depending on the number of applications received. This means that each customer will be expected to pay at least what their normal bill would have been and still requires each household to conserve. Paying 70% of the KW increase roughly means that the amount the individual household still must pay could approximately double unless they conserve energy, versus going up as much as 500% without this program.

**What if a household has a good reason for failing to apply the first month?** The purpose of the program is to help people, so it makes sense to go back and provide assistance, if funds are available.

**Does the money go to the household, or to AEL&P?** The money goes to AEL&P to the account of the household as if it was paid by the household.

**How will households apply?** We have developed a simple one page application that can be faxed or mailed or dropped off at various locations.

**Where will applications be available?** We are still developing the list of locations. Many eligible households will receive applications in the mail from state and local programs they participate in. We will also have applications available by mail, website links, etc. Drop off and assistance will be available at the Catholic Community Service – Juneau Unplugged Office on 6<sup>th</sup> Street downtown. AEL&P offices will also assist customers and serve as a drop off collection site. We are working with city and other programs to provide locations to collect applications, help people if they need to make copies, etc.

**How will people verify their household income?** Three ways:

- First, the existing state and local agencies that provide assistance to households based on income eligibility have volunteered to send letters to their clients. Those letters will be attached to the Juneau Unplugged application to verify income eligibility. The agencies are the State Department of Health and Social Services, Tlingit and Haida assistance programs, Juneau School District Lunch Program, and Day Care Assistance.
- Second, if the applicant is not served by existing programs, by submitting the first page of the IRS 1040 or 1040A forms (with the social security numbers blacked out).
- Third, proof of income for the last full month is also acceptable if for any reason, the tax forms are not available, or if there have been significant changes to income.

**Will there be provisions for special cases?** Yes, there are also special cases. A review of special cases process is being developed to make sure that no eligible households fall through the cracks.



**What about public input and communication?** Communication and feedback from Juneau citizens is critical throughout this crisis:

- We will have press briefings throughout the life of the program and meet with organizations or community groups as requested.
- People can call at any time to give their comments at 463-6130.
- We plan to have evening listening sessions several times to get comments and discuss ideas of citizens as the program is implemented.
- Of course, citizens are always welcome to contact the Mayor or Assembly Members.

**Who is funding the program?** The City and Borough of Juneau is funding the program.

**Who is administering this program?** The United Way of Southeast Alaska and Catholic Community Service will administer this program. Former City and Borough Manager Kevin Ritchie will be directly in charge of the implementation of the program.

**How do we ask questions?** Call 463-6130.