SPU's Low Income Housing Water Conservation Assistance Program Summary

Program Description

The program provides financial incentives to overcome first-cost barriers in completing water efficiency improvements for low-income single family, multifamily, and institutional housing in the City of Seattle. SPU pays for the equipment and installation of efficient plumbing fixtures and appliances (toilets and common-area clothes washers). Additionally, for single family customers SPU handles all logistics including installation. Examples of multifamily and institutional housing participants have included Seattle and King County Housing Authorities, Community Psychiatric Clinic, Union Gospel Mission, Foss Nursing Home, Pioneer Housing, Low Income Housing Institute, Youth Care, Mt Baker Housing, and Capitol Hill Housing.

Benefits

Water efficiency improvements reduce water and sewer costs for low-income homeowners and housing providers. Often, these savings exceed the increased efficiency of the fixtures alone because water leaks are discovered and repaired in the process. When customers are able to reduce water consumption and sewer usage by replacing old toilets and clothes washers, their utility costs go down and so does the SPU rate assistance subsidy.

Background

The program was originally established in 2002 in response to Ordinance 120532 (the I-63 Settlement Ordinance). The ordinance stipulated that "the administering agencies shall use their best efforts to retrofit substantially all Qualifying Low-Income Units and Qualifying Low-Income buildings through December 31, 2010". The program was reauthorized in 2010 (for 2011-2013) and in 2013 (for 2014-2020) by the SPU Director. Activity levels since the program began in 2002 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Program Activity Level

Years	Single Family Housing Units Served	Multifamily & Institutional Housing Units Served	Total Housing Units Served	Total Program Cost
2001-2010	3,057	17,785	20,842	$6,317,000
2011-2013	1,657	886	2,543	$1,704,800
2014	603	641	1,244	$802,500
2015	523	115	638	$564,400
2016	359	181	540	$573,700
2017	291	284	575	$538,500
Total	**6,490**	**19,892**	**26,382**	**$10,500,900**

Association with Utility Discount Program

SPU's Low Income Housing Water Conservation Assistance Program has a long-standing association with the City's Utility Discount Program. Customers who enroll in the UDP are a key target audience for the program. Historically, those customers have been given a program brochure when they inquire about the UDP, as well as mailed a follow up brochure after they are approved for the UDP. In 2014, those marketing efforts have been enhanced by modifying the brochure to include an easy to use return postage-paid postcard to facilitate participation, as well as follow up phone calls to all new enrollees of the UDP.

The Utility Discount Program offers eligible customers a 60% discount on their Seattle City Light (electricity) bill and a 50% discount on their Seattle Public Utilities (water/wastewater/drainage/solid waste) bill. UDP is available for income-qualified residential households. More details on the program are here Seattle has recently undertaken a significant effort to increase the proportion of eligible customers enrolled in the program. There are now approximately 35,000 participating households receiving discounted bills (or rebates).

Where We're Going

There is significant potential remaining for this program, primarily in the single family sector. The multifamily sector has largely been saturated. There are approximately 12,000 single family customers eligible to participate in the program that has not yet done so. Table 3 shows the approved target participation levels and budget for the program for 2014-2020.

Table 2 - Target Participation Levels and Budget (2014-2020)

Time Period	Single Family Housing Units	Multifamily & Institutional Housing Units	Total Housing Units	CIP Allocation
Annual	500-700	100	600-800	$555,000
2014-2020	3,500-4,200	700	4,200-4,900	$3,885,000