

**PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF OREGON
STAFF REPORT
PUBLIC MEETING DATE: February 23, 2021**

REGULAR CONSENT EFFECTIVE DATE January 1, 2021

DATE: February 16, 2021

TO: Public Utility Commission

FROM: Mitchell Moore

THROUGH: Bryan Conway, John Crider, and Matt Muldoon **SIGNED**

SUBJECT: AVISTA UTILITIES:
(Docket No. UM 1978(2))
Requests reauthorization to defer costs associated with Low-Income Rate Assistance Program.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve Avista Utilities' (Avista or Company) request to reauthorize the deferral of costs associated with its Low-Income Rate Assistance Program (LIRAP) for the 12-month period beginning January 1, 2021.

DISCUSSION:

Issue

Whether the Commission should approve Avista's request for authorization to defer costs associated with its low-income rate assistance program.

Applicable Law

Avista makes this filing in accordance with 757.259 and OAR 860-027-0300. ORS 757.259(2)(e) authorizes the Commission to allow a utility to defer, for later recovery in rates, expenses or revenues in order to minimize frequency of rate changes or to match appropriately the costs borne by and benefits received by customers. OAR 860-027-0300 sets forth several requirements for applications to defer.

Analysis

Background

Avista's LIRAP program was approved by the Public Utility Commission in 2002. Revenue for the program is collected through the Company's general residential gas service, Schedule 410. The purpose of LIRAP is to reduce the energy cost burden among low-income customers. Funds collected are distributed to the four Community Action Agencies in Avista's Oregon service territory for disbursement to qualifying customers and for program administration, according to parameters set forth in Schedule 493.

This deferral was previously authorized by the Commission in Order No. 19-424.

Proposed Accounting

Avista proposes to account for the expenses associated with the PPC by recording the expenses in FERC Account 242.7 (Low Income Energy Assistance).

A balancing account tracks the difference between funds collected and costs incurred. Any over- or under-collection is rolled forward to the following year.

Current Deferral Balance

Avista reports a positive balance of \$67,297 as of year-end 2019.

Information Related to Future Amortization

- Earnings review – An earnings review is required prior to amortization, pursuant to ORS 757.259(5).
- Prudence Review – A prudence review is required prior to amortization and should include the verification of the accounting methodology used to determine the final amortization balance.
- Sharing – One hundred percent of the deferred balance is subject to utility recovery, pending a prudence review.
- Rate Spread/Design – The costs are allocated among all Avista's Oregon customers on an equal cents per therm basis.
- Three Percent Test (ORS 757.259(6)) – The three percent test measures the annual overall average effect on customer rates resulting from deferral amortizations. The three percent test limits (exceptions at ORS 757.259(7) and (8)) the aggregated deferral amortizations during a 12-month period to no more than three percent of the utility's gross revenues for the preceding year.

Conclusion

As the Company's application meets the requirements of ORS 757.259 and OAR 860-027-0300, and the reason for the deferral is valid, Staff recommends the Commission approve Avista's application.

PROPOSED COMMISSION MOTION:

Approve Avista's request to authorize the deferral of costs associated with its LIRAP program for the 12-month period beginning January 1, 2021.