

4.1 Education Programs

Background: Gainesville Regional Utilities is owned by the people it serves in that it is governed by Gainesville's elected City Commission. The Gainesville City Commission is advised on utility policies, programs and procedures by the GRU Executive Director, through the Commission's Utility Advisory Board. GRU and Gainesville's general government have multiple and extensive public outreach, education, and support programs to engage and inform the utilities' customer-owners which have met with varying degrees of success.

Goal: To better explain to customer-owners the vital role that GRU serves to provide safe, reliable, competitively priced utility services in an environmentally responsible manner, including the important relationship between rate structure, the General Fund Transfer and City Taxes.

Policy: GRU and the City Commission will continue and expand education and outreach programs that engage customer-owners so that they better understand the role of, and advocate for, the utilities that serve them. Focus on the value provided by, and need for, safe, reliable, competitively priced utility services in an environmentally responsible manner. Special consideration should be given to creating programs and materials designed to reach customers with limited internet access.

4.2 Rate Planning and Determination

Background: Rate setting, which includes determination of the General Fund transfer from Gainesville Regional Utilities to Gainesville general government, is the sole jurisdiction of the Gainesville City Commission. GRU staff prepares anticipated utility revenue needed for each of the City's five utilities to provide safe, reliable, competitively priced utility services in an environmentally responsible manner over a five to ten-year period. Staff present their recommendations based on these analyses to the Commission's GRU Advisory Board, which considers and recommends rates to the City Commission annually. The City Commission holds a series of public meetings on these rates, balancing the utilities revenue needs within the overall City goals and customers' expectations, and adopts the annual rates.

Goal: Design rates that provide safe, reliable, competitively priced utility services in an environmentally responsible manner over a five to ten-year period in which rates are incrementally adjusted annually. Involve and engage the utilities' customer-owners through public outreach and City Commission meetings. Focus on rate setting that meets the utilities' revenue needs, the public's service needs, while separately addressing and reducing rate impacts for individual owner-customers for whom rate payments represent a disproportionately high percentage of their income.

Policy: The City Commission will adjust necessary utility rates incrementally annually over a five to ten-year period. Incremental changes allow customers to better estimate and plan for anticipated future utility costs and to more accurately predict and project energy savings through conservation or other measures. Encourage customer-owner's participation and education through City Commission outreach and public meetings on rate setting to ensure to the best extent possible the public's understanding of why rates are being adjusted. Develop programs that offset disproportionate individual impacts, rather than reduce overall rates needed to sustain utility services and public needs.