



Legislation Text

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Resolution Reestablishing ConnectFree Program and Directing the Expenditure of Program Funds (B)

This item is a resolution to re-establish the ConnectFree Program.

The City of Gainesville, in accordance with Sections 27-128 and 27-169 of the Code of Ordinances, imposes a 25 percent surcharge on water and wastewater connection charges incurred beyond the municipal boundaries of the City. In 2003, the City created the ConnectFree Program (Resolution No. 030223, as amended by Resolution Nos. 050601, 130718, and 140313), which was funded by surcharges collected on water and wastewater connections, to assist with the extension, construction, and connection to the City's water, wastewater, and reclaimed water systems. In July 2014, the City Commission suspended the surcharges on water and wastewater connections for the 2015 fiscal year (Ordinance No. 140171) and discontinued the ConnectFree Program (Resolution No. 140313). The City Commission on May 7, 2015, voted to reinstate the ConnectFree Program (Legislative File No. 140680) and reinstated the surcharges starting in FY 2016 with the adoption of Ordinance No. 150246 on September 17, 2015.

The Community Development Committee and the City Commission decided on the criteria to identify and prioritize projects eligible to receive ConnectFree Program assistance. The ConnectFree Program policy established in this resolution is as follows: 1) grants shall assist with the payment of costs associated with the extension, construction, and connection to the City's water, wastewater, and reclaimed water systems throughout the entire Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) service area; 2) households with incomes at or below the 80% median income level for Gainesville, as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, are eligible to receive additional funding to assist with any necessary on-site plumbing modifications; 3) priority is given to low-income households and areas, as well as projects that promote the elimination or reduction of threats to public health, safety and environmental welfare; 4) a maximum funding limit is provided per customer and per neighborhood, with the limit to be evaluated annually; 5) the City Commission shall approve any projects receiving \$50,000 or greater; 6) criteria for the use of program funds by non-profits/governments that serve special needs populations; and 7) staff reporting back in eighteen (18) months to provide an assessment of the administration of the ConnectFree Program.

Projections indicate that the re-instated 25% surcharge on water and wastewater connection charges in the unincorporated area will generate approximately \$250,000 annually to fund the ConnectFree Program.

Staff recommends that the City Commission adopt the resolution.

The Utility Advisory Board recommends that the City Commission suspend the 25% connection fee and find another way to fund ConnectFree and reimburse GRU for the unfunded mandate connected with this program.