



Agenda Item: 10.A
Date of Meeting: March 23, 2026
Department: Finance

STAFF REPORT

To: City Council
From: Ethan Aukee
Subject: **Introduction and First Reading of an Ordinance Amending Chapter 13 of the Bishop Municipal Code Relating to the Utility Assistance Program**
Prepared On: March 11, 2026
Attachments: Ordinance Amending Sections 13.04.091 and 13.08.061 of the Bishop Municipal Code Relating to the Utility Assistance Program

Background/History:

Title 13 of the Bishop Municipal Code establishes regulations governing the City's water and sewer utilities. Sections 13.04.091 and 13.08.061 currently authorize a Low-Income Senior Citizen Rate Reduction Program, which provides a reduction in monthly water and sewer service charges for qualifying applicants.

Under the existing code provisions, eligibility is limited to households occupied by a person 65 years of age or older whose household income does not exceed the "very low income" threshold established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for Inyo County. Qualifying applicants must receive a utility bill directly from the City and submit an application to the Finance Director on forms provided by the City.

Staff has reviewed the existing program and determined that limiting eligibility to seniors restricts the program's ability to assist other residents experiencing financial hardship. The proposed ordinance amends the applicable sections of Title 13 to convert the existing program from a senior-specific utility rate reduction program to a general low-income utility assistance program.

The ordinance also removes the specific discount amount and structure from the Municipal Code and instead authorizes the City Council to establish program parameters by resolution,

allowing the Council to modify program details in the future without requiring additional amendments to the Municipal Code.

Introduction of the ordinance at this meeting constitutes the first reading. If introduced, the ordinance will return to the City Council at a subsequent meeting for second reading and adoption, at which time the amendments would take effect in accordance with applicable law.

Analysis/Discussion:

The proposed ordinance updates Sections 13.04.091 and 13.08.061 of the Bishop Municipal Code to modify the City's existing utility rate reduction program. The current code provisions limit eligibility to low-income senior households and establish a fixed 25 percent reduction in monthly water and sewer service charges for qualifying applicants.

Staff is recommending two primary changes to the program. First, the ordinance removes the age-based eligibility requirement, allowing the program to be available to qualifying low-income households regardless of age. This change is intended to ensure that assistance is available to residents experiencing financial hardship who may not qualify under the existing senior-only structure.

Second, the ordinance removes the specific discount percentage and program structure from the Municipal Code. Instead, the ordinance authorizes the City Council to establish the details of the utility assistance program by resolution. This approach provides greater administrative flexibility, allowing the Council to adjust program parameters—such as the level of assistance, eligibility verification requirements, or program limits—without requiring future amendments to the Municipal Code.

The proposed changes do not alter the City's ability to administer the program through the Finance Department or require that applicants receive a utility bill directly from the City. Program administration, application procedures, and verification of eligibility will continue to be managed by the Finance Director in accordance with adopted policies.

If introduced, the ordinance will return to the City Council at a subsequent meeting for second reading and adoption. Upon adoption, staff will return with a separate resolution establishing the program structure and discount level for the utility assistance program.

Impacts to Council Goals and Strategic Planning Priorities:

The proposed ordinance supports the City Council's goals of maintaining reliable municipal services while promoting community well-being and responsible governance. Expanding the utility assistance program from a senior-specific benefit to a broader low-income program

improves access to essential utility services for qualifying residents experiencing financial hardship.

The amendment also supports sound administrative practices by allowing program details to be established by resolution rather than fixed in the Municipal Code. This approach provides the City Council with greater flexibility to adjust program parameters over time as community needs, utility costs, or policy priorities evolve, without requiring additional amendments to the Municipal Code.

Overall, the proposed changes help ensure the City's utility assistance program remains responsive, equitable, and administratively efficient while supporting the Council's broader priorities related to community support and effective municipal service delivery.

Budget Impacts:

The proposed ordinance itself does not have a direct budget impact. The ordinance establishes the framework for the utility assistance program and authorizes the City Council to set program parameters by resolution.

Any financial impact associated with the program will depend on the assistance structure and eligibility criteria established by the City Council through a future resolution. Program costs would be reflected as reduced utility service charge revenues within the applicable utility funds. Staff will administer the program within existing operational resources.

Legal Review:

The City Attorney has reviewed this item and finds that the recommended action complies with the law.

Recommended Action:

Council consideration to approve the first reading and introduction of an ordinance amending Chapter 13 of the Bishop Municipal Code relating to the City's Utility Assistance Program by title only.

Approved By: Ethan Aukee 3/11/2026

Approved By: Robin Picken 3/11/2026

Approved By: Pam Foster 3/16/2026

Approved By: