

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

In the Matter of the Request of

AVISTA CORPORATION, d/b/a AVISTA
UTILITIES,

Petitioner,

For Less Than Statutory Notice in
Connection with Tariff Revisions

DOCKET UE-220565 and UG-220566

ORDER 01

GRANTING LESS THAN
STATUTORY NOTICE;
ALLOWING TARIFF REVISIONS

BACKGROUND

- 1 On July 27, 2022, Avista Corporation, d/b/a Avista Utilities, (Avista or Company) filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) revisions to its currently effective Tariff WN U-28 and WN U-29, which revises Schedule 92 and Schedule 192 to incorporate an automatic hardship grant offering that helps to mitigate the residual past due balances customers are experiencing and to remove the Low-Income Rate Assistance Program (LIRAP) Senior/Disabled Outreach and Temporary COVID-19 Hardship Assistance grants from its tariff as these programs both concluded on September 30, 2021. The matter was assigned to Dockets UE-220565 (electric) and UG-220566 (natural gas).
- 2 The proposed Automatic Hardship Grant would use approximately \$2.4 million of existing LIRAP funds for the 2021-2022 program year¹ and would be administered in a one-time automatic grant not to exceed \$350 per customer. The grant would not result in a rate impact to customers. The grant would be given to customers that have arrears greater than 60 days, a balance larger than \$100, have not received LIRAP or Project Share assistance during the current program year (since October 2021), and will not be eligible for the forthcoming Department of Commerce funding approved in the 2021 legislative session for utility arrearage forgiveness.
- 3 RCW 80.28.060 and WAC 480-80-121 require that utility companies give 30 days' notice to the Commission and publication prior to the effective date of any tariff. The tariff sheets bear an effective date of August 26, 2022, allowing the required 30-day statutory notice. The Company requests, however, less than statutory notice as permitted

¹ The LIRAP program year runs from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022.

by WAC 480-80-122, and that the revisions become effective August 11, 2022. Avista requests less than statutory notice so that the Company may offer this customer relief immediately as funding is readily available to do so and customers with arrears greater than 60 days could be at risk of continued hardship including a risk of disconnection.

4 Commission staff (Staff) has reviewed the proposed filings to incorporate an Automatic Hardship Grant and believes it is a reasonable proposal to use LIRAP funds for the 2021-2022 program year. With the estimated \$2.4 million spent on this one-time automatic grant, the LIRAP program will still have an additional approximately \$6 million in LIRAP funding to distribute between August 11, 2022, and September 30, 2022. While funds can carry over to the following program year, Staff believes this is a reasonable use of funds now as there are customers in need of arrears assistance. Further, Staff believes that as this grant will be targeted towards customers who have not previously received LIRAP or project share assistance but are estimated to be low-income qualified, this could be an effective way to target households who qualify for assistance but haven't contacted Avista to receive it.²

5 Staff has reviewed the tariff language which allows the Energy Assistance Advisory Group (EAAG) some discretion to modify the specific thresholds and timing intervals by which the Automatic Hardship Grant is distributed. Staff believes this provision is reasonable as it allows flexibility for future automatic grant distribution that may differ in nature should a different extenuating circumstance arise in the future. Staff believes this approach reduces administrative burden of multiple tariff filings, were the EAAG to come to consensus on another round of automatic hardship grants in the future.

DISCUSSION

6 We agree with Staff's recommendation. WAC 480-80-122 allows the Commission to grant less than statutory notice when a company provides good cause.

7 The grant provided by this tariff revision will be targeted towards customers who are estimated to be low-income qualified and will allow Avista to target households who qualify for assistance but haven't yet applied for it and may be in danger of imminent hardship. Since the proposed tariff revisions appear to be fair, just, reasonable, and

² According to Avista's 2019 Low-Income Needs Assessment (LINA), completed by Evergreen Economics, approximately 95,387 customers within Avista's service territory may qualify as "low-income," thereby qualifying for energy assistance. However, only approximately 20,255 are receiving such assistance each year, resulting in a saturation rate of approximately 21 percent.

sufficient, and less than statutory notice is consistent with the public interest, we grant Avista's request with an effective date of August 11, 2022.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8 (1) The Commission is an agency of the State of Washington vested by statute with the authority to regulate the rates, regulations, practices, accounts, securities, transfers of property and affiliated interests of public service companies, including electric companies.
- 9 (2) Avista is an electric company and a public service company subject to Commission jurisdiction.
- 10 (3) Avista is subject to RCW 80.28.060 and WAC 480-80-121, which require electric companies to file changes in any rate, charge, or service with 30 days' notice. For good cause shown, however, the Commission may allow changes without requiring 30 days' notice by order specifying the changes to be made and the time when the Order shall take effect. WAC 480-80-122.
- 11 (4) Staff has reviewed Avista's request in Dockets UE-220565 and UG-220566 and recommends the Commission grant the Company's request for less than statutory notice.
- 12 (5) This matter came before the Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on August 11, 2022.
- 13 (6) After reviewing Avista's proposed tariff revisions filed on July 27, 2022, and giving due consideration to all relevant matters and for good cause shown, the Commission finds the proposed tariff revisions should become effective August 11, 2022, and that Avista should be granted exemption from the customer notice requirements.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 14 (1) Avista Corporation, d/b/a Avista Utilities' request for less than statutory notice is granted.

- 15 (2) The tariff revisions Avista Corporation, d/b/a Avista Utilities filed on July 27, 2022, will be effective on August 11, 2022.

The Commissioners, having determined this Order to be consistent with the public interest, directed the Secretary to enter this Order.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective August 11, 2022.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

AMANDA MAXWELL
Executive Director and Secretary