

**Agenda Item: Resolution**

Title: Resolution 2020-55 Authorizing the Transfer of Funds from the Economic Development Fund (Daycare) in the Amount of \$86,000 to Laramie Interfaith to form a Partnership for Resident COVID-19 Relief

Recommended Council MOTION:

I move to approve Resolution 2020-55 authorizing a transfer of funds from the Economic Development Fund (Daycare) in the amount of \$86,000 to Laramie Interfaith to establish a grant partnership for Resident COVID-19 Relief and authorize the Mayor and Clerk to sign.

Administrative or Policy Goal:

Provide financial assistance for utilities and other critical services for residents in need.

Background:**Current Status/Recommendation:**

The City applied for COVID Relief funding at the State level for \$250,000; the request was denied by the Wyoming State Land and Investment Board on August 6, 2020. The City is requesting to assist residents with a partnership with Laramie Interfaith (Interfaith) by transferring the restricted \$86,000 in daycare monies to a resident assistance program with Interfaith. Laramie Interfaith has the tools to determine the appropriate funding needed for each client. This may include daycare expenses, medical, utilities, or other expenditures. If City Council desires to transfer these monies, staff will develop a Memorandum of Understanding with Interfaith.

Initial Background:

In April, the City of Laramie began to waive all shut-offs for utility bills. Municipal customers were notified of this option by letters sent within their utility bills. This action was taken with the recognition that many customers were suffering from income and wage reductions or job losses as a result of the pandemic. Delinquent payments increased by 25%, and many customers continue to struggle to pay bills and are now several months behind. The City of Laramie, therefore, reached out to Laramie Interfaith, which serves as a conduit for our community to help residents in need, to brainstorm creative solutions.

Laramie Interfaith has, for the past 35 years, served as a dynamic and vital local nonprofit, distributing more than 1,000 pounds of food every day and providing financial assistance to more than 40 families each month. Interfaith's primary focus is to work alongside Albany County residents to prevent and alleviate homelessness and food insecurity while helping motivated families achieve self-sustainability. To that end, Laramie Interfaith provides holistic support ranging from rental assistance, specialized budget training, food, and transportation.

As the pandemic wore on Laramie Interfaith services and aid increased significantly. From May to June, Interfaith saw a 154% increase in rental and non-municipal utilities (e.g. Gas and Electric) assistance requests, with 60% of those requests being COVID-19 related. Interfaith's average dollar amount per request also increased by 35%.

In the City's inaugural conversation with Laramie Interfaith, it became apparent that it would be shortsighted to partner only to help municipal customers to catch up with their utility bills. For example, many persons in need are prioritizing bill payments. So, while a person may be up to date on his or her utility bill, rent has gone unpaid and vice versa. Similarly, people who have been more acutely affected may not be able to pay rent *or* utilities and are facing imminent homelessness.

With all these issues and nuances at play, the City and Interfaith determined a more suitable solution than focusing purely on utilities would be for Interfaith, through its extensive intake process, to determine the best assistance “roadmap” to meet the unique needs of each individual client, whether that be utilities, rent, medical or a combination thereof. Currently, all assistance interviews occur by phone in order to follow physical distancing guidelines. During the phone interview, Interfaith’s case managers assess each individual’s situation and reason for requesting assistance. The assessment process covers client strengths, such as family support, income, other sources of aid, and back-up plans; the assessment also identifies potential vulnerabilities in the individual’s life such as medical issues, family size, and other stressors. Additionally, with the CARES Act funding to support rental and mortgage assistance via the Wyoming Community Development Authority’s (WCDA) Wyoming Emergency Housing Assistance Program (WEHAP), Interfaith’s intake process also includes screening to determine if clients qualify for aid through that program. Those who do qualify for the program are supported in seeking aid through the WCDA. For those that slip through that safety net because they do not meet stringent qualifications or for some other circumstance (which is the majority of Laramie Interfaith’s clients), staff finds alternative interventions and aid sources. After this information is collected, each case is discussed at a weekly Review Board meeting. The Board works to fill as many requests as possible while prioritizing the most vulnerable individuals and families and those who do not qualify for other programs, including WEHAP.

After the funding amount and sources are identified for each request, Interfaith’s case managers follow up with families to collect income verification and any other necessary documentation. For example, when utilizing federal Community Services Block Grants (CSBG), Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), or other federal funds, Interfaith case workers make sure to gather documentation to verify that individuals receiving assistance fall at or below the pertinent percentage of the poverty level for each grant. After collecting all necessary documentation, case workers then complete a voucher detailing the dollar amount of assistance, the individual requesting help, and the contact information for where the payment will be sent. Checks are generated from the voucher information and sent directly to landlords or utility providers. Following the payment, the individual’s demographic information and details of the assistance provided are entered into the appropriate database depending on the funding sources, including the Community Action Plan database for CSBG, HMIS, and the Emergency Solutions Grant.

If this grant is awarded, the City of Laramie and Laramie Interfaith will negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding to define the roles and responsibilities in disseminating aid to clients, procedures for invoicing the City for reimbursement when aid is disseminated, and processes for meeting all grant requirements and assuring allowable uses of funding sources.

Legal/Statutory Authority:

N/A

BUDGET/FISCAL INFORMATION:**EXPENSE**

Proposed Project Cost.

Project Budget	Amount	Funds
Project Cost		
Loans on Project		
Grants for Project	\$86,000.00	Transfer ED fund for Grant to Laramie Interfaith
Other/Outside Projects		
City's Amount		
Contingency	0%	\$0.00
Total Amount	\$0.00	

Responsible Staff:

Janine Jordan, City Manager

Malea Brown, Chief Operating Officer

Sarah Reese, Economic Administrator