



## City of Gainesville Agenda Item Report

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**File Number:** 2023-11

**Agenda Date:** January 5, 2023

**Department:** Gainesville Regional Utilities

**Title:** 2023-11 Update on Winter Energy Usage and Billing and Staffing (B)

**Department:** Gainesville Regional Utilities

**Description:** An unusually cold winter in Gainesville has the potential to increase electric bill totals for GRU customers. GRU staff will address the utility's approach to reducing costs, assisting customers in lowering their energy usage to help keep their bills lower and other customer assistance during this challenging time. Staff will also provide an update on billing and staffing issues.

**Fiscal Note:** The Utility will accrue additional expenses for contracting outside resources and overtime for current employees. These expenses will be absorbed in the FY23 budget.

**Explanation:** Over the last several fiscal years, GRU has increased electric rates in order to keep pace with the continuously rising cost of supplies and equipment, in addition to numerous other fiscal pressures. Additionally, the skyrocketing cost of fuel continues to place a burden on customers. These increases have driven higher energy costs, and bills may also be impacted in the next month or so as temperatures drop and energy usage increases. In addition to our every-day practices, staff has undertaken a number of additional measures to keep costs down and to assist customers in lowering their energy usage to minimize potential bill increases.

The Utility has faced additional challenges since the summer of 2022, when GRU experienced a substantial staffing shortage in the meter reader position, which caused delays in completing meter reading routes. The delay caused longer billing cycles and in turn, higher bills. In an effort to reduce the number of days billed, the organization made a decision to estimate usage and enter actual reads the following month when staff was able to complete their routes.

Some of the estimations were significantly under or over the actual reads and the billing system interpreted the differences as anomalies. These anomalies must be corrected manually by billing staff before bills can be issued. The number of estimations caused a

backlog and some bills were not issued for two or more months. Staff has taken an all-hands-on-deck approach to correcting this situation.

Staff will give a presentation to update the City Commission on the utility's approach to the above challenges.

**Strategic Connection:**

Goal 5: Best in Class Neighbor Services.

**Recommendation:** The City Commission hear a presentation from staff.