



**OFFICE OF THE CITY
COUNCIL**

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Notice Meeting CM's Peluso and Gaffney Jr. RE JEA Utility Assistance

October 8, 2026

Don Davis Room 4:00 PM

Attendees: Council Members Jimmy Peluso (D7), Reggie Gaffney Jr. (D8), Tyrone Clark-Murray (D9), Rahman Johnson (D14), Moné Holder (AL1), Ken Amaro (D1), (Renee Goode Director of Government Relations JEA, Brian Parks Assistant Council Auditor

Call to Order: 4:00 p.m.

Summary

Opening & Purpose

Council Members Jimmy Peluso and Reggie Gaffney Jr. convened the noticed meeting to discuss growing constituent concerns regarding utility bills and the availability of utility assistance. Council Member Gaffney Jr. discussed rising household costs and questioned whether the City and its community partners were doing enough to assist residents experiencing financial hardship. Council Member Peluso stated that the discussion was intended to take place outside the recently completed budget process and raised the possibility of using City reserves to provide emergency utility assistance.

JEA Utility Assistance Programs

Representatives from JEA discussed existing customer-assistance programs and processes, including referrals to community agencies, customer service support, payment arrangements, and free water and energy audits. JEA representatives noted that some community partners face staffing limitations that affect their ability to answer calls, schedule appointments, complete intake procedures, and assist all customers seeking help.

Dr. Charles Moreland, the Chief Customer Experience Officer at JEA, reported approximately 6,719 active payment arrangements, 19,516 active short-term payment plans, and 21,627 customers participating in JEA's MyWay program. He stated that these figures reflected substantial customer need and indicated that he would follow up with a more precise count of customers having trouble paying their utility bills.

JEA representatives explained that water and energy audits can help identify unusually high usage, leaks, and opportunities to improve energy efficiency. Chief Financial Officer Ted Phillips discussed rising operating costs and infrastructure investments affecting utility rates.



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He also addressed construction of a combined-cycle power plant intended to replace an older natural-gas plant that entered service in 1977 and has experienced reliability concerns.

City and Community Assistance Resources

A representative from the City's Senior Services program discussed the Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program for seniors, referred to during the meeting as HEAP. The program serves eligible adults aged 60 and older. The representative stated that the most recent contract ended June 30, 2026, and that the City was awaiting renewal with ElderSource. Approximately \$114,000 in crisis assistance was awarded during the prior contract year, with an average of approximately 50 seniors assisted per month. The representative also reported receiving approximately 40 to 50 calls per day from seniors seeking utility-bill assistance while the contract renewal remained pending.

An ElderSource representative explained that seniors living on fixed incomes are particularly affected by rising costs and described ElderSource's utility-assistance efforts in addition to the state-funded program. The representative indicated that additional local support could help address unmet needs while the state contract was being renewed.

A representative of United Way of Northeast Florida discussed the role of the 211 help line in screening callers and connecting residents with community partners, including Catholic Charities, Family Community Services, and other service providers. The representative reported that approximately 5,100 Duval County residents were connected with utility-assistance appointments or support during the prior fiscal year, while 1,159 utility-assistance needs went unmet because funding or resources were unavailable. The representative also stated that 211 receives approximately 46,000 calls annually across all service needs in Duval County. The 5,100 figure was presented as relating specifically to utility-assistance connections, rather than total calls.

The United Way representative discussed heavy call volume, wait times, restrictive eligibility requirements, and the need for additional staffing if the system were to accommodate a substantial increase in utility-assistance requests. Participants emphasized that assistance programs have differing eligibility requirements and that funding may be limited to one instance within a 12-month period or another specified timeframe.

Participants discussed the need for improved coordination among JEA, the City, United Way/211, Catholic Charities, ElderSource, and other community providers. Discussion included developing a coordinated process to screen applicants, distribute assistance, track outcomes, improve public awareness, and make effective use of technology.



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Potential Funding and Next Steps

Council Members discussed a potential two-year utility-assistance initiative of approximately \$2 million, with an additional estimated \$300,000 for administrative staffing and program infrastructure. The discussion included the possibility of requiring reports every six months. These amounts were discussed as a potential proposal and were not adopted as an appropriation during the meeting.

JEA representatives indicated that, following adoption of the current budget and the beginning of the new fiscal year, additional funding might need to come from operating reserves unless another funding source could be identified.

Council Members raised questions about administrative expenses, whether funding should support both the 211 screening function and direct-service providers, and how to prevent duplication or fragmentation among participating organizations. Members also discussed whether eligibility requirements could be made more flexible to assist residents whose needs do not fit existing program criteria.

Participants emphasized that additional funding alone would not resolve access issues without adequate staffing, clear coordination among providers, and reliable information regarding whether applicants ultimately received assistance.

The co-chairs and participating Council Members discussed holding another noticed meeting, potentially the following week, to further develop the program design and consider a more specific legislative proposal. No final funding decision, appropriation, or legislation was adopted at this meeting.

Council Member Discussion

Council Members discussed constituent reports concerning difficulty reaching assistance providers, lengthy waits for appointments and utility audits, increasing utility bills, and the challenges faced by residents who are several months behind on payments. Members considered the need for timely relief while ensuring that any proposed program could be administered effectively and receive sufficient Council support.

The discussion also addressed the immediate needs of senior residents and the importance of coordinating the City's efforts with those of JEA and community-based assistance organizations. Members raised questions about how assistance could be distributed efficiently, how residents could be connected to available resources, and how program outcomes could be monitored.



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Public Comments

Wilshan Tiller: Expressed frustration with JEA, and a significant personal JEA bill.

Rev Dr Russell Meyer: Expressed the need for JEA to provide assistance to at-need residents for improving energy efficiency in historic homes.

Michelle Rivera: Expressed frustration with JEA rate increase.

John Nooney: Expressed interest in funding the utility assistance program with a data center.

Suzanne Sapp: Chose not to speak (JEA Rates and Services)

Closing Remarks

Council Members thanked the presenters, City staff, community organizations, and members of the public for their participation. Participants reiterated the importance of continued coordination and further development of a utility-assistance proposal.

Adjourned