

THE SUN-GAZETTE

Visalia offers up to \$5K in assistance for families

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\$1.2 million program will now provide up to \$5,000 in rent and utility assistance to more than 200 households impacted by coronavirus

VISALIA – What started as a plan to exhaust the city’s state coronavirus relief funding has now become a \$1.2 million program to assist Visalia residents struggling to pay their bills.

The Visalia City Council unanimously voted at its Oct. 5 meeting to use the third round of Community Block Development Grant, Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funding to expand its rent and utility assistance program to help those who have experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19.

The council had initially set aside \$189,000 on Aug. 17 left over from its food program contracted through the Central California Food Bank in July to assist residents with rent and utility payments. That money was part of the first round of CDG-CV funding. On Sept. 11, the city was notified it would receive \$740,000 as part of a third round of funding. By Oct. 5, staff presented the council with a \$1.2 million budget for the program that kicked in another \$211,000 in unspent round one funding and rolled over \$160,000 in 2019 CDBG funding.

Originally intended to provide up to \$3,000 for 63 households, the additional funding will allow the city to provide up to \$5,000 for 204 households.

“With the City Council’s authorization, we will now be working on the disbursement of federal COVID-19 funding to assist those struggling here in Visalia,” shared Margie Perez, City of Visalia Housing Specialist. “Households who have both experienced financial hardship and meet income limits may receive assistance to help with rent/mortgage and/or utilities payments during this difficult time.”

The new program, entitled the COVID-19 Residential Rental/Mortgage and Utility Assistance Program, has a maximum assistance cap of \$5,000 per household for up to six consecutive months.

Applicants must have experienced a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and their households must be at or below 80% Area Medium Income limits. Those who are already receiving housing assistance through a local or federal program are not eligible, as payments cannot be a duplication of benefit.

“We have partnered with two, local service providers to administer the program Self-Help Enterprises and Proteus, Inc.,” adds Perez. “Interested applicants should contact one of the two agencies directly and they’ll be walked through the application process.”

COVID-19 Residential Rental/Mortgage and/or Utility Assistance Program payments can be used to assist with current and/or past due monthly rental or mortgage payments, and/or utilities such as electric, gas, water, sewer and trash. Payments will be paid directly to the service provider and are

only for the resident's primary residence. Assistance will be provided on a first-come, first-serve basis until funds are exhausted or until March 31, 2021, whichever comes first.

Those looking to apply for the COVID-19 Residential Rental/Mortgage and Utility Assistance Program can contact Self-Help Enterprises at 802-1273 or Proteus, Inc. at 627-0100.