

RESOLUTION 21-13
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE HELIX WATER DISTRICT
APPROVING THE HELIX HELPS CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO PROVIDE
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, FROM NON-WATER RATE REVENUE, TO CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE
UNPAID, PAST DUE WATER BILLS AS A RESULT OF FINANCIAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND AUTHORIZING THE GENERAL MANAGER TO EXECUTE A
CONTRACT WITH HOME START INC. TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely began in December 2019, spread widely throughout the United States in 2020; and

WHEREAS, on March 19, 2020, California's Governor Newsom issued a stay at home order for all nonessential California businesses and schools to try and limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Governor Newsom signed an executive order that prohibited water agencies throughout the state from shutting off water service for nonpayment to all residential and critical commercial customers; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 2020, the district's board voted to temporarily suspend water shutoffs and late fees, to support customers experiencing economic or health impacts from the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, on or about April 1, 2020, the district's board took further action to support ratepayers by postponing the district's Proposition 218 rate notice that was scheduled for August 2020, effectively freezing water rates; and

WHEREAS, over the past year of the pandemic, the district has continued to look for ways to support its customers, including increasing communication, offering payment arrangements for past due balances and providing references to outside agencies who offer financial assistance to struggling residents; and

WHEREAS, the district's customer service representatives have spent extended time working with customers to help them understand their outstanding balances and reassuring them that their water will not be shut off for nonpayment; and

WHEREAS, the district desired to provide additional assistance and while its efforts to help its customers mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic have been helpful and appreciated, as of January 2021, the district had 583 customers who, from March 2020, have outstanding balances, that under normal circumstances, would have resulted in their water service being discontinued for nonpayment. This group's unpaid amounts total \$404,432; and

WHEREAS, in January 2021, the district began exploring the idea of creating a customer assistance program, however, Proposition 218, which largely governs how California public agencies set water rates, does not allow agencies to use water bill revenue to create financial assistance, low-income or other programs that discount water bills for certain customers; and

WHEREAS, an agency which has revenue from other, non-water bill sources, can use those funds to establish a customer assistance program and it is the desire of the district to create the Helix Helps Customer Assistance Program, using \$500,000 of land sales reserve funds to provide financial assistance to approximately 1,400 customers who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, providing relief for unpaid water bills of up to \$300; and

WHEREAS, the district's core mission is to provide safe, reliable drinking water, and as it does not have the infrastructure or staffing available to administer an in-house customer assistance program, the district proposed to contract with the San Diego based nonprofit organization, Home Start Inc., for an amount not to exceed \$80,000, to screen and qualify Helix Helps Customer Assistance Program applicants using established criteria and provide a weekly list of qualified applicants to the district's customer service manager. Qualified applicants would then be contacted by a district customer service representative in order to apply the program credit to the customer's account and a set up of an amortization payment for any remaining, unpaid account balance; and

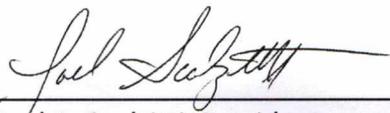
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Helix Water District Board of Directors approved the Helix Helps Customer Assistance Program to provide financial assistance, from non-water rate revenue, to customers who have unpaid, past due water bills as a result of financial impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and authorizing the general manager to execute a contract with Home Start Inc. to implement the program.

PASSED, ADOPTED, AND APPROVED this 24th day of February 2021, by the following vote:

Ayes: Scalzitti, Hedberg, McMillan, Gracyk, Verbeke

Noes: None

Absent: None



Joel A. Scalzitti, President

ATTEST:



Sandra L. Janzen, Secretary of the Board

