



Date: June 20, 2013

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: W. Bowman Ferguson, Deputy City Manager
From: Donald F. Greeley, Director, Water Management
Subject: Citizen request to appear at City Council Work Session
Ms. Alicia Sidney-Vick

Executive Summary

Ms. Alicia Sidney-Vick has submitted a request to appear before City Council to protest the assessment of connection/reconnection and penalty fees due to delinquency, stating that the decision making process is unfair because the decision-makers are all male (see attached form) and therefore there is an imbalance in the organization.

Background

Ms. Vick's service was initially set up in November of 2011. The following summarizes the account activity to the present:

- 6/4/2012 – Customer's service was terminated for non-payment.
- 8/2/2012 - Customer cut off again for non-payment; at this time she complained about not getting bills in the mail. The Billing Manager made one-time adjustment to remove the penalty and provided general information regarding the timing of mailing bills and using the web payment tool to avoid further late fees.
- 8/17/2012 – Customer continued to register concerns regarding policy of assessing \$50 disconnection fee and additional \$50 deposit for cut-off for delinquency. The Utility Finance Manager attempted to contact the customer by phone, however after two voice mails were not returned, Ms. Ziegler sent a letter to explain that by policy these fees could not be waived (see attached).
- 3/22/13 - Customer made extended payment arrangements, committing to make timely payments to catch up the past due balance.
- 4/3/13 - Customer missed first payment due date; cut off for not honoring payment agreement.
- 5/30/13 - Customer visits City Manager's office with concerns.

Issues and Analysis

In November of 2012, Ms. Vick's meter reading district was converted to monthly billing and since then her bills have ranged between \$40 and \$50 per month. Customer Billing staff have consistently applied the existing ordinance [Section 70-57 (a), (d), and (e) of the City Code of Ordinances] and policy when working with Ms. Vick.

- When a customer's service is terminated for non-payment, the reconnection fee is \$50 plus another \$50 penalty which is added to the customer's deposit. Per the ordinance, an additional \$50 deposit is assessed each time the account is cut-off for non-payment until the deposit reaches \$200. Ms. Vick has currently accrued penalties of \$150.

- Customer Billing staff consistently strive to work with customers to develop reasonable payment arrangements. However, per the current policy in effect, when a payment agreement is broken without prior notice or renegotiation, the customer must pay in full and must wait another six months to be eligible for a new extended payment arrangement.
- Since Ms. Vick became a City of Durham water customer, she has spoken with the following CBS staff: Customer Service Supervisor Angela Andrews, Customer Service Supervisor Jared Murphy, Billing Manager Rosa Williams and Utility Finance Manager Martha Zeigler. Staff also recalls that Ms. Vick may have spoken to former Deputy City Manager Ted Voorhees about this issue.
- Ms. Vick has not contacted me although she indicated this on the form.
- The Code of Ordinances and subsequent amendments must be adopted by City Council prior to enforcement. This process includes the opportunity for public comment and Council considers both the needs of customers and the City's financial health in making decisions.

Attachments

Request to appear form

Letter to Ms. Vick, August 17, 2012