

#467972 1125 Hague Ave - Q4 2023 Assessment Inquiry (WM) - LH REDUCE

Submitted	Received via	Requester			
March 21, 2024 at 12:00	Web Form	Tim Johnsongrass <tim.johnsongrass@gmail.com>			
Status category	Ticket status	Type	Priority	Group	Assignee
Pending	Pending - Future Event	Question	Normal	PW - Garbage	Lydia Campbell

Assessment No.	Property ID Number	Project Number	Do you need an interpreter?
240111	032823110127	CG2401A1	No

Latitude/Longitude	Location	Other Name
-93.14767,44.94605	1125 Hague Ave, Saint Paul, MN 55104	Timothy Johnson-Grass

Garbage Hauler	Rescheduled LH Date:
Waste Management	04/18/2024

Have you contacted your hauler about this garbage bill before?

Yes

Staff Comments

In 12-2021, WM accidentally closed billing account at 1125 Hague Ave while attempting to close a different account. PO continued to send automatic payments to WM quarterly, but did not notice that they were being returned to the account. In 7-2023, PO called WM about missed collections and the error was then realized. Once the account was reinstated, WM invoiced PO for \$725.62 in Q4 - 2023. This bill included service from 11-7-2021 thru 12-31-2023. Per contract, it is not permissible that haulers back-bill residents more than one quarter. For this reason, the bill was reduced by City staff before being sent to assessment in 1-2024. This original reduction was to \$208.52. That total was calculated to only include service charges from 7-1-2023 thru 12-31-2023 with no late fees.

PO has now provided proof of payment to WM for \$96.08 on 10-11-2023. Payment was received without return and applied toward the Q4 -2023 bill. I therefore recommend that this assessment be reduced by the amount of that payment for a total of \$112.44.

Billing year for Delinquent Garbage Bill Assessment	Date of CP (MM/DD/YYYY)
2023	05/15/2024

Total amount due for Delinquent Garbage Bill Assessment	Legislative Hearing Required
208.52	Yes

Other Telephone	Date of LH (MM/DD/YYYY)	Other Email
6518952683	04/04/2024	tim.johnsongrass@gmail.com

Stated Reason for Appeal (if given)

Waste Management has made an error...again

Did you receive a Saint Paul City Council Public Hearing Notice Ratification of Assessment?

Yes

Garbage Invoice Dates (i.e. January 1- March 31)

October 1 - December 31

Billing period for Delinquent Garbage Bill Assessment	Time of LH
Quarter 4 (October - December)	9:00 AM

Tim Johnsongrass March 21, 2024 at 12:00

On 11/7/2021 a neighbor at 1129 Hague moved, cancelling their garbage, but Waste Management canceled OUR garbage service at 1125 instead. We were paying for the service every period via auto pay between 11/21-9/23. Since our account was cancelled without us knowing and collection continued and we were making payments every period we were unaware there was an issue at all until calling WM because they skipped our entire street

for collection one week. While on the phone WM could not find an account for our address, which is how we learned of the cancellation. After two years of this occurring...despite NEVER RECEIVING ANYTHING from Waste Management in regards to payments not being made, we were asked to make back payments for their mistake. Again, this was for a TWO YEAR PERIOD! I own a business and I would be disemboweled if I charged a customer for making a mistake and then trying to collect payment from two years prior. Regardless, in Sept 2023 we paid WM \$500 for all payments that were returned and resolved the account issue after 6, yes 6 phone calls attempting to reinstate and resolve our account! Fast forward to today and we receive this assessment notice File # CG2401A1 stating we have not paid Oct-Dec 2023. I have attached the invoice and a screenshot of our account showing no balance due and the invoice for Oct-Dec 2023 showing the amount paid in full on 10/5/2023. I do not understand why WM cannot adequately account for our payments and manage a simple process. Frankly I'm fed up with being forced to use this company and question its practices and ability to be a contractor for the City of St Paul. I humbly request this assessment be removed and proof of its removal sent to me prior to the April 4th Hearing so I can adequately manage this waste of yours and my time due to the ineptitude of WM. Sorry to express my frustration to you, but this is becoming a major problem.

Lydia Campbell March 21, 2024 at 16:33

Internal note

PO received an invoice in Oct 2023 from WM with request for payment dating back to 11/7/2021. PO states that 11/7/2021 their neighbor at 1129 Hague Ave moved, but WM accidentally canceled the billing account for their address, 1125 Hague Ave. PO did not realize the error because they had autopay set up. Error came to light when PO called to report a missed collection and WM stated they had no account on file for the address. PO states that they paid WM \$500 in Sep 2023 and now received an assessment for \$208.52.

Lydia Campbell March 21, 2024 at 16:40

Dear Tim,

I am so sorry that you are having to deal with this issue. It is not permissible for the hauler to back-bill a customer more than one billing period, no matter the circumstance. I am sorry that you paid that amount and going to do what I can to have that money returned to you.

In addition, I am going to investigate why part of that bill was then sent to you as an assessment. The reason the City assesses for garbage bills is only supposed to be when a resident does not pay their bill. In those cases, the City would pay the bill on behalf of the homeowner and assess the property owner as recompense.

Can you please reply with the following:

- Proof of the exact amount you paid to WM in 2023.
 - You can submit a bank statement, receipt, or account ledger with your hauler. Make sure that the date, amount, and Waste Management are all visible in the image. You can send a picture, screenshot, or file and attach it to your email reply. The "Invoice History" screenshot you sent does not show enough information, because it only shows what they charged you, not who paid/how much.
- When you contacted WM about the missed collection.
 - It's okay if you don't know the exact date.

Thank you,

Lydia

City of Saint Paul
Public Works - Solid Waste
651-266-6101

Tim Johnsongrass March 22, 2024 at 18:08

Hi Lydia - Thank you SO MUCH for your response and your work on this matter. I'm finding it to be even more confusing the more I dig into it. Just got off the phone with WM and can't say I resolved much, but I'm a couple steps closer to understanding what still needs to be resolved. They show payments received as I do, but their online system and invoices do not reflect any outstanding balances. They could not find any unpaid balances

either. Perhaps when payment is forwarded to the city, the amount is shown as paid on WM end since the city would pay on our behalf, then send to the county for assessment on taxes.

I see two issues here, maybe they are related or independent, but I can't be sure one way or the other. So lets go through them one at a time.

1. On the ratification of assessment "collection of delinquent garbage bills for services provided October through December 2023" in the amount of \$208.52. I am not clear about how the \$208.52 amount was arrived at. Our auto pay (see attached Wells Fargo report) Shows a payment of \$96.08 on 10/11/23. This would be for the Oct - Dec collection period. I looked into our bill pay settings in the WM account and it is set up to pay the entire invoice (not a specific \$ amount) "20 days after invoice date" so any balance due should have been paid at that time. Regardless, our account was debited \$96.08.

2. This second issue may be related, but I'll be very honest in saying nothing makes sense and I can't even begin to know where to start to explain because none of the numbers add up no matter how I try to reconcile it. In the same attachment you will see the history of payments to WM, all of them returned (unfortunately it will only allow me to go back two years from today so it is not a full list). I'll be honest and admit we do not pay much attention to deposits into our account but watch debits closely so we never noticed the payments being returned since all of this is automated. I'll admit fault there. I could not find the voicemails or phone call records with WM from this past summer unfortunately. My first contact, where the individual informed me about not having an account on record with WM because it was cancelled was in July 2023. I remember because we were on a family trip and I was going back and forth with a woman in the billing department over the course of the following weeks. We were both trying to figure out what was paid and what was returned on either end to make sure we were in agreement and so on. A few phone calls later, things seemed to be resolved and after receiving the 10/5 invoice my wife contacted WM because of the determination that we owed \$575.08 and she wanted to discuss payment. She agreed with me the whole thing was crazy that they were trying to collect payment for such a long period of time for their error. We obviously weren't not making payments. WM received them and returned them. This would have been very soon after receiving the invoice, so around Oct 5-10th is when she talked with someone. She states she felt it best to have the amount owed go as an assessment on our taxes. I cannot find record of that payment. I haven't, to my knowledge, received anything regarding amounts due from WM or the City of St Paul. I'm assuming I would have received something from one of them prior to receiving something from Ramsey County if I understand the process right? Perhaps this is the \$208.52 amount and its listed as Oct-Dec because it was included on that time periods invoice? It is not \$575.08 though. Why would it be less? According to what you stated they can't charge us for that at this point anyway?

All of this is so confusing. I deal with billing issues all the time in our businesses and I'm a financial director and I can't get to the bottom of this one. I'm guessing I'm missing something obscure that I'm not aware of, or I missed a piece of mail or WM simply doesn't know their head from their tail. Whatever the case, I'm grateful for whatever you are able to do to help resolve this.

Lydia Campbell March 27, 2024 at 15:21

Tim,

You're correct in your assumption- once the City pays your overdue bill, the account with WM displays that you are up to date on payments.

Thank you for this detailed response. It prompted me to dig deeper and I found part of the answer! Turns out that when WM sent their list of properties with overdue bills, I was the one who reviewed it. They initially stated that you owe \$723.95. I questioned it because it was high for a single-family dwelling. They had a very long response (attached). **I ultimately approved that they charge you for service from July 1 - December 31 for a 64-gal cart with no late fees.** This is why you received an overdue bill for \$723.95, but **the assessment was a reduced amount: \$208.52.**

Sorry I didn't realize that sooner. I deal with about 6,000 records each quarter, so I don't retain much of the info. Good thing I write it down :)

I'm not sure where the \$575.08 number is coming from, but if WM is no longer coming after you for it, I think we can safely ignore that mystery and focus on what's still owing.

Here are the major points and actions still needed:

- The City still agrees with the initial recommendation that you only be responsible for bills beginning July 1, 2023. For 2023, this is a total of \$208.52 that was assessed on your property.
- That said, because you paid \$96.08 toward that amount in October 2023, I would like to recommend that the assessment be reduced to \$112.44. This will need to be taken care of at the legislative hearing happening next week Thursday. I cannot guaranty that it will be approved, but I will make the recommendation and anticipate it passing.
- It looks like your recurring payment for garbage services successfully went through for January 2024, however, **I recommend that you update the amount.** \$96.08 was the cost of service for a medium cart in 2021. **The current rate is \$112.57/quarter** for that size. If you don't pay the difference before the end of the month, you will receive an assessment for the difference. stpaul.gov/garbagerates

Do you agree with this? Also, did you make any payments to WM from any other accounts? I only ask because you mention your wife assisting with the payments and I want to make sure you are not overcharged.

Thank you for your patience with this process.

Lydia

City of Saint Paul
Public Works - Solid Waste
651-266-6101

Tim Johnsongrass March 27, 2024 at 15:52

Lydia - I can only imagine how many of these you deal with! Yes, I agree with your findings. It all makes sense to me as you have explained it. I agree with the assessment amount as you outline it, \$112.44.

For Q1 2024 WM did charge us the \$96.08 then an additional \$16.49. So, you answered that question about the odd charge, so thank you.

I very much appreciate your efforts to resolve this.

Tim Johnson-Grass

Lydia Campbell March 30, 2024 at 12:08

Internal note

In 12-2021, WM accidentally closed billing account at 1125 Hague Ave while attempting to close a different account. PO continued to send automatic payments to WM quarterly, but did not notice that they were being returned to the account. In 7-2023, PO called WM about missed collections and the error was then realized. Once the account was reinstated, WM invoiced PO for \$725.62 in Q4 - 2023. This bill included service from 11-7-2021 thru 12-31-2023. Per contract, it is not permissible that haulers back-bill residents more than one quarter. For this reason, the bill was reduced by City staff before being sent to assessment in 1-2024. This original reduction was to \$208.52. That total was calculated to only include service charges from 7-1-2023 thru 12-31-2023 with no late fees.

PO has now provided proof of payment to WM for \$96.08 on 10-11-2023. Payment was received without return and applied toward the Q4 -2023 bill. I therefore recommend that this assessment be reduced by the amount of that payment for a total of \$112.44.

Lydia Campbell March 30, 2024 at 12:13

Tim,

I'm glad that we were able to resolve the issue.

The hearing for this assessment is next Thursday 4-4-2024 at 9:00 AM. Unless you disagree with my recommendation, there is no need to attend. Like I said, I fully anticipate it being approved by the hearing officer,

although I cannot promise it. I will send you a letter in the mail with the final resolution.

If you are unhappy with the resolution, you are able to contest it again on 4-18-2024 before it officially goes to council for final approval.

Take care,

Lydia

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