



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

310 CITY HALL

15 WEST KELLOGG BOULEVARD

SAINT PAUL, MN 55102-1615

Marcia Moermond, Legislative Hearing Officer

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PHONE: (651) 266-8585 FAX: (651) 266-8574

January 12, 2023

Donald Sobania
1510 Crawford Street
St. Paul, MN 55113

VIA US MAIL

Re: Water Appeal for Property at 1660 Cumberland Street

Dear Donald Sobania:

You appealed the bill for water services to this property for the water billed September 21 and October 19, 2022. You indicated your goal in the appeal process was for an unspecified reduction in the water bill to a level more consistent with the average water consumption for this property. This appeal was discussed at a Legislative Hearing on December 13, 2022.

I have reviewed the hearing record, documents submitted by you, and Saint Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) subject-matter and made the following findings:

- This is a 17-unit apartment building on Saint Paul's North End; and as such receives monthly bills for water consumption.
- Monthly water consumption at this building billed from the May 18 through the November 18, 2022 averaged 213 units with an average bill of \$1,874.29, **excluding** the monthly bills under appeal.
 - The September 21, 2022 bill was for 338 units and \$2,295.08
 - The October 19, 2022 bill was for 503 units and \$4,316.03.
- A reduction in the bills in question to bring them into alignment with average monthly consumption would result in approximately a \$3,492 credit to the account.
- There is general agreement that the increase in water consumption is related to malfunctioning plumbing fixtures, such as running toilets and dripping faucets.
- There was no assertion in the appeal of faulty SPRWS equipment or meters.
- Tenants in this building are predominantly from the Karen community and you report that the tenants are good, timely in their rent and not destructive to the building and are generally good neighbors.
- This building has an A-Rating from the City's Fire Certificate of Occupancy Program.



- In the Legislative Hearing, you indicated there were 2 underlying reasons justifying a reduction in the bill:
 - Saint Paul was imposing extra costs on landlords related to rent stabilization; and
 - Your renters tend to speak English as a second language; consequently they may not relate building problems or maintenance issues, such as running toilets, to your property manager(s) as they occur. You also noted you are an experienced landlord and your management has Karen language skills.
- In the Legislative Hearing I summarized your argument as a request for a reduction based on the cultural and language differences of your tenants and therefore, their diminished ability to communicate in a relevant way about building deficiencies in need of repair. You concurred with this assessment.

I cannot recommend a reduction the SPRWS Board and will recommend they deny your appeal. Using racial/cultural/nation of origin criteria for disparate treatment in SPRWS billing is not consistent with local, state, and federal codes and laws. Following the logic presented, the appeal is asking for a subsidy from SPRWS based on the demographic composition of tenants in the building. Additionally, the assumption that the untimely repairs was attributable to slow tenant reporting, as opposed to passive building management is problematic.

This matter will go before the Board of Water Commissioners on Tuesday, February 14, 2023 at **5 pm in Room 330, Saint Paul City Hall, 15 Kellogg Blvd. West, Saint Paul, MN.** Please remember to allow time to go through security prior to the meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact Mai Vang at 651-266-8585.

Sincerely,

Marcia Moermond

Marcia Moermond
Legislative Hearing Officer

c: SPRWS Staff: Patrick Shea (General Manager), Mollie Gagnelius, Dolly Ludden, Derek Olson and Racquel Vaske