



Public Relations Committee
(Chair—Griffith, Member—Sewell)
MEETING NOTICE AND MINUTES
Wednesday, May 03, 2023 — 11:00 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Robert Griffith called the meeting to order at 11:00 am

ROLL CALL

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Robert Griffith, Member Ivan Sewell

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Arturo Ceja, Arden Wallum, Brian Macy, Marion Champion
Dori Petee

CUSTOMER PRESENT: Chang Rhee (Homeowner)

PUBLIC INPUT

No public input

APPEAL OF WATER CONSUMPTION CHARGES

66249 Avenida Barona - Discussion and recommendation to the Board of Directors on appeal of water consumption charges.

Arturo Ceja presented a timeline of activities for this account. Mr. Ceja noted that when COVID hit the State issued a moratorium on disconnections. During this time the customer of record (known here as the tenant) accumulated a balance of roughly \$4,000 which included late fees. Mr. Rhee was notified the entire time of the accumulation. In March of 2021, the District removed \$535 in late fees at the request of the tenant. In December of 2021, the moratorium ended. However, the State required the District to make contact with the customer of record (tenant) and set up a payment plan prior to disconnection. In addition, SB 998 prohibited the District from disconnecting service for nonpayment until a payment by a customer has been delinquent for at least 60 days. This clock started when the moratorium was lifted. In January of 2022 this account was included in the Districts arrearages request and received \$723 from the State to apply to this account. The customer also reached out to the District to inquire about a leak at this address which was a contributing factor to the high bills. On April 5th the tenant reached out to the District and established a payment plan of \$100 per month. In addition, the customer applied for bill assistance through the Untied Way and received a \$100 payment towards their account. On June 2nd the homeowner notified the District that he was beginning the eviction process on his tenants. At the same time the tenant established another payment plan. After speaking with Mr. Rhee who expressed he was not comfortable with the balance on this account, the District removed another \$2340 in late fees from the account. The homeowner was also notified about additional bill assistance that may be available to him.

Mr. Rhee addressed the committee and noted some discrepancies in the timeline of his eviction process. He admitted to knowing any balance left by his tenants would be his responsibility, however he never thought the amount would get so high. The circumstances of COVID really affected the way the District ability to handle disconnections. He noted his tenants were Section 8 and feels we should

consider the tenants credit worthiness prior to establishing service. He understands the requirements of SB 998 but feels the District should have acted more quickly. Additionally, because the tenants defaulted many times on their payment arrangements, Mr. Rhee feels we should have taken that into consideration before establishing other payment arrangements.

Member Sewell asked for more clarification on efforts made by the District from January 2022 – present. Mr. Ceja noted that prior to disconnection the District was required to contact the customer and establish a payment plan, the District used many methods of communication to attempt to contact customers, mailings, robo calls, and door hangers. These methods of contact continued through April of 2022. We could not begin the shut off process until we heard back from the customer which happened on April 5, 2022. At this point if the customer refused a payment plan, they would have been immediately disconnected, but the customer did establish a payment plan for this account.

Points of clarification: If a payment plan is established but defaulted on, say the customer misses a payment but then starts up again, it restarts the clock each time.

January of 2022 the tenant reached out to the district regarding a possible leak, which was a contributing factor to the high bills. Mr. Rhee didn't in fact fix said leak until April of 2023. Mr. Rhee claims he was not informed by his previous tenants that there was a leak.

Chairman Griffith noted it is not the responsibility of the District to determine that a customer is credit worthy to establish water service. Additionally in terms of the timeline, the District followed the law and removed up to \$3816 in late fees. As a homeowner, Mr. Rhee is responsible for the balance left on the account. According to Prop 2018, the law determines what the District can and can't do with regards to water service and accounts. Article XIII D, section 6 in summary states the District cannot charge more than the cost of providing service and is proportionally allocated, meaning other rate payers cannot and should not be responsible for water a single customer used. So, the District cannot forgive the fees associated with a customer's account and make other customers responsible for those fees.

Member Sewell confirmed that Mr. Rhee was informed of the increasing balance. Mr. Ceja confirmed that once a tenant becomes past due, the owner of records receives all bills until the amount is no longer past due.

The committee discussed this situation and stated from their perspective that the Board reject this claim.

ADJOURN

With no further business, Chairman Griffith adjourned the meeting at 11:31 AM.

Respectfully,

Arden Wallum
Secretary of the Board of Directors

