

{ SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1} **NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY COUNCIL
UTILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - 6:30 p.m.
MONDAY, JULY 21, 2025**

To Order:

Chairman Martin DeVries called the Utilities Committee meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendance:

Members present were Councilman Bruce Abens, Councilman Eric Shaffer, and Chairman Martin DeVries.

Also present: Mayor Kevin Corcoran, Director of Community Services Tara Peet, Lisa Diederich, Finance Director April Wilkerson, Council President Jason Jacobs, Councilman Councilwoman Georgia Awig, Councilwoman Holly Swenk, and Assistant Clerk of Council Fijabi Gallam.

Minutes:

Chairman DeVries asked for any corrections to the minutes of September 3, 2024. No discussion was offered. Minutes approved as presented.

{Clerk's notes: Numerous discussions took place among the audience that were not captured in the minutes because the microphone did not detect their voices.}

New Business:

O 2024-100 An Ordinance amending Section 1060.07 - *Collection Rate Discounts and Waivers* of N.R.C.O. Chapter 1060 - *Garbage and Refuse Collection and Disposal*.
(Introduced by Mayor Corcoran; First Reading on 06-16-2025)

Chairman DeVries introduced the legislation and asked Councilwoman Swank to explain the proposed legislation.

Councilwoman Swank stated that during her tenure on City Council, she had received numerous calls and requests, primarily from senior citizens, regarding increasing water bills and various fees. She noted that she had met with Director Peet and Director Wilkerson to discuss the issue and discovered that the existing \$2 credit had only been proposed for a single contract year, despite being provided to the senior citizens for the past 30 years. She referenced the previous council meeting, which approved the permanent \$2 discount, where the Administration had identified this oversight.

Councilwoman Swenk stated that the homestead exemption was a separate discount requiring qualification, and that not all senior citizens were eligible for the additional \$1. She acknowledged that the proposed \$5 discount was a huge request. Still, she pointed out that the recent decision to pass credit card fees onto consumers was estimated to save the City approximately \$450,000. She expressed openness to reducing the proposed discount from \$5 to \$3, which, combined with the previously approved \$2 discount, would total \$5. She added that these savings could benefit senior citizens and individuals who are 100% disabled, especially given the addition of water meter surge charges and stormwater fees.

Chairman DeVries asked if the Administration had a chance to review the numbers for the request if the City implemented this type of discount cost.

Mayor Corcoran clarified that the structure of utility billing includes charges for water, sewer, and garbage. The ordinance under discussion proposed changing the eligibility age for the garbage discount from 62 to 65, but did not affect the water discount. He outlined the various discounts offered by the City:

- A senior discount for garbage begins at age 62—a \$1 discount.
- An additional \$1 discount is available at age 65 for those who qualify for the homestead exemption, totaling \$2 for garbage.
- A separate water discount is available starting at age 62, which varies based on usage, and some pay \$15 or less. Seniors using less than 400 cubic feet per month could receive a more significant discount.

{Clerk notes: Technical difficulties with the Audio and Visual presentation.}

Director Wilkerson then presented the fund summary as of July 18, 2025, including forecasted numbers for 2026 based on the City's tax budget. She explained that the refuse fund is separate from other utility funds and derived solely from service charges for garbage collection. The refuse fund was governed by its own

Ordinance, which required a carry-forward amount equivalent to two months of refuse collection payments to the supplier. Director Wilkerson advised that the finance director is responsible for annually evaluating the fund to determine the potential for rate adjustments (increase, decrease, necessity for a rate holiday). In 2025, the fund showed revenues and expenditures broken down into personal services, other expenses, and refuse collection. The fund annually made \$46,824. After accounting for the beginning rollover fund balance and subtracting the mandated carry-forward amount, the fund was projected to end with a balance of \$33,303. She noted that a one-month rate holiday for all customers in 2025 would require \$358,220, which the fund could not support. This limitation extended through 2026, 2027, and 2028. However, based on current forecasts, a rate holiday might be feasible in 2029, when the fund balance is expected to be sufficient.

Director Wilkerson presented a revised fund summary:

- An additional \$4 credit for seniors is proposed, replacing the current homestead credit.
- Currently, seniors 62+ receive a \$1 credit from the City.
- Seniors 65+ with the County's homestead exemption get an additional \$1 credit, totaling \$2.
- The new legislation would eliminate the County's homestead credit and replace it with a \$4 credit for seniors.
- About 2,700 seniors are enrolled in the program.
- With the current seniors enrolled, the proposed change would decrease revenue by \$133,968 annually.
- Additionally, the change would eliminate rate holidays in future years.
- Fund deficits are projected in 2029 and 2030.

Mayor Corcoran responded by stating that negative fund balances were not permissible under City ordinance, which required a two-month carry-forward. To accommodate the projected deficit, rates would need to increase for all customers. He explained that the City's billing system could not support separate rate structures, so that any rate increase would apply universally, with eligible seniors receiving the applicable discount.

Councilman Shaffer asked if the definition for a senior is aged over 62 or 65.

Director Wilkerson confirmed that the North Ridgeville senior credit applied to residents aged 62 and older, while the County's homestead credit applied to those aged 65 and older for the refuse.

Councilman Shaffer inquired whether there is a difference between garbage and refuse.

Director Wilkerson clarified that “refuse” and “garbage” have the same meaning in the ordinance and that recycling is included in refuse collection.

Director Wilkerson requested that, should the Committee choose to move forward with the proposed legislation, language be added to authorize the Finance Director to adjust rates automatically in the event of a deficit. She explained that current legislation limited rate increases to match only the supplier’s rate increase, which would not be sufficient to cover a fund deficit. She asked that the ordinance be amended to allow for greater oversight and flexibility in rate adjustments.

Councilman Abens inquired whether implementing the discount would create a rate increase for residents under the age threshold.

Director Wilkerson confirmed that any rate increase would apply to all customers, including seniors, and the discount would be applied afterward.

Mayor Corcoran explained that the City cannot establish two separate rate structures—one rate for all residents and a discounted rate for some.

Councilwoman Swenk discussed the impact of the 2.95% transaction fee for credit fees that had been paid from various departmental funds, including Parks and Recreation, Water, Sewer, and Refuse, as well as Mayor’s Court and Civil Service collections. She noted that the City incurs nearly \$450,000 annually in credit card fees; however, she did not know which account those fees were paid from before the legislation was passed to allocate credit card fees to consumers. The financial statements showed that the impact on the refuse fund specifically had been minimal.

Director Wilkerson stated that when the City previously absorbed credit card fees, the expense was allocated proportionally across utility funds based on the amount paid by the customer. For example, if a customer paid their entire utility bill via credit card, the fee was distributed among the water, sewer, and refuse funds according to the revenue share each fund received.

Councilwoman Swenk inquired about the estimated savings since the City started passing credit card fees to residents.

Councilman Abens noted that the rates are based on our total costs. Since the City started passing those fees onto customers, they were no longer part of the utility rate structure. He understood that there was no separate fund to save from this change; instead, the fees were removed from the City's expense calculations.

Director Wilkerson confirmed that rates are based on refuse collection and that credit card fees had previously been included in those costs. She reiterated that the refuse fund was used to cover personal services, operational expenses, and collection costs, and that the city was cautious not to overcharge the fund. Only expenses directly related to refuse services were allocated to it.

Director Wilkerson added that the fees were recorded under the "electronic collections" line item, which included various types of charges. As of June, the City had spent approximately \$8,000 in that category, though it was difficult to isolate the exact amount attributed solely to credit card fees. Therefore, the amount associated with credit card charges is minimal.

Councilman Jacobs asked about the financial impact of the proposed senior credit.

Director Wilkerson stated that the additional \$4 credit per senior currently enrolled would cost the fund an extra \$133,968. She explained that she had not projected future enrollment increases, but anticipated that more seniors would likely enroll if the credit were approved. She noted that in 2029, the deficit would be relatively minimal due to the large number of refuse customers (approximately 14,600). Still, by 2030, the deficit could rise to \$7,000, requiring a slightly higher rate adjustment.

Chairman DeVries asked if anyone from the audience would like to speak.

Pat Borke of 8717 Mosswood Circle asked if paying with a credit card means she would not have to pay a fee, and whether the City will cover that fee, or if the City is considering changing the current process.

Director Wilkerson said that this is not the current process. Starting January 1, 2025, the resident pays the fee. In addition, there are no plans to change this process. The City no longer absorbs the cost.

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Director Wilkerson answered Councilman Abens' question regarding the year-end deficit. She explained that in the year with a projected deficit of \$26,851, each

refuse customer would need to pay an additional \$1.83 to cover the senior credit. In the year with a \$66,250 deficit, the extra cost per customer would be \$4.52.

Sandra Williams of 33909 Bainbridge Road voiced concern that as the city expands and the refuse fund grows, there should be a way to give back to residents. She questioned why the city couldn't offer residents a little something in return.

No further public comments were made.

Councilman Shaffer noted that the materials were difficult to read and that he could not make an informed decision without further clarification.

Chairman DeVries recommended tabling the discussion to allow time for review and additional forecasting. He voiced concern about approving a discount that would create a deficit, potentially requiring a rate increase for all residents to offset the cost.

Councilman Abens clarified that the City's refuse service provider charges based on the number of households or addresses, not a flat fee. He explained that as new developments are added, the City's costs increase accordingly. He also shared his personal experience as a senior receiving water discounts, which he appreciated. He expressed concern about shifting the cost burden to younger generations. He stated that the proposed \$5 discount would not significantly benefit him, but could negatively affect the City and its Utilities Department. He supported tabling the discussion until more data could be reviewed.

Councilman Shaffer asked whether different service providers were used for recycling and garbage collection.

Chairman DeVries confirmed that the same company provided both services.

Moved by Chairman DeVries and seconded by Abens to table Ordinance Number 2024-100 until further calculations are obtained, for discussion at the next Utilities Committee meeting.

A voice vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Yes – 3 No – 0

Adjournment:

Chairman DeVries adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Date Approved: December 1, 2025



Fijabi Gallam, MMC
Assistant Clerk of Council