



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: March 22, 2016

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Environmental Services Division, Finance Department

SUBJECT: Municipal Code Amendment To Allow The Combination Of Discrete Water, Sewer And Refuse Services Onto One Utility Bill

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council introduce and subsequently adopt, An Ordinance of the Council of the City of Santa Barbara Amending Section 7.16.320, Billing and Collection, of the Santa Barbara Municipal Code to Allow the City, At Its Own Discretion, to Join Discrete Water, Sewer and/or Refuse Accounts When the Discrete Accounts Contain Corresponding Customer Identification Information and Corresponding Service Locations.

DISCUSSION:

The City directly bills ratepayers for water, sewer and refuse services. Section 7.16.320 of the Municipal Code authorizes the City to include charges for refuse service on the same bill for water and sewer service. Over the past decade or more, water service was often established by the City, and trash service was established separately by the City's waste hauler(s), leading to the creation of hundreds of duplicate accounts in the City's Utility Billing System for the same customer at the same service location.

The existence of these duplicate accounts is inefficient and problematic for several reasons. Duplicate accounts: 1) increase the risk of data errors associated with utility billings; 2) complicate reporting and data management when extracting data from the system; and, 3) may lead to inconsistent treatment of delinquent utility bills. Whereas protocols for termination of service for delinquent water accounts are under the City's direct control, delinquent trash accounts are often pursued by MarBorg, the City's franchised refuse hauler, and other third-party collection agents whose practices may differ from those set forth in the Municipal Code.

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The recommended amendment to Section 7.16.320 of the Municipal Code would allow the City to combine approximately 1,930 discrete water, sewer and refuse accounts into 966 accounts.

This action would also improve the efficiency and accuracy of the City's Utility Billing database and would ensure consistent treatment of accounts.

Staff discussed this amendment to the Municipal Code with the Ordinance Committee on March 1, 2016. MarBorg, the City's franchised solid waste hauler, spoke in support of the recommended action. The Committee voted unanimously to support the staff recommendation to refer the item to the City Council for consideration and action. Since the meeting, at the suggestion of the City Attorney's Office, staff made one minor change to the draft Council resolution to make the language of the entire section consistent with the proposed change.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

There are no budget or financial impacts associated with this Council action.

PREPARED BY: Matthew R. Fore, Environmental Services Manager

SUBMITTED BY: Robert Samario, Finance Director

APPROVED BY: City Administrator's Office