

Agenda Date: October 28, 2021
Item Number: B1

Docket: TG-210647
Company Name: Rubatino Refuse Removal

Staff: Greg Hammond, Regulatory Analyst
John Cupp, Consumer Protection Staff

Recommendation:

Issue a Complaint and Order suspending the tariff pages filed on August 16, 2021, by Rubatino Refuse Removal.

Discussion

On August 16, 2021, Rubatino Refuse Removal (Rubatino or Company) filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) a proposed general rate increase that would generate approximately \$2,126,500 (17.5 percent) in additional annual revenue, to become effective October 1, 2021. The proposed increases are prompted by increased employee wages and benefits, recovery of newly purchased operating assets and other general operating expenses. The Company provides service to approximately 28,000 residential customers in Snohomish County. The Company's last general rate filing was approved for \$606,000 (3.5 percent) additional annual revenue and became effective September 1, 2019.

Commission Staff (Staff) has not been able to complete its review and has data requests outstanding with the Company. These are related to affiliate transactions and the handling of recycling commodities and processing charges between the two entities. The Company and Staff have not yet reached agreement on the revised revenue requirement and have also not agreed to the handling of excess funds due to a forgiven Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) loan. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue an order to suspend the filing until the Company and Staff are able to reach agreement on a revised revenue requirement.

Customer Comment Summary

On August 31, 2021, the Company notified its customers by mail of the proposed rate increase. Customers were notified that they may contact John Cupp at 1-888-333-9882 or john.cupp@utc.wa.gov with questions or concerns. Staff received 18 comments opposed to the increase.

Customer Comments

Seven of the commenters feel the amount of the requested increase is excessive. Six customers said the increase should be denied because they receive poor service; mainly missed pickups and garbage being left on the ground. Several feel the rates are already too

high, and some feel rates should not be increased during the pandemic. Two customers said they should not be charged for recycling because recyclable materials are disposed of with the garbage.

Staff Response

State law requires rates to be fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient to allow the Company to recover reasonable operating expenses and the opportunity to earn a reasonable return on its investment. Commission Staff performs a thorough review of rate filings to ensure that all rates and fees are appropriate.

The Company says it has taken steps to mitigate the loose debris issue by installing tarps on certain vehicles and offers at no charge additional recycling containers that are less susceptible to wind. The Company also said it has a policy against recyclable materials being dumped in with garbage. Staff informed customers how to contact Consumer Protection if they are unable to resolve service issues with the Company.

Recommendations

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