

H-23-503 Contact Information

Hotline ID: H-23-503
Date of Submission: 12/5/2023
Submission Method: Web
Submission Type: Citizen
Staff:
Author (Last, First): Cash , Lori
Address: 1408 S Dusky Drive
City: Ridgefield
State: WA
Zip: 98642
Home Phone:
Work Phone:
Mobile Phone: 3604314782
Email: lorielcash@gmail.com
Can Contact: #CanContact#
Contact Preference: Email
Anonymous: #Anonymous#
Waived
Confidentiality: No

H-23-503 Details Information

What state or local organization is involved?

Please identify the specific concerns you are hoping the audit will address.

Mayor Will Finn, without council approval, public input or notice instructed staff in 5/2023 to ignore a Council Order to implement a utility rate increase per approved Resolution 729, and then at the 12/4/23 Council meeting, put forward a reduced rate schedule for approval, without proper noticing.

Please provide a detailed description of the assertion or outstanding achievement, including who, when, where, what, how and how much.

In December 2022, the Woodland City Council voted to delay the implementation of the scheduled utility rate increase that was scheduled to go into effect on Nov 16, 2022 until May 2023 with Council Order 2022-05, delaying the published Water Rate Increase until May 2023 and Sewer Rate Increase until November 2023. In the May 2023 bills, a note was added informing citizens that the water portion of the bills would be increased to the published rate. This increase did not happen and there was no subsequent communication with the Council or the public informing them of a rate freeze, or allowing for input or council action. The first meeting in November should have included a public hearing and action regarding the next rate increase due to become effective on 11/16/2023. This did not happen. Then, at the 12/4/23 Council meeting, a new rate resolution 776 was put forward, with the new rates retroactive to 11/16/23, to be approved without proper noticing and public input, violating WMC 13.04.300 which states that, "Before modifying any of the rates and charged identified in this chapter, the city council shall hold a public hearing. The clerk-treasurer shall give notice of such to the city's affected utility customers by newspaper publication and by notice in utility billing statements. The mayor freely admits that this rate vacation & rate reduction was his decision alone, that he ignored council action and that he "did it quietly" without public input or participation. The City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer, Peter Boyce and Public Works Director Tracy Coleman should have refused to participate in such an order. Citizens effectively paid published water rates, effective 11/16/2021 for the entirety of 2023. I am not sure of what the total dollar amount not collected is but it was an effective 15% increase that never happened.

How did this issue come to your attention?

I learned about this issue after reviewing the City Council agenda for 12/4/23 and after watching the meeting. Mayor Will Finn, in a Facebook post today, wrote the following admitting that he ignored Council action, did so without proper public notice, and without legal authority: "Utility Rate Increase Stopped: In May of this year, my office was directed to increase water rates by 15.5%. I declined privately behind the scenes to make the increase, without advertising. I did this based on the community asking to "stop" the

increases, even though city council directed me to do so. I am not sorry I directed staff NOT to increase the rates. At last night's regular meeting a new rate schedule Resolution 776 was placed on the agenda. That new schedule officially eliminated the 15.5% increase. City Council passed the new schedule. I was questioned by my opponent and his supporters why the rates were not increased and why I failed to do my job in May. I got the impression they would have preferred the rates increased. Promises were made this election to lower your utility rates by the winning candidate, unfortunately for him I beat him to the punch! I had already lowered the rates before candidate filing week without advertising/informing the community. I am proud I was able to stop the 15.5% increase and NOT use the topic as an election talking point to get votes, even if it went against the direction of our City Council. Leadership means doing the right thing even when no one is looking. I stand by my actions and would do it again!"

**What employee(s), contractors, etc., were involved in the assertion or achievement?
Please include employee titles if possible.**

Will Finn, Peter Boyce, Tracy Coleman

Please provide the names of any witnesses to the assertion or achievement, if possible.

Mayor Will Finn Facebook page, Peter Boyce, Tracy Coleman, Gina Anderson, JJ Burke, Monte Smith, Aaron Alderman, DeeAnna Holland, Carol Rounds, Terry Hall, Melissa Doughty

Please provide any additional details or comments that would help us understand your assertion or achievement.

Although it doesn't really matter why this mayor ignored council action and purposefully ignored his duty to include the public in a rate adjustment, his Facebook post of 12/5/23 states that he "beat his opponent to the punch" of lowering rates which leads one to believe that there may have been a political angle to this as well since the mayor was in a hotly contested race.

H-23-503 Referral Information

Hotline ID: H-23-503
Date of Submission: 12/5/2023
Entity Type: Local
Entity Category Type: City/Town
Entity: Woodland, City of
Sub Entity Name:
Category: Accounting/Financial Reporting
1-2 sentence description of concern: Mayor Will Finn, without council approval, public input or notice instructed staff in 5/2023 to ignore a Council Order to implement a utility rate increase per approved Resolution 729, and then at the 12/4/23 Council meeting, put forward a reduced rate schedule for approval, without proper noticing.
Report Issued: No
Reporting Type: Exit Item
Report Number:
Investigation
Contracted: No
Contract Number:
Contract Name:
Billing Time Code:
Costs:
Public Records
Request: No
Flag for Annual Report: No
Substantiated: No
ARRA: No
Action: Referred to Audit Team - Consider Next Audit
Audit Team: Vancouver
Audit Team Contact: osbornel@sao.wa.gov
cc: #CC1#
cc: #CC2#
cc: #CC3#
cc: #CC4#
Referral Date: 12/6/2023
Action Taken: No
Response Date:
Report Date:
Follow Up Date:
Date Closed: 1/14/2025

H-23-503 Activity Log

01/14/2025

Referral updated by 'JEANA Gillis (gillisj)'.

01/14/2025

Referral updated by 'LINDSAY Osborne (osbornel)'.

01/14/2025

Referral updated by 'LINDSAY Osborne (osbornel)'.

01/14/2025

no significant issues were identified. Exit comment was provided regarding the timing of the rate increase - The City did not implement water utility rates per City Council Ordinance and Resolution. The City delayed an increase in water utility rates originally set to go into effect November 2022 to be implemented in May 2023 instead. However, the City did not implement the planned rates in May then passed Resolution 776 increasing rates in November 2023. We recommend the City strengthen internal controls to ensure utility rates are implemented in accordance with City Council approved Resolutions. --osbornel

01/14/2025

Reviewed concern as part of our audit and no issues were identified --osbornel

12/17/2024

Referral updated by 'NICHOLAS Hoeft (hoeftn)'.

12/17/2024

Called Citizen on 8/21 to discuss concerns, call covered the utility rate change which we confirmed would be communicated to the client in the audit, additionally citizen communicated new concerns over severance deals made to employees - we were aware of these and informed citizen it would be considered in our planning phase. Informed citizen results of audit areas reviewed and recommendations made at the finding level would be in our audit report. Citizen did not request any additional updates. Closing hotline. --hoeftn

12/08/2023

spoke with citizen 12/8/23. very concerned about the council not holding public meetings/public comments about the rate change. Told her we would consider the concern during the next audit. --osbornel

12/06/2023

Referral updated by 'JEANA Gillis (gillisj)'.

12/06/2023

Task assigned to 'osbornel@sao.wa.gov'. Team notification email sent to: osbornel@sao.wa.gov,katie001950@sao.wa.gov

12/06/2023

Referral updated by 'JEANA Gillis (gillisj)'. Action changed from (not set) to Referred to Audit Team - Consider Next Audit.