



INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: **Finance Committee**

FROM: **Vicky Carlsen, Finance Director**

CC: **Mayor Ekberg**

DATE: **August 17, 2020**

SUBJECT: **Update Police and Fire false alarm fees**
Updated September 22, 2020

ISSUE

Update fee schedule for false alarms

BACKGROUND

Fees for false alarms were last adjusted in 2014. As City resources are expended to respond to, and bill for false alarms, a restructure and an increase in false alarm fees is being proposed to deter the occurrence of false alarms and to help recoup City costs.

Responding to an Alarm

When an alarm monitoring company receives an alert that an alarm has been triggered, they call 911 to report the alarm. Valley Com procedures stipulates that the alarm company calls two phone numbers before calling 911 to dispatch. This is their verification process and is an attempt to reduce the number of false alarm. If there is no response from either phone call, or if someone does answer and requests help, then officers are dispatched.

The standard response for police is a minimum of two officers. When they arrive at the scene, they will walk the perimeter and check doors and windows for any signs of a break-in. If nothing suspicious is located and there are no signs of a break-in, they mark the incident report as a false alarm. The average length of a response to a police false alarm is 10-20 minutes, depending on the size of the business or residence.

Fire personnel are dispatched to an alarm in a similar manner. The average length of a response to a fire false alarm is 30-45 minutes, depending on the type of the business or residence. Most often more time is needed to re-set the alarm panel for a fire alarm as compared to the police response.

Costs to the City for responding to a false alarm include apparatus usage and personnel time spent responding to the alarm, as well as administrative time to bill and collect payment for the false alarm.

Current False Alarm Fees

The current structure for false alarm fees is as follows:

First two alarms: Free

Third alarm: \$150

Fourth and subsequent: \$200

The schedule resets each year which means every alarm owner is not charged for the first two false alarm responses each year. The current fee structure requires significant staff time each month to review all false alarms to determine if it is the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. alarm of the year.

DISCUSSION

False Alarm Statistics for the City

The table below represents the number of false alarms for both police and fire for the last three complete calendar years. A large percentage of false alarms are not billable because they are either the first or second false alarm in a calendar year. False alarm data from 2010-2012 has been included to demonstrate that the substantial fee increase in 2014 did not reduce the number of false alarms.

Year	Police # of False Alarms	Fire # of False Alarms
2019	1,030	611
2018	1,089	606
2017	1,037	713
2012	872	552
2011	810	632
2010	837	666

As a side note for fire false alarms, the total number of false alarms listed above includes false alarms outside of the City of Tukwila and are not billable. The average number of false alarms per year that would qualify as billable averages between 425 and 475.

Comparison of Surrounding Jurisdiction False Alarm Fees

The table below lists several surrounding jurisdictions and the fees they charge for false alarms. The table does not include information on alarm registration fees, alarm renewal fees, or other action that may be taken by the jurisdiction responding to a false alarm. Additionally, many of the cities that charge for false alarms have outsourced the billing function. Outsourcing the billing function would result in either additional fees to the alarm owner or reduced cost recovery to the City.

False Alarm Fees							
City	Alarm Type	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th+
Auburn	Burglary	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100
Federal Way	Burglary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50	\$ 100	\$ 150	\$ 200
Seattle	Burglary	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115
Burien	General	\$ 150	\$ 150	\$ 150	\$ 150	\$ 150	\$ 150
Des Moines	General	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 100	\$ 200	\$ 200	\$ 200
Kent	General	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Renton	General	\$ -	\$ 100	\$ 250	\$ 250	\$ 250	\$ 250
SeaTac	General	\$ -	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100	\$ 100
Tukwila (Current Fee)	General	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 150	\$ 200	\$ 200	\$ 200

Source: City Codes, websites

Staff is recommending the following fee structure. The intent of the new fee structure is twofold. The new fee structure will streamline the review and billing process. A reduction in time spent reviewing and billing false alarms could be redirected to other responsibilities. An updated fee schedule could encourage alarm owners to take steps to reduce the number of false alarms. Decreasing the number of false alarm responses for both Police and Fire personnel will redirect time to responding to actual alarms.

The proposed and current fee schedule for false alarms follows:

False Alarm	Proposed Fee	Current Fee
First (lifetime for alarm owner)	\$0	\$0
Second	\$250	\$0
Third	\$250	\$150
Fourth and Subsequent	\$250	\$200

The recommended fee structure will keep the rates comparable with surrounding jurisdictions. Fees incurred in the new schedule will help to offset costs of responding to recurring false alarms.

New Information as of September 22, 2020

At the August 24, 2020 Finance Committee meeting, two questions were asked and responses are provided below.

1. How many free false alarms do other cities allow and does the free alarm(s) reset each year? The following chart outlines each city's policy for free false alarms. As mentioned earlier in this memo, the proposed fee structure changes the current policy of 2 free false alarm every year to 1 per alarm owner (lifetime, no annual reset).

City	# of Free False Alarms	Reset Period
<u>Auburn</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Not applicable</u>
<u>Burien</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Billing function is outsourced</u>
<u>Des Moines</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>Every year</u>
<u>Federal Way</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>Every year</u>
<u>Kent</u>	<u>Unsure. Research indicates that police respond to false alarms as a low priority and may not respond at all.</u>	
<u>Renton</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>Every year</u>
<u>SeaTac</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>Every 6 months</u>

2. What efficiencies are expected to be gained by restructuring the fee schedule? Per Police staff that currently process the false alarms, the billing process has already been streamlined to a degree but still can average 16-20 hours a month to process the false alarm billings. The amount of time varies, depending on how many businesses/residential properties require research to determine mailing address and to determine if the business is still active or not. Staff sends out notices for all false alarms, including the first 2 that are free. Alarm owners tend to call when they receive the 3rd invoice that includes a charge and it takes time to research and respond to the alarm owner's concerns. By eliminating the free false alarms every year and increasing the fee to \$250 for each alarm after the first free false alarm, staff is hoping that this will encourage alarm owners to

address the reasons for the false alarms occurring, thereby reducing the total number of false alarms.

In order to give alarm owners the ability to formally appeal the false alarm charge, staff is recommending the following process be established.

The proposed False Alarm Appeals Program will borrow heavily from programs already in place by other Valley Cities.

The person/organization against whom the false alarm fee is levied shall, within thirty days of receiving notification that a false alarm fee has been levied, submit an appeals request either online (via a site dedicated to that purpose but not yet built) or via an email sent to an email address that will be monitored by representatives of the Tukwila Police and Fire Departments. If the appeal is submitted via the webpage, all required fields must be completed.

If submitted via email, the notice of appeals must contain the following information:

1. Name of person submitting the appeals
2. Email address of above listed person (if applicable)
3. Physical address where alarm occurred
4. Date of false alarm
5. Permit number of alarm, if applicable
6. Name of alarm monitoring company, if applicable
7. Reason(s) for the appeal
8. Any supporting evidence

For an appeal to be reviewed, the person/organization submitting the appeal must remit an appeal fee of \$25 that will be refunded if the appeal is upheld. If the appeal is not upheld, the Tukwila Police or Fire Department will deposit the fee into a revenue account and the fee will help to offset the cost of reviewing the appeal.

Upon receiving the appeal notice, complete with the information listed above and the appeals fee, a designated representative of either the Police or Fire Department shall review the appeal and submit a decision within thirty days.

A non-comprehensive list of actions that typically will result in a false alarm appeal being denied will be listed on the City of Tukwila's Alarm Information webpage and will include items such as the following:

1. Faulty, defective, or malfunctioning equipment supplied by an alarm business.
2. Improper installation or maintenance by an alarm business.
3. Improper monitoring by an alarm business.
4. Alarm activations that occur while alarm technicians are repairing or servicing the alarm system.
5. An occurrence where no evidence of criminal activity, fire, or medical need is present.
6. Mistakes made by private contractors, maids, cleaning crews, visitors, etc.
7. Item(s) within the home or business that move causing motion detectors to activate (i.e. curtains, signs, balloons, etc.).
8. Doors and/or windows that become loose and cause a break in the contacts that activate the alarm system.
9. Caretakers who watch homes or businesses when owners are away and who activate the alarm in error or are not familiar with required codes or passwords.
10. Pets, rodents or wildlife movement in or near the home or business.

11. Alarms caused by Apartment Management Employees.

RECOMMENDATION

~~The Council is being asked to approve the resolution and consider this item at the September 14, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting and subsequent September 14, 2020 Regular Meeting.~~

The Council is being asked to approve the resolution and ordinance and consider this item at the September 28, 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting and subsequent October 5, 2020 Regular Meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Draft Ordinance

DRAFT

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, REPEALING RESOLUTION NO. 1818, AND ADOPTING A FALSE ALARM FEE SCHEDULE.

WHEREAS, the City has reviewed the existing fee schedule for false alarms; and

WHEREAS, fees for false alarms have not been adjusted since 2014; and

WHEREAS, it has been determined that false alarm fees should be increased to encourage the reduction in number of false alarms and to recover some costs associated with responding to false alarms; and

WHEREAS, false alarm fees should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, HEREBY RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. False alarm fees will be charged according to the following schedule, which shall supersede any previously adopted false alarm fees:

DESCRIPTION	FEE (effective 1/1/21)
First false alarm dispatch (one per alarm owner/user)*	\$0
Second and subsequent false alarm dispatch per alarm owner/user*	\$250
<i>*The first false alarm per alarm owner/user is a warning only. The false alarm fee will be imposed on the second and subsequent false alarms.</i>	

Section 2. Repealer. Resolution No. 1818 is hereby repealed.

Section 3. Effective Date. This resolution and the false alarm fee schedule contained herein shall be effective as of January 1, 2021.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, at a Special Meeting thereof this _____ day of _____, 2020.

ATTEST/AUTHENTICATED:

Christy O'Flaherty, MMC, City Clerk

De'Sean Quinn, Council President

APPROVED AS TO FORM BY:

Filed with the City Clerk: _____
Passed by the City Council: _____
Resolution Number: _____

Office of the City Attorney

DRAFT

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 1363 (PART), AS CODIFIED AT TUKWILA MUNICIPAL CODE SECTION 8.08.040, "FALSE ALARM – FINES," TO REVISE LANGUAGE REGULATING FALSE ALARM FEES; REPEALING ORDINANCE NO. 2434; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, Ordinance No. 2434 amended Tukwila Municipal Code Section 8.08.040, which regulates fines for false alarms; and

WHEREAS, the fines for police and fire false alarms have not been adjusted since 2014; and

WHEREAS, it has been determined that false alarm fines should be increased to encourage the reduction in number of false alarms and to recover some costs associated with responding to false alarms; and

WHEREAS, false alarm fines should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, HEREBY ORDAINS AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. TMC Section 8.08.040 Amended. Ordinance No. 1363 (part), as codified at Tukwila Municipal Code Section 8.08.040, "False Alarm – Fines," is hereby amended to read as follows:

8.08.040 False Alarm – Fines

In the event that any department of the City receives or responds to a total of more than one false alarm of fire, intrusion, crime or other safety-related emergency at any single place of business, home, vehicle or other premises or place, the owner of said premises or place shall, within 10 days of receipt of written bill therefor, pay to the City the fee charged in accordance with the fee schedule to be adopted by resolution of the Tukwila City Council.

Section 2. Repealer. Ordinance No. 2434 is hereby repealed.

Section 3. Corrections by City Clerk or Code Reviser Authorized. Upon approval of the City Attorney, the City Clerk and the code reviser are authorized to make necessary corrections to this ordinance, including the correction of clerical errors; references to other local, state or federal laws, codes, rules, or regulations; or ordinance numbering and section/subsection numbering.

Section 4. Severability. If any section, subsection, paragraph, sentence, clause or phrase of this ordinance or its application to any person or situation should be held to be invalid or unconstitutional for any reason by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity or unconstitutionality shall not affect the validity or constitutionality of the remaining portions of this ordinance or its application to any other person or situation.

Section 5. Effective Date. This ordinance or a summary thereof shall be published in the official newspaper of the City, and shall take effect and be in full force January 1, 2021.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TUKWILA, WASHINGTON, at a Special Meeting thereof this _____ day of _____, 2020.

ATTEST/AUTHENTICATED:

Christy O'Flaherty, MMC, City Clerk

Allan Ekberg, Mayor

APPROVED AS TO FORM BY:

Filed with the City Clerk: _____

Passed by the City Council: _____

Published: _____

Effective Date: _____

Ordinance Number: _____

Office of the City Attorney