

March 28, 2024

TO: Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe & Decatur City Council Members

FROM: Scot Wrighton, City Manager

RE: Yard Waste Removal Services & Fees

On February 20, the City Council requested a discussion item be included on the next following council agenda concerning new arrangements stipulated in the City Code for premium yard waste services, and the different types of yard waste services offered, to date, by Decatur's two largest private haulers. This request was made because most council members had received numerous complaints from citizens about the manner in which premium yard waste services and changes had been rolled out following December adoption of an overhaul to Chapter 56.

Following an extended council discussion on March 4, staff was directed to obtain new rates and revised terms for two new alternatives: 1) find the lowest acceptable fee for an unlimited residential yard waste service program to be made available to ALL eligible customers (paid by ALL eligible customers, not just those who sign-up for optional premium yard waste services); and 2) keep the status quo in-place, but revise the terms and conditions of "premium yard waste" services that residential customers could optionally elect to receive, and for which they would also pay an extra fee. Since March 4, I have met frequently with GFL and Waste Management to develop options responsive to the council's request. It has taken considerable effort to get the two private haulers to provide comparable proposals, and refine them so I am comfortable submitting them to the council for review and subsequent action. The product of my negotiations has yielded the following two options. Draft ordinances have been prepared for both options (attached). The council can only adopt one of the options.

Option One: Year-round universal yard waste available to all eligible residents (i.e., those covered by Chapter 56) for a common fee paid by all residential customers.

This option would provide unlimited weekly at-curb collection of yard waste to all residences from March 1 thru December 15 every year. From December 15 thru the end of February, there would be two(2) yard waste pick-ups, one in January and one in February. The private haulers will be responsible for properly informing customers about the specific weeks in January and February that trucks will be in their respective neighborhoods. At all times, yard waste must be placed in biodegradable bags purchased by the customer or in appropriate containers provided by the customer (if marked "Yard Waste Only"), and sticks/branches must be bundled as required by the ordinance. Private haulers will not provide yard waste containers. There will no longer be a Spring and Fall clean-up period since unlimited yard waste would be available to everyone all year. Within reason, customers can use any combination of biodegradable bags, stick bundles, and privately owned containers to set out their yard waste. The

added fee for Option #1 would be \$3.00/month if the city assumes responsibility for billing on its water/sewer bills, and \$3.25/month if the additional charge is added to customer bills issued and managed by each private hauler.¹ The actual cost to provide unlimited yard waste service to all residential customers likely exceeds \$3.00 or \$3.25 per month in Decatur, but the private haulers have calculated that a portion of the \$23.50 monthly base fee includes seasonal collection in the Spring and Fall. The additional fee covers the extra 40 weeks of cost. This new Option #1 means that the total monthly cost for full-service garbage, recycling, bulky waste *and yard waste combined* will increase from \$23.50 to either \$26.50 or \$26.75, year-round, for ALL customers. Residents who have already paid GFL or Waste Management for “premium yard waste” will have their accounts credited.

Option Two: Year-round universal yard waste available only to those customers who elect to sign-up and pay for “premium yard waste” services are detailed here.

This option would provide unlimited weekly at-curb collection of yard waste ONLY for persons who sign-up and pay an extra fee for “premium yard waste” services. Customers signed-up for this option would receive yard waste collection weekly from March 1 thru December 15 every year. From December 15 thru the end of February, there would be two(2) yard waste pick-ups, one in January and one in February. The private haulers will be responsible for properly informing “premium” customers about the specific weeks in January and February that trucks will be in their respective neighborhoods. At all times, yard waste must be placed in biodegradable bags purchased by the customer or in appropriate containers provided by the customer (if marked “Yard Waste Only”), and sticks/branches must be bundled as required by the ordinance. Private haulers will not provide yard waste containers.² Customers not signed-up for the “premium” option will still have unlimited yard waste for 6 weeks in the Spring and 6 weeks in the Fall. The “premium” service will cost \$100/year,³ and will increase at 4% per year in subsequent years. Customers will be obligated for a full year if they sign-up for this premium option, but may elect to pay one-sixth of the annual fee (\$16.67) with each bill issued by their private hauler (every other month). This revised option #2 means that the total monthly cost for garbage, recycling, bulky waste and seasonal yard waste collection in only the Spring and Fall would remain at \$23.50 for all customers with “Basic Service.”

The advantage to Option #1 is that it is uniform and would likely decrease the incidence of illegal dumping of yard waste. The advantage to Option #2 is that fees are more sensitive to the customer’s level of utilization.

¹ This would be a separate line on the city’s bill, as the recycling fee is now. This is not recommended, however.

² Waste Management has said they will not collect “Yard Waste Only” containers they have already distributed, unless requested to do so. Customers can keep them if they wish.

³ Waste Management says they want to keep the annual fee at \$120; but if it is capped at \$100 by ordinance, I believe they can be compelled to keep it at \$100. GFL has agreed to an annual fee of \$100. If a \$100 cap is instituted, Waste Management requests the option to end premium yard waste services after two(2) years.