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Waste Management's Proposed \$180 Waste Fee Targets Residents, Spares Government Amid Fiscal Strain

The V.I. Waste Management Authority says its proposed \$180 annual solid waste fee would apply only to residential units and vacant lots, exempting government agencies due to financial hardship, with projected revenue of up to \$9.8 million.

Government / **Published On July 22, 2025 07:34 AM /**

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Facing continued financial strain and a \$5 million budget gap, the V.I. Waste Management Authority is proposing a \$180 annual fee for solid waste collection, disposal, and maintenance—one it hopes will bring the agency closer to self-sustainability.

The fee, if approved by the Public Services Commission, would apply to residential units and residential vacant lots, but exempt commercial properties and government agencies.

WMA Interim Executive Director Daryl Griffith shared details of the proposed fee during his FY2026 budget presentation before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance on Monday evening. “The fee is expected to cover the cost of house-to-house collections, bin sites, convenience centers, public housing, government agencies and school garbage collection as well as transportation to the landfills,” Mr. Griffith testified.

The proposed fee amounts to \$15 per month, and is expected to generate as much as \$9.8 million annually based on WMA’s estimate of 34,022 residential units and 20,718 parcels. However, the agency has based its revenue projections on a 70% collection rate, which would yield approximately \$6.8 million.

The fee would be added to property tax bills, not utility bills—a choice Griffith attributed to the “dire financial situation” at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority. “The authority is not comfortable with payments being processed through them,” he said.

Lawmakers expressed mixed reactions. Senator Ray Fonseca questioned the fairness of exempting commercial properties and government entities, stating, “You’re going after the easy-to-collect money, but you’re not going after everyone who is generating waste. This fee has to be a fair fee.”

Griffith explained that commercial entities already pay for their own waste collection and disposal, while central government agencies are in similar financial distress. “Instead of trying to pull from another entity that doesn’t have the funding, we just went ahead and exempted them...because it’s coming from the same government.”

Senator Hubert Frederick was skeptical that the \$15 monthly rate would be sufficient long-term and suggested using WAPA for collections, noting it would likely result in higher compliance. Griffith responded that such a move made him uneasy. “I’m afraid, honestly, that if we collect it through WAPA...we’re going to have to use this Waste Management Authority money” during an emergency.

“There are ways to safeguard the funds,” Frederick countered. Senator Clifford Joseph agreed, urging Griffith to consult legal counsel. Joseph also pointed out that a single parcel could contain multiple apartments, yet only be charged once under the proposed model. “As a government in crisis, we’re trying to make sure that we don’t have to be looking for money for Waste Management,” he said.

Senator Kurt Vialet echoed the call for legal consultation and floated two ideas: collecting the fee monthly rather than annually, and expanding liability to tenants who generate waste even if they don’t own the property. “A number of those individuals would be exempt because they have an apartment and they’re not the property owner,” he noted.

Griffith emphasized that reaching a financial “break-even point” remains his priority, noting that the proposed fee could help close WMA’s \$5 million gap. Only then, he said, could the agency consider expenses like hiring additional enforcement officers.

Beyond household waste fees, Griffith said WMA is exploring new revenue sources, including fees for oil collection and imported tires.

WMA’s FY2026 general fund request is \$32.5 million. It also expects:

- \$5 million from the Anti-Litter and Beautification Fund
- \$1 million from the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund
- \$2.5 million in utility expenses
- \$1.8 million from sewer wastewater funds
- \$3.5 million in tipping fees, up from \$2.7 million in FY2024

The budget includes \$20 million for personnel and fringe costs, covering 170 filled positions and 48 vacancies. Professional services total \$25.8 million, with key allocations including:

- \$12.4 million for territory-wide garbage collection
- \$5.9 million for landfill maintenance
- \$2.5 million for emergency system repairs

WMA is also grappling with \$20 million in accounts payable, prompting the inclusion of a “past-due invoices” line item in its budget. But whether it will be funded depends in large part on whether the PSC approves the new waste collection fee.