



Edward Campbell, Interim Director

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August 22, 2024

Andy Stevens, Deputy Ombudsman

Dear Andy,

Thank you for your detailed review and the recommendations concerning the returned payment fees charged by the Portland Water Bureau. I am additionally grateful for your patience in awaiting a final response from the bureau as it has gone through the significant leadership changes within the Public Works Service Area. Below are the bureau's responses to the two recommendations.

As we shared in our recent meetings with your office, the Water Bureau Customer Service Group is working with the bureau's equity manager to review many of its fees, policies and procedures to meet the City's equity and affordability goals. We welcome further collaboration with you as we work to meet the needs of our customers and community.

Recommendation #1: Regarding the Refund of Overcharged Fees

After careful consideration, the bureau will work to provide bill credits to current customers who were affected by the overcharged returned payment fees between July 2008 and December 2011. Given the significant administrative effort required, the passage of time, the challenges in accurately identifying and notifying all potentially affected customers, and the current workload challenges the Customer Service Group is experiencing due to implementation of the recent BES Stormwater rate changes, the bureau believes it will be able to begin this work by January 1, 2025. Eligible customers should receive credits on their Spring 2025 bills.

Recommendation #2: Concerning the Elimination of Returned Payment Fees

Regarding your recommendation to eliminate returned payment fees, the bureau will consider that option as part of the fee, policy, and procedure equity review that is currently underway. The outcomes of the current effort are anticipated to be available in time to be implemented as part of the FY 2025-26 rate ordinance. In considering this recommendation, the bureau will be examining and considering the implications of shifting the financial burden from those who incur the fees to all customers. We are sensitive to the challenges some customers face that lead to returned payments, and want to explore how this proposal and other concepts may best support customers facing financial hardships and ensure that City policies align with our commitment to affordability and equity.

As we shared in our meeting, PWB's Customer Service Group, in collaboration with our Equity team, is currently conducting a comprehensive analysis of all fees from an equity and affordability perspective. This includes a detailed review of the returned payment fee. We welcome your office's participation in that process.

We appreciate your understanding and the opportunity to discuss this matter with you. The Portland Water Bureau remains dedicated to transparent and thoughtful dialogue with your office and to serving our community with integrity and respect.

Thank you again for your thoughtful engagement and research.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Edward Campbell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "C".

Edward Campbell
Interim Director