Bureau of Environmental Services (BES)
Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant (CBWTP)
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
Meeting Minutes – April 16, 2025

Attendance:

Community Members:	Matthew Denton and Mark Kennedy
Staff Members:	Joe Dvorak, Mia Sabanovic, and Rob George
Guests/Presenters:	Cindy Ryals, James Hutton, Charissa Rogers, and Bert Carino

Introductions and Welcome

James Hutton, Office Support Specialist III, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and sharing introductions among those in attendance. He then shared the agenda for the meeting which included an update on PFAS and a plant tour at CBWTP.

Update on PFAS Chemicals

Cindy Ryals, Biosolids Program Manager, shared an update on PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances). These are a group of manufactured chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, grease, and stains due to their strong carbon-fluorine covalent bonds. These bonds make them resistant to degradation in the environment. Therefore, they are known as “Forever Chemicals.” They started getting public attention for potential toxicity to human health about 10 years ago and are considered “Emerging Contaminants.” PFAS chemicals are found in a variety of residential and industrial settings and products. These include raingear, dental floss, make-up, electronics, paper, and firefighting foam, among others. In some cities, most of the PFAS loading to wastewater treatment plants comes from residential sources, while in others, their primary origin is from industrial uses. Joe Dvorak, Treatment and Pumping O&M Manager, asked for further details on bioaccumulation of PFAS chemicals in the human body. Cindy replied that while PFAS is bioaccumulative, not all of it stays in the body, and human waste contains PFAS. Cindy explained that for most chemicals, regulators determine a threshold concentration that is still considered safe in media like drinking water or wastewater discharge. Scientists are still studying what this value is for wastewater and biosolids in regard to PFAS.

There is currently no treatment technology for PFAS chemicals that is scalable to a municipal wastewater plant, and PFAS in wastewater is not yet regulated by EPA or DEQ in Oregon. Regardless, the City of Portland has a multi-pronged approach to dealing with these chemicals. The first part of the strategy involves source control. If we can minimize the amount entering the wastewater system, we are minimizing any risks that may be associated with PFAS in wastewater. This is the best response. Despite there being no requirement to treat or test for PFAS chemicals in wastewater, BES has been proactively monitoring for them for over 8 years in the Portland metro area to assist with source control efforts. We are also cooperating with local and State agencies regarding PFAS. Finally, we are actively staying updated with the science of PFAS, and the regulations concerning it, while following the lead of DEQ and the EPA. Mark Kennedy, University of Oregon Professor Emeritus, asked about PFAS being found in the drinking water of some cities. Cindy replied that PFAS in drinking water is already regulated. It is a big problem, but it has not been found in Portland's drinking water, and we have been monitoring for it.

Because PFAS has been detected in biosolids, another topic shared was biosolids use and disposal. According to the EPA, 14% of biosolids are disposed of through incineration. Unlike some other regions, most of the Pacific Northwest does not utilize incineration. Matthew Denton, CAC member, asked if incineration is effective against PFAS chemicals. Cindy answered that super high temperature incineration has shown promise in breaking down PFAS, but there are concerns about it releasing PFAS-containing air emissions into the environment. Another common means of managing biosolids is landfill disposal. However, landfill leachate, which can contain PFAS, is often routed back to treatment plants, exacerbating the problem of PFAS. Eventually, risk management will play a part in mitigating risks from PFAS. One example of risk management is seen in the accumulation of mercury in fish. Public health officials still encourage fish consumption due to its important dietary and nutritional benefits, albeit in limited quantities in some areas, despite the presence of mercury in most fish. For CBWTP, biosolids are land applied to pastures and cropland in Eastern Oregon, which provides agricultural benefit for area farmers.

In-person Tour at CBWTP

Following the presentation, Charissa Rogers, Coordinator III, and Bert Carino, Coordinator II, led an in-person tour of CBWTP for the CAC members.

Upcoming Meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.