

PORTLAND UTILITY BOARD

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To: Mayor Ted Wheeler
Commissioner Mingus Mapps
Commissioner Carmen Rubio
Commissioner Dan Ryan
Commissioner Rene Gonzalez
Auditor Simone Rede

Re: PUB Testimony regarding the Bureau of Environmental Services and the Portland Water Bureau FY 2023-24 Budgets

Date: June 14, 2023

Good Afternoon Elected Leaders of Portland,

As co-chairs for the Portland Utility Board and representatives of PUB, we are providing reflections and follow-up on our prior testimony during the budget process. Appointed by Council as a volunteer community board, our members spend hundreds of hours each year providing independent community oversight regarding policy, operations, and budgetary decisions for the Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services as well as advise Council on how to navigate the difficult decisions regarding the utilities.

At the May 24th Rate Hearing, one of our ex-officio members shared the testimony written by and on behalf of the Board. That hearing was a unique moment of alignment between the utility bureau leadership, the PUB and labor representatives. Unfortunately, the discussion and response to our testimony focused on a reaction to word choice and diverted from the true content of the Board's testimony and recommendations.

As the Board reflected on the testimony, we identified the following statement as both the source of controversy and also as an important point with intentional word selection. We stated:

"A process that does not allow for true engagement and rushes to decisions while centering limited interests is classic white supremacist culture and contrary to the value of anti-racism in decision-making."

The board's criticism was and is about the process. After many months of development, engagement and public dialogue, proposals on utility rates changed significantly with only a few days of notice. Our objection

is not directly the decisions made nor a personal statement about the people making the decisions, but rather that a decision cannot be fully informed if it lacks adequate time for transparency and thorough evaluation of impacts while also eliminating opportunity for authentic engagement with the public. We believe this approach is contrary to the goals of democracy and the City's stated core values.

The Board understands that racial equity is explicitly intertwined with economics and we acknowledge their intersectionality is critical in navigating the budget as a moral document. We remain concerned about the increase in deferred maintenance and the impact on labor and workforce equity with the cuts required by the Adopted Budget. Water is Portland's most valuable resource so we must invest in it as a necessity, not just when it is profitable.

The Board will continue to engage with the bureaus to consider and inform decisions to effectively implement adopted rates while attempting to mitigate the negative impacts. We look forward to engaging early in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget development so that our feedback can inform critical decisions. We hope that some of the process and timeline changes that may result from the budget notes will allow for more timely and authentic engagement in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback.

Sincerely,

Karen Williams and Robin Castro, PUB Co-Chairs