

Portland Utility Board

Thursday, May 16, 2024, 11:00a.m.
Virtual meeting using Zoom platform
Meeting #180

Attendees:

PUB Members:

Alexis Rife
Christopher Richard
Robin Castro, Chair
Heather Day-Melgar
Joe Spada, Ex-Officio
Karen Williams
Lorraine Wilson

Absent:

Bob Sallinger*
Julia DeGraw*
Joanne Johnson, Ex-Officio*
Roslyn Gray, Ex-Officio*
*Notice of absence provided prior to meeting

Staff:

Aaron Abrams, Bureau of Environmental Services
Amy Archer-Masters, Portland Utility Board Analyst, City Budget Office
Anthony Locke, City Budget Office
Anthony Martin, Bureau of Environmental Services
Brandon Zero, Portland Water Bureau
Caryn Brooks, Bureau of Environmental Services
Cecelia Huynh, Portland Water Bureau
Eli Rosborough, Bureau of Environmental Services
Farshad Allahdadi, Bureau of Environmental Services
Jacq Tjaden, Commissioner Mapps' Office
Ken Bartocci, Bureau of Environmental Services
Megan Callahan, Bureau of Environmental Services
Sherri Peterson, Bureau of Environmental Services

Public:

Carol Cushman, League of Women Voters

Items Discussed, Action Items, Decisions

In these notes PWB stands for Portland Water Bureau, BES for the Bureau of Environmental Services, and PUB for the Portland Utility Board.

The [video](#) of the meeting as well as supporting documents can be found here:

<https://www.portland.gov/pub/events/2024/5/16/portland-utility-board-meeting>

In the below notes the **blue timestamp** indicates the approximate place in the video where a particular topic begins as well as providing a link to that portion of the video. For example, **3:45** indicates that this topic begins at approximately 3 minutes and 45 seconds into the video. Closed captioning is available by clicking on the CC symbol in the lower right side of the video tool bar.

The Board received an update from BES on the Rate Study Implementation, reviewed and approved the recommendation from the PUB Recruitment Subcommittee discussed brief updates.

I. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 11:02a.m.

II. Disclosure of communications [~3:26](#)

There were no disclosures.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Review and Approval of Minutes [~4:46](#)

The March 25th, April 8th and May 6th Recruitment subcommittee meeting minutes and April 18th and May 7th full PUB meeting minutes were reviewed and accepted as drafted.

V. BES Rate Study Implementation Update [~6:32](#)

The Chair welcomed Bureau of Environmental Services staff Sherri Peterson, Revenue Programs Manager, and Aaron Abrams, Public Involvement Manager, to provide an update on the BES Rate Study Implementation. The following highlights were covered in the presentation:

- Rate Study Recommendations approved by Council in December 2023, supported by PUB to align rates with cost of service.
- Administrative Rules updates in process to align with code changes to go into effect July 1, 2024.
- Rate increase of 5.15% approved by Council in March for typical single family (supported by PUB).
- Phasing in rate increase for drainage district over 3 years.
- Rate change implementation milestones

- Customer impacts – bills looking different, increases for large residential and commercial, drainage district customers most impacted.
- Small/Standard/Large Single Family Residential Customers
- Components of Stormwater billing: Stormwater billable area (redefined impervious area) and Service Units
- Multi-Family & Mixed-Use Customers – larger density will see larger increase in FY 24-25 and subsequent years
- Nonresidential – approximately 20% increase, drainage district buffering over time and also eligible for Clean River Rewards discount program
- Addressing Customer Concerns/Questions – training call center, offering methods for review for those most impacted, sharing information about discount and assistance programs
- Public Information and Engagement – overview of rate study engagement conducted, shift to engagement on implementation outreach, messaging and coordination with Water Bureau.
- Future Outreach – communication to all customers, translation, office hours, call center, segmented messaging to impacted customers.
- Some details on the number of accounts - Approximately 120,000 accounts are small/standard accounts that will see no change or slightly lower (87,000 standard), large category single family residential bills are approximately 25,000 accounts, non-residential and multi-family customers are approximately 12,000 customers and there are about 1,500 customers in the drainage districts. Many customers are receiving quarterly bills so will not get a bill in July so communications are staggered. There will be a detailed bill insert with information on how to understand the bill.

The presentation was followed with general discussion and questions/answers:

- A PUB member asked how the drainage districts are being impacted, the demographics of that community, and any outreach to that community.
 - Aaron responded that they are working with the drainage districts during the rate study and implementation as they have substantial efforts with the public. The drainage districts have an agreement with the City currently that they are not charged for on-site stormwater (roughly 35% discount) but the recommendation of the rate study was that the charge should be to charge the cost to serve them so over time they would be charged in alignment with the cost to serve them. The idea is it would align over the next 3 years. There is some demographic information, but the bulk of the properties are industrial non-residential properties, they can send the details later. There are approximately 800 non-residential and a few hundred residential. The communications will include information about financial assistance and the Clean River Rewards program that they were not eligible for previously since they were not charged for those fees.
- A PUB member asked why the drainage district properties were not charged the stormwater fees previously?

- Staff responded that they were not here when those agreements were made but it was a policy decision made at the time the agreements were made. The new way the City charges for stormwater there is no “on-site” and “off-site”.
- Farshad Allahdadi added that it was a legacy policy choice but it is not a swapping of who is providing services, BES has been providing services the entire time but the discounted rate was billed at the time. There are programs that exist to address concerns if people choose to participate in programs like Clean River Rewards.
- A PUB member noted that these properties are along the Columbia Slough and they believe that language access would be a big deal for some of those households so they would put a plug in for intentional outreach through community partners and paying particular attention to language isolation and those type of issues that might not arise through aggregated statistics.
 - Aaron responded that they are meeting with the drainage districts and will discuss what has worked and said that if needed they can go knock on doors and deliver fliers.
- A PUB member raised how much do they expect bills to increase for the 15% of large single family residential customers they expect to see significant increases in their bills?
 - Sherri responded that they estimate approximately \$67 per quarter (or \$268 per year, without Clean River Rewards discount). Aaron stated that includes the rate increase as well. The 1500 inside the drainage district are a wide range. They are not charging over water structures.
 - PUB Staff asked if the customer qualified for financial assistance then the increase would be reduced? Aaron confirmed that it would be reduced if they qualified. Sherri stated they are working closely with PWB customer service to notify of the programs and incorporate into the training materials.
- A PUB member asked if there are any multi-family residences in the drainage districts? If so, financial assistance is not available to all multi-family residences.
 - Aaron confirmed yes, there are multi-family residences. RAMP is a program that is available to some of those properties but finding a way to ensure those programs are carried through to those residents is a challenge.
- A PUB member shared interest in paperwork reduction and desire for the City to make it easier for customers to actively hear from community what is burdensome and improve process to apply.
 - Sherri responded that BES and PWB are interested in making the financial assistance application process simpler for customers, but there is still an application process. There are also conversations in the City about having a one-stop shop for customer assistance – we are not there yet but it is on the radar. We are committed to trying to make the process simpler but we have a ways to go. Aaron added that PWB Customer Service does a great job helping people through the process. Due to the rate legal requirements,

there are conversations that need to be had to address some of affordability into the rates to meet legal requirements.

- A PUB member asked whether there has been outreach to landlords/property owner for those individuals in multi-family residences that are not part of regulated affordable housing?
 - Aaron responded that in those properties the individuals do not directly pay a bill, but those property owners or management companies are those that BES is offering office hours to as opportunities to meet and discuss impacts. They are limiting office hours to the larger of those properties, but outreach is to all those properties.
 - The PUB member shared they are concerned about what is being shared with the renters from the property owners, how will the residents that don't get a bill be informed about the potential impacts when they haven't been communicated with directly? Just a concern, not sure how to address.
 - Another PUB member echoed the concern stating that as a resident when they had an issue with their water bill they could not communicate with the water company directly and could not address the issue.
 - Sherri responded that the rate study does not address this issue, but the automated meter program will allow residents more access to information to be able to have impact on usage.

The Chair shared appreciation to BES staff for the presentation and reminded PUB members to send any follow up questions through Amy/PUB staff.

VI. **PUB Recruitment Subcommittee Recommendation** [~1:01:40](#)

PUB Staff/Amy provided a brief overview of the Recruitment Subcommittee recommendations as summarized by Heather and Karen at the prior PUB meeting, but there was not a full quorum, so the recommendation was not formalized. Since that meeting staff has been in contact with the three selected candidates so was able to share a bit more about the recommended appointees. The group interview process was dynamic and a learning process and resulted in strong recommendation with three recommended candidates and two alternates if any were unavailable. The brief bios were shared with PUB recommending appointees Kyle Chipman, Maly Haghshenas and Lauren Rosenkranz (alternates are I and D). Next steps include PUB advancing the recommendation and then Council making the formal appointment.

VOTE:

Robin moved to approve the Recruitment Subcommittee appointment recommendation as discussed and directing PUB staff to prepare for Council appointment. Seconded by Lorraine. No further discussion.
No public comment.

Yes: RC, HDM, LW, KW, CR, AR
No:none
Motion passes

Special appreciation to the subcommittee members for the time and innovations to the process, it will be great to have a full board again!

VII. **Announcements and Next Meeting** [~1:11:19v](#)

PUB staff shared brief announcements including:

- The Mayor’s proposed budget proceeded and was approved May 15th, no significant highlights at this time utility related besides what was noted in prior communications. Budget process recommendations should continue to develop, please send recommendations to PUB staff.
- Natural Resources Service Delivery – work plan sent via email, more updates to come in future as it progresses
- PUB work plan began at prior meeting – please flag any priorities for meetings in June and early FY 2024-25 by reaching out to PUB staff or chair, PUB staff is coordinating regarding existing items.
- A PUB member inquired about PUB’s role in the new City structure – Was PUB formed out of a lawsuit? If the City is discussing board’s, what is PUB’s role and is it unique in any way and if discussions are taking place then it feels non-transparent.
 - PUB staff stated that there is no new information at this time, but PUB will continue to discuss PUB’s role in the future. They noted that there may be broad discussions at the City about boards, but not anything specific. When PUB went to Council during budget the Commissioner specifically asked PUB for feedback on budget process and PUB has had discussions about PUB’s role and some discussions about course corrections regarding focus on budget, focus in meetings, and original goals and purpose. It is more of an internal conversation. There is a body in the City that is responsible for board and commissions that existed in Civic Life and they are convening staff about support to advisory boards but not specific to PUB, just general. PUB should have received a link from the GTAC on a survey on the role of advisory boards and the budget process so there are efforts like that related to advisory boards and the budget process, so there are efforts and conversations, but PUB has a lot to say about the PUB’s role. Code exists and defines PUB’s role until it is changed to say otherwise, and PUB uses that to report to Council annually and PUB members are always involved in it annually.

- The PUB member shared that last year the question was asked “what is going to happen with PUB?” and we haven’t really heard anything, meanwhile a lot is happening with the City defining a new structure. The City should have focused on creating the infrastructure to support instead of staking out their land hiring deputy administrators. They are concerned with what is happening right now going into the election.
- A PUB member flagged interest in learning more about the equity tool kits and how they are used in how they are used and applied in making decisions.
- The Chair noted that they have discussed with PUB staff interest in holding a field trip in the summer months sometime, interested in seeing PUB members in person and getting out in the nice weather.

Next meeting is June 4. Potential future topics to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at approximately ~12:29 p.m.