

Portland Utility Board

June 17, 2021, 11:00 a.m.
Virtual meeting using Zoom platform

Meeting #105

Attendees:

PUB Members: Amy Chomowicz, ex-officio
Brian Laurent, ex-officio
Dory Robinson
Heidi Bullock
Julia DeGraw (departed, 12:00 p.m.)
Kaliska Day
Karen Y. Spencer
Karen Williams, co-chair
Robert Martineau
Robin Castro
Theresa Huang (departed, 12:35 p.m.)
Tom Liptan

Absent:

Gabriela Saldaña-López
Sara Petrocine*

*Notice of absence provided prior to meeting

Staff:

Amy Archer-Masters, Portland Utility Board Analyst, City Budget Office
Cecelia Huynh, Director of Finance and Support Services, Portland Water Bureau
Eliza Lindsay, Portland Utility Board Coordinator, City Budget Office
Gabriel Solmer, Director, Portland Water Bureau
Jeff Winner, Portland Water Bureau
Ken Bartocci, Bureau of Environmental Services
Michelle Rodriguez, Commissioner Mapps' Office
Yung Ouyang, City Budget Office

Public:

Carol Cushman

Synopsis, 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 Board gave recognition to departing Board members, heard a presentation and discussed the intersections of the bureaus' work and houselessness, discussed Co-chair recommendations, and heard

brief updates on the plans for a community meeting, the recruitment for the Labor voting seating, CUB, and the City African American Network report.

I. Call to Order

The Co-Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 11:00 a.m.

II. Disclosure of Communications

Heidi had her usual communications with BES staff regarding the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

Theresa had her usual communications in her role on the board of Depave which includes BES staff.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Approval of Prior Minutes

The minutes from the May 20 and June 1 full board meetings as well as the June 7 subcommittee meeting were accepted as submitted.

V. Intersections of the bureaus work and houselessness

Amy Chomowicz, BES staff, ex officio member, and lead on BES' work in this area walked through a presentation.

A PDF of the presentation as well as a video recording of the meeting is available here:

<https://www.portland.gov/pub/events/2021/6/17/portland-utility-board-meeting>

Question and Answer

The Co-chair opened the meeting for Board member questions.

A PUB member asked about the possibility of partnering with BPS or Metro for hauling trash as well as partnering with organizations to assist in getting housing for folks that they are hiring.

BES staff replied that PBOT has organized across bureaus to talk about the issue of trash. Metro is at the table. They noted that Metro's RID program is just now gearing up but moving forward they will likely be a partner to work with.

They also said in terms of hiring people that are houseless that is something they are working on. They have a partnership with Central Eastside Industrial Council and Ground Score Association: Trash for Peace. They have hired 2-4 people experiencing houselessness to pick up trash in green street facilities especially at the east side end of the Hawthorne and Morrison Street Bridges. They have recently planted trees there. In general, they are interested in promoting jobs for folks experiencing houselessness or who were formerly houseless.

BES staff added that they are interested in partnerships or projects and if PUB members have ideas please let them know.

The PUB member clarified that they were asking if BES had looked into partnering with agencies to assist in getting housing for folks who they are hiring.

A BES member said no they haven't. They noted that they have not been at this work long and they need to get up to speed on the housing side of things, not so that BES can provide housing but so that BES can support those who are.

Another PUB member shared that they appreciate how interconnected the social issues are and thus how interconnected the solutions also need to be. They said that when we say "experiencing houselessness" this lightens the load of what it is. They said we must be mindful that houseless people are living in and through homelessness and must be mindful of what that does to your mindset and belief that the system works for all of us. We are very quick to adopt progressive terms like 'houselessness' over 'homelessness.' And, we must be equally quick to adopt measures to address the issues. They said they appreciate the description of the ways BES is partnering with other efforts. They said they especially appreciated the comment that BES may not want to start its own trash collection program, noting a recent article on the issue of Portland's fragmented system:

<https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2021/03/portlands-unusual-highly-fragmented-sanitation-system-who-cleans-up-the-city.html>

The PUB member said they appreciate that the bureau is leaning into and building on what we already have. They also noted that Commissioner Mapps shared that affordability is their number one priority. They said that the number one reason someone is houseless is about being able to afford housing and that includes paying the bills that come along with housing. So, water and sewer bills are part of what makes housing affordable.

BES staff said they agree 100% on the issue of affordability and utility bills. They added that if land is contaminated it can be an obstacle to building housing. Using grant funding, primarily from the EPA's BES Brownfields program remediates such sites. So, they are trying to identify a funding source that is not as dependent on grants. This is an area that BES can contribute to in creating affordable housing.

A PUB member asked about a sustainable funding stream since this work will not be done in a year. They asked if BES had interacted with Metro around the recently passed housing bond. Could that be a source of funding?

BES staff answered that the short answer is that they are looking at all kinds of funding sources and assessing the appropriateness of it to the work they want to do.

They have been talking to staff internal to BES about planning for FY 22-23 to see if they can carve out a budget for this work. The hope is to by fall have a draft strategy in place which would allow them to know what the budgeting needs would be. For the RV sanitation program, they have applied for American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding. They are still in the running. They noted that it would be nice to have some bridge funds.

They have not looked into the Metro funds because that would involve a policy decision. While there is a need to provide shelter and services, does the bureau attempt to get funds earmarked for housing? Is that appropriate?

A PUB member said they appreciated the work the bureau was doing to address impacts. Regarding the budget they support looking at the current budget request and requesting an amendment especially if

the grant funding doesn't come through. They said that this is a long-term, complicated problem and they don't know that BES and PWB are going to figure out how to solve houselessness problems. But certainly, it is part of the bureaus' responsibility to address impacts as it relates to bureau facilities and natural areas.

BES staff agreed that no one entity is going to solve houselessness. The job of the BES committee is to identify ways that BES can be part of the solution in providing services whatever they might be. They noted that a big part of what they might come up with is to be a partner to others. They said the key is that they be part of a broad community-wide solution.

A PUB member said they appreciate that BES is taking a person-first approach. They asked if there is any effort from BES or other bureaus to track the time and expense incurred trying to address houselessness, noting that some of the costs may be relatively hidden.

The BES staff said that is a good question and they can't answer it. They said we should be tracking the resources the City is spending. BES, PWB, and PPR are working together to do better reporting for the next 3 months of what we're seeing on the ground. They said they will look into who is tracking what at the City, especially the Homelessness and Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program (HUCIRP).

A PUB member said they would like to receive an update at a future meeting on the costs and impact to rates of these services, e.g., RV pump-outs, garbage removal, since these are not traditional services provided by BES and PWB. These services need to occur but if they are using rate payer dollars, then there is an obligation to understand the costs.

A PUB member shared that they liked that last point because if we knew how much it was costing rate-payers to address issues of houselessness, that number could be used to encourage rate payers to ask the City for additional money to address the issues. They also noted that while we speak as if houselessness is kind of remote to us, they want to bring it back and tell the group that they are a PUB voting member and their story starts with houselessness. Their mother was homeless when she was pregnant with them and while it does feel removed because they don't remember physically experiencing it, they know it is part of their story. They appreciate everyone taking this topic as it needs to be taken. Also, during covid there were times where they were worried, they would not have enough money for the next month's rent. There are a lot of people right on the edge of homelessness. It is the people on the streets and also those about to be on the streets and the people on this Board who may have experienced it first-hand or second-hand.

BES staff thanked the Board member for their comments.

The Co-chair thanked the PUB member for grounding the conversation, bringing the Board back to centering those most impacted, how that can be any of us, and also in noting how the othering in the language used isolates and narrows the way we can advance this discussion and outcomes for communities.

Brief comments from PWB

The PWB equity manager shared that up until recently PWB has been reactive in focusing on impacts. They are trying to move to be more proactive. They noted that given PWB's scope of work their focus may be narrower than BES'. They said PWB is focusing on providing PWB staff training to appropriately engage with people experiencing houselessness. There is also an item in PWB's equity plan to expand access to potable water in public spaces and ensure ADA compliance which is specifically aimed at

providing water to people experiencing houselessness. PWB is looking at making the Benson Bubblers more accessible and making them easier to use to refill water bottles. They are committed to working closely with other agencies and not duplicating existing efforts.

The Co-chair asked PUB members to send additional thoughts and questions to PUB staff.

VI. Recognition of departing PUB members

The Board took a moment to turn on video cameras and share thank yous and well wishes to the departing PUB members in recognition of their service and contributions.

VII. PUB Co-chairs

There are two positions open: a 1-year term and 2-year term. Karen Williams has expressed willingness to serve for another year. That leaves open the two-year position. A two-year term is ideal as it would stagger the terms. If two years presents a barrier for someone and they would otherwise be interested, then other options are possible. Please let PUB staff know by Friday June 25 so a vote can happen at the July 6 meeting.

Tom said he had not responded because he felt he might be the oldest person on the Board. While he feels he has a place to represent people over 70, he also feels younger folks taking responsibility for these sorts of things is the best way to go. He said he can also see it is a challenge as younger folks may be working full time while he is retired. He said he would volunteer to be Co-chair but really hopes someone younger will volunteers. He said he didn't know if he could commit to two years.

The Co-chair thanked Tom and said they felt anyone could be in this role regardless of age, but they hear his perspective as well. They also hear the feedback about the terms and how inflexible they can be.

PUB staff shared that any term length is possible and because of the process of nominating co-chairs and the time it takes to get up to speed they felt that 6 months was probably a minimum length for a term to be useful. But, if 6 months seems too long, we could certainly try something shorter. They noted that facilitation can easily be delegated. It is being on point for a quick urgent decision, e.g., about what needs to be on the agenda, that isn't easily delegated.

Kaliska said she would add her name the only thing is her 3-year term ends the same as Karen W's which is the constraint with the two of them being Co-chairs.

Robin said as a newer member she liked the idea of what Kaliska is offering. There were four new members in January and now there will be three new members. This would allow those of us who are new to serve in the role for a year and mature into the Board. She doesn't want to speak for anyone else, it's just that she personally likes the idea as someone who has interest in the Co-chair role but also likes sharing her opinions during the meeting, noting that when you are facilitating it is harder to be part of the conversation.

The Co-chair noted that while it is true that you may not be able to state your opinions during the meeting as easily when facilitating, there are other ways to get your opinion out there.

Karen YS asked that if anyone is interested in serving as Co-chair but if they have financial issues impacting them, e.g., the extra time away from activities that bring in income, please let her and/or PUB staff know as this connects to the issue of stipends.

Tom said he supports Kaliska as a Co-chair and was only offering if no one else was able to do so.

PUB staff shared that the Board procedures are such that the formal notice of interest in serving as Co-chair will go out for the July 6 meeting at which a vote can be taken. The math will work out as Kaliska said that both Karen W and Kaliska's PUB terms end June 30, 2022. There are a couple of options. They could both serve for one year. Or, one person could serve for 1 year and the other 6 months. Karen W and Kaliska don't have to decide now. They can talk with PUB staff prior to the July 6 meeting and come to the meeting with preferred terms.

VIII. Report back from subcommittee planning a PUB community meeting

A subcommittee member drew Board members' attention to the list of community based organizations, courtesy of Theresa's work, that was sent via email. The intent was to get PUB member input on organizations to reach out to as well as organizations that individual Board members would be willing to reach out to so that they have a good broad list to use in starting to establish relationships.

IX. Brief Updates

Labor Voting Seat

The unions in BES and PWB had numerous discussions about who to put forward and decided to recommend Jasmine Varela. Her information has been passed on to Council.

CUB

A PUB member asked for a little more information about CUB stepping back.

PUB staff shared that after the lawsuit, during the Blue Ribbon Commission and formation of PUB, CUB played an active role and had a formal relationship to Council. In CUB's letter they said they have been impressed by the evolution of PUB and believe the Board is carrying the core topics forward and has the necessary independence. PUB staff said they think CUB is choosing to focus on the private utilities and the other work they do. They noted that there is opportunity for a continued relationship and open channel of communication when there is overlap.

City African American Network (CAAN) Report

The Co-chair shared briefly that CAAN produced a report that was quite astounding when it comes to the hiring, firing, retention practices and outcomes specifically as it relates to Black staff at the City of Portland. The Co-chair asked PUB staff to reach out to CAAN to ask if they could present on the report to the Board given the Board's interest in hiring and retention of BIPOC staff. They asked CAAN to present because they want to honor the work and have the creators of the report speak about it rather than others speaking for them. In the interim they also asked if the report could be shared with PUB. CAAN gave permission to share the report with PUB. They are hoping the Board will have a chance to review the CAAN report and perhaps have a presentation from the members of CAAN.

X. Next meeting, Tuesday, July 6, 2021, 3:30 p.m.

Next meeting topics: Welcome new PUB members, Co-Chair recommendations; Comprehensive Rate Study – Background; Brief annual review of PUB governing documents; and as time permits, beginning discussion of PUB work-plan.

Dory shared that she has left a document with her last words that includes ideas she wanted to put forth for the Board and that she did not have time to bring up at Board meetings. These include topics for the Board, process improvements, etc. It is a take it or leave it type document as the Board finds useful.

Next meeting: Tuesday, July 6, 2021, 3:30 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:40 p.m.