

Portland Utility Board

May 4, 2021, 3:30 p.m.
Virtual meeting using Zoom platform
Meeting #102

Attendees:

PUB Members: Amy Chomowicz, ex-officio
Brian Laurent, ex-officio
Dory Robinson, co-chair
Gabriela Saldaña-López
Heidi Bullock (departed at 5:00 p.m.)
Julia DeGraw (arrived at 4:00 p.m.)
Kaliska Day (departed at ~4:30 p.m.)
Karen Y. Spencer (arrived at 4:10 p.m.)
Karen Williams, co-chair
Robin Castro
Robert Martineau
Theresa Huang
Tom Liptan
Sara Petrocine, ex officio

Absent:

*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
Edward Campbell, Portland Water Bureau
Eliza Lindsay, Portland Utility Board Coordinator, City Budget Office
Gabriel Solmer, Director, Portland Water Bureau
Jaymee Cuti, Portland Water Bureau
Jeff Winner, Portland Water Bureau
Kate Carone, Bureau of Environmental Services
Kavita Heyn, Portland Water Bureau
Ken Bartocci, Bureau of Environmental Services
Niel Curley, Bureau of Environmental Services
Nishant Parulekar, Bureau of Environmental Services
Robert Cheney, City Budget Office
Yung Ouyang, City Budget Office

Public:

Carol Cushman
Justin Sims

Synopsis, Action Items, Decisions

Both bureaus presented on their efforts to address climate change and took questions from the Board. The upcoming rate hearing was discussed. It was decided that PUB members will present testimony. The opportunity to co-facilitate upcoming PUB meetings was discussed as well as the fact that both Co-chair positions will be open come July 1.

I. Call to Order

The Co-Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 3:30 p.m.

II. Disclosure of Communications

Theresa had her regular communications with Depave which involve a BES staff.

Heidi went on a walking tour of Linnton Neighborhood with BES staff related to the Portland Harbor Superfund and community involvement. She also had conversation with BES staff regarding an upcoming position opening.

Tom had conversations with the Bull Run Filtration design team offering them information about eco-roof design and offered the same pro bono type information to BES through Dawn Uchiyama.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Approval of Prior Minutes

The minutes for the April 15, 2021 meeting were accepted with the addition of a statement in the minutes that information clarifying the dollar figures related to the City's adopted budget and PWB's overall budget, operating budget, and trends was provided post-meeting.

V. PWB and BES' work to address climate change

PWB presentation: "Climate Change Resilience and Your Drinking Water"

PWB staff walked through a presentation on the bureau's work to address climate change. The presentation can be found here:

https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/pub_climatebriefing_waterbureau-updated.pdf

Question and Answer

A PUB member asked about the relationship, if there is any, between cryptosporidium and climate change.

PWB staff said they have not identified a link between climate change and cryptosporidium.

Cryptosporidium is an omnipresent protozoan in mammalian digestive tracts. There have always been some detections of cryptosporidium in the watershed. In the past there just haven't been lots of

detections. Clearly something has been going on in the last 4-5 years. They do not have evidence that it is climate change related. But, at this stage, they are not ruling it out. They may find evidence that helps them to better understand why there have been more detections of cryptosporidium or they may not.

A PUB member asked if PWB has been in communication with Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) and their efforts to invest in clean construction and make awards to BIPOC contractors.

PWB staff answered that they are aware of the great efforts of PCEF which is housed in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. A lot of the focus is investing directly into community projects. So, PWB is not directly involved. PWB staff noted that anything that helps the city as a whole reduce its climate-related emissions and carbon emissions will help down the road. PWB is very supportive of the work and feels it complements their internal efforts.

A PUB member said that when climate change is talked about the tendency is to generalize about its arrival in the future. However, communities, specifically in East Portland, are already seeing climate extremes. In 2020 the Oregonian reported that Portland's historically racist housing policies were exacerbating climate effects in Portland's low-income neighborhoods. NPR also reported that in analyzing multiple studies conducted throughout the u.s., Portland had the broadest range in temperatures. Some neighborhoods were up to 13 degrees hotter than others. So, they recommend the bureau not only think about climate change in the future, but also think about those communities that are already experiencing extremes. They asked, what is being done to localize efforts? Is extra effort and funding being put into neighborhoods that are already experiencing impacts?

Links to mentioned articles:

<https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2020/01/historically-racist-housing-policies-exacerbating-climate-change-effects-in-low-income-portland-neighborhoods.html>

<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/14/795961381/racist-housing-practices-from-the-1930s-linked-to-hotter-neighborhoods-today>

PWB staff answered that they are tracking the impacts within the system. They do know that climate change is already happening and there is more to come. One of the biggest things the bureau can do to meet their equity commitment is to reduce their impact now so that harm is reduced down the road. There is recognition of historical oppression and inequities. They have been tracking PSU's heat vulnerability index work for many years, before it became national news. Beyond reducing emissions, the bureau is doing other things such as electrifying their fleet of vehicles to reduce local pollutants and ground level ozone which could directly benefit communities in areas like East Portland. They are educating communities on storing emergency water supplies in event of water disruption. They are also enhancing the water security of low-income folks by expanding financial assistance programs in partnership with community-based organizations. They noted that many PWB staff come from the communities the Board member was speaking about and they are doing a workforce evaluation. There is definitely more work to do.

A PUB member asked if the Mt Tabor reservoirs are part of a backup system or purely decorative.

PWB staff responded that they are purely decorative and not part of the system anymore. The most important redundancy and source of climate resiliency is the secondary ground water supply on the Columbia River south shore.

PWB staff said that even in an emergency you would not want to tap into Mt Tabor. It is of poor water quality because it is no longer circulating. It is essentially standing pond water, like Laurelhurst Pond. It would only be under extreme, extreme situations and as a last resort that it would be considered.

BES Presentation: “BES Climate Resiliency”

BES staff walked through a presentation on the bureau’s work to address climate change. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/pub-presentation-climate-change-work-bes.pdf>

Question and Answer

A PUB member said it was their understanding that BES has a policy of installing underground perforated sumps in East Portland (gray option) rather than using the green street facilities. They asked if this was correct.

BES staff answered that they could not speak to whether this was policy. They noted that a lot of factors might come into play, e.g., if there is a local community preference, operations and maintenance needs, and if one is better at managing stormwater with a smaller footprint. They said they can find out if there is an actual policy and get back to the PUB.

The PUB member said they would like to know. They mentioned that at the site they had visited they had talked to some neighbors and the neighbors had said they had not been asked by the City about their preferences. The PUB member mentioned that the lead agency is PBOT, noting that it may be a challenge to get them on board with green rather than gray infrastructure.

Another BES staff added that there are a lot of Underground Injection Controls (UICs, the sumps) on the East side and that this was an early strategy. They don’t know if there is an actual policy.

A PUB member said they are encouraged by BES’ holistic approach to addressing climate change and asked where the bureau is currently lacking in their work to address climate change.

BES staff answered that an area of improvement is to better understand climate risks, where they are in the city, what type of risk they are, the cascading impacts they have, and the inter-dependency between infrastructural elements maintained by different entities. A failure in one part may cause issues for another part managed by a different entity.

A PUB member asked for elaboration on anticipated impacts on community if there are infrastructural failures.

BES staff answered that it really depends on what risk scenario one is looking at. For instance, one scenario looked at was a 500-year flooding event in SE Portland. In that scenario there would be significant localized flooding that cut-off emergency access and isolated fire stations and schools. Analyzing involves looking at infrastructure interdependencies based on the scenario and asking what might be cascading effects.

A PUB member asked about BES’ Tree Program which they had understood had recently moved to PPR’s Urban Forestry.

BES staff explained that BES had not handed the Tree Program over to PPR. They have pushed the pause button and are exploring options. They agree about the importance of the program in connecting with community and making BES' commitments to green infrastructure. There are questions about overlapping services between the bureaus. They have not decided what the best configuration is and there is a chance it would remain with BES. BES staff noted that BES and PPR had a very robust conversation with community last year. From that conversation, they know they are not meeting all community needs and they need to reinvent the program. The pause is so the program can be reconfigured to better meet community needs and designed to be most efficient in delivering government services. BES has just hired a new program manager and one of their first tasks is to look at this program.

PUB staff noted that during the Co-chairs and Bureau leadership meeting it was suggested that BES provide updates on the Tree Program to PUB during the summer, once the new program manager has had a chance to settle in.

PUB members were encouraged to send additional thoughts and questions to PUB staff.

VI. Rate Hearing

There was a brief recap on where things are in terms of PUB's budget work. Theresa provided verbal testimony at the budget work session March 23. PUB developed a budget recommendation letter provided to Council on April 13. Highlights from the letter were provided to the Mayor by Director Kinard. The proposed budget was released April 29. For the most part it was consistent with what was requested. The rate increases are the same as put forth by the bureaus. The one change was in the capital set aside funds. Approximately \$400k in general funds was allocated for HydroParks and Powell Butte to address ADA barriers. There was also a slight reduction in maintenance dollars (general fund) that get passed to PPR for Powell Butte Nature Park.

The next step is the Rate Hearing on May 19th at 2:00pm. PUB is invited to attend and provide testimony. Whether PUB presents testimony varies year to year depending on whether there is some additional information the Board wants to provide.

The question before the board today is: Should PUB provide additional testimony?

If the Board decides to provide testimony, then the Board would need to talk about the content and delegate to 1 or 2 Board members the task of finalizing and delivering the testimony.

The Co-chair said that to them it is a question of if there is new information to provide or something the Board wants to emphasize. They balance this with managing the relationship with Council and being cognizant of how busy Council is.

A PUB member said they like the idea of providing testimony as it allows PUB to be present at the hearing. It makes sense the community board would be present at the hearing, even if just for that emphasis. They said they are not sure the Board has anything new to say, but by having a PUB member present and having them speak, this would show that they take their job seriously and intend to be heard.

Another PUB member added that it might be a good opportunity to put into the record PUB's values and how PUB wants them infused in all their work and the work of the bureaus. It is a chance to make a values-based statement.

Another PUB member agreed and that they loved the idea of elaborating more on the values and aligning work with equity.

There was a call for volunteers. Robin volunteered.

Julia said she would be willing to volunteer but noted that it might not be ideal to have two white women presenting. Also, she first wanted to offer the opportunity to Gaby since she had played a key role in developing the values.

The Co-Chair noted that both Gaby and Karen YS had played instrumental roles in developing the values statement and opened the floor to them.

Gaby said she, herself, is okay stepping back. She felt the process they went through speaks for itself and she is happy stepping back.

Karen YS said she is happy to help in any way: assisting in drafting the talking points, attending, and/or talking at the hearing. She suggested those interested stay after to look at their schedules for coordinating purposes.

Julia said so long as she heard correctly that Karen YS was volunteering, then she would prefer to step aside and have Karen YS be one of the two folks involved in finalizing the testimony.

VOTE

Tom made a motion that Robin and Karen YS work to develop and deliver PUB testimony at the rate hearing which would focus on restating key points already provided during the budget process and sharing the core values PUB wants to and wants the bureaus to operate from.

Karen Williams seconded the motion.

There was no public comment.

Voting Yes: Dory, Karen W, Theresa, Tom, Gaby, Robin, Julia, Karen YS.

Rob abstained. (Rob abstained from all votes and speaking during this meeting due to fact that his connection only allowed for listening.)

Kaliska and Heidi had had to leave and were no longer present.

VII. Facilitating PUB meetings and Co-Chair positions

The Co-chair welcomed others to step in and co-facilitate a meeting in June.

The Co-chair also noted that both positions will be open in June. The Co-chair invited everyone to consider the opportunity. She noted that Karen W stepped into the role for 6 months to ensure continuity for the Board. Karen W is interested in the opportunity being open to others who might be interested in the Co-chair role.

Dory noted that her two-year term is up. She is not reapplying. In June she will be leaving the Co-chair role and the Board. She thought she had already shared this with everyone but realized maybe not. She

apologized if this is the first anyone is hearing this. She repeated that she hopes folks will step into this role.

It was noted that the Board recommends Co-chairs to the Commissioner-in-Charge and the Mayor who then make official appointments. Since both positions are open, it was suggested that the PUB Co-chair recommendation be done in June, rather than the first meeting in July.

PUB staff will send follow-up email with details.

VIII. Next meeting

PWB staff are developing a community engagement strategy and approached PUB about coming to the Board during the early planning phases. The Co-chair asked if the Board was comfortable tabling STEP-CIP updates for May 20 meeting, since the Board receives regular updates, and instead having Joanne Johnson from PWB come discuss the work to develop a community engagement strategy.

A PUB member shared that this would be timely and informative since PUB is in the beginning stages of planning a community meeting.

There was general agreement to the topic.

Next meeting: Thursday, May 20, 2021, 11:00 a.m.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:10 p.m.