

## MEMO

**To: Mayor Wheeler, Commissioner Ryan, Commissioner Hardesty, Commissioner Eudaly**

**Cc: Gabriel Solmer, Portland Water Bureau Director  
Ezra Hammer, Home Builders Association  
Kaliska Day, Portland Utility Board  
Morgan Tracy, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability  
Bruce Nelson, Urban Forestry Commission  
Kim McCarty, Community Alliance of Tenants  
Holloway Huntley, EnvironsPDX  
Steve Mazzaneti, Habitat for Humanity**

**From: Commissioner Fritz**

**Re: Revised proposal for Title 21.12.070: Separate Meters**

**Date: November 10, 2020**

Thank you for your participation in the City Council Title 21 Separate Metering work session on October 27, 2020. The conversation was robust, and I appreciated the variety of perspectives shared by community organizations, staff, and City Council as we all work to center affordability and equity in the work of the utility bureaus. It was inspiring to see Council's understanding and engagement on the details of water metering, and to hear a commitment from the community to help shape Portland's future.

At the work session, we heard that Council was not ready to move forward with a policy requiring separate metering due to concerns about perceived impacts to affordable housing and tenants. We heard that there is broad support for water conservation, and for policies that support affordability and racial equity. Based on this feedback from the work session, the Water Bureau has revised the draft policy language that we discussed on October 27 to allow, **but not require**, separate metering in new multifamily developments. Below is the updated language for this section of Title 21.

## NEXT STEPS

The full Title 21 Revision Process will be in front of City Council on the following dates. If Council passes the Ordinance authorizing changes to Title 21, this voluntary separate metering policy would go into effect July 1, 2021. The schedule for Title 21 to be reviewed at a public hearing by Council is:

- **December 2, 2020:** City Council Title 21 first reading
- **December 9, 2020:** City Council Title 21 vote

## TITLE 21.12.070 SEPARATE METER – REVISION 3

### 21.12.070 Separate Meters

- A. Separate meters are required to supply water to:
1. Each separate lot, parcel, house or building under separate ownership;
  2. Buildings on multiple contiguous lots under the same ownership;
  3. New mixed-use buildings will be required to have a separate commercial meter;
  4. New non-residential developments which will include irrigation of 1,000 square ft or greater will be required to install a separate irrigation meter.
- B. Separate meters may be installed to supply water to:
1. New accessory dwelling units (ADU's);
  2. New residential and multifamily developments with more than one unit;
  3. Developments that are required to up-size their meter; or,
  4. Other developments approved by the Chief Engineer.

Effective Date. Administrative rules to implement this Subsection will be adopted by July 1, 2021, through the Annual Rate Ordinance.

## BACKGROUND

Title 21 is a set of codes that guide the work of the Portland Water Bureau. The Bureau is updating Title 21 to revise outdated provisions, ensure the values and commitments of our Strategic Plan are embedded, and add Charter changes resulting from approved ballot measures from 2019. One part of this revision work included revisiting items that could potentially benefit from an update. Separate water metering for new construction is one result from this comprehensive process.

The bureau's revised separate metering policy was written after consultation and engagement with more than twenty stakeholders, including affordable housing developers, community groups, and representatives from other bureaus. It was further revised after a City Council work session on October 27.

## SUMMARY OF BENEFITS OF SEPARATE METERS

Separate metering provides some key public benefits including:

- [Access to customer service programs](#)  
Separate meters are individually billed, creating a direct relationship between the Water Bureau and its customers. This allows for better communication, water quality connections, financial assistance options, and access to water efficiency programs.
- [Tenant control of water use and potentially costs](#)  
Separate water metering would allow a tenant to be in control of their water use, and to reduce water costs if strategies are devised to ensure the rent is determined factoring in separate utility bill payment. In typical multifamily properties, water use is included in rent, and tenants are not eligible for discount

programs provided by the Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services to customers with separate utility bills. As Portland grows, more Black, Indigenous and People of Color residents are moving into multifamily housing. According to the Housing Bureau, “Rentership continues to increase steadily in Portland, from 46 percent in 2012 to 47 percent in 2017. Rentership rates vary by race and ethnicity. African American, Hawaiian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic-Latinx and Native American comprise the majority of renter households. Rentership rates have increased among African American, Asian, and Hawaiian-Pacific Islander households, while staying the same for Whites and decreasing among Hispanic-Latinx, and Native American households”. Separate water metering is important to make sure BIPOC Portlanders have the same access to services and discounts, the opportunity to understand their bill and water use, and personal connections to the utility bureaus. More work is needed to ensure landlords reduce rents to reflect the tenant being responsible for utility bills.

- **Climate adaptation, water and energy efficiency**  
Individual meters reduce a tenant’s water use. [National studies show](#) that those who receive a water bill use 20% less water than those that don’t because they receive direct feedback on water use. Because water use also includes energy use to heat the water, energy costs are reduced as customers take shorter showers or run only full dishwasher loads. Facilitating energy and water conservation is pivotal to helping Portland be prepared for our changing climate.
- **Leak management and property maintenance**  
Individual meters allow a property manager to more quickly find and repair leaks. Many multifamily properties struggle with leaks and high bill costs associated with the challenge of identifying where leaks occur. Quickly managing leaks helps keep rents lower and allows for easily finding and repairing leaks, because the meter provides the info needed to identify and detect leaks.