

The Ripple Effect

1984 - 2014



Citizens Utility Board
30 Years and Counting
of Oregon

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CUB Continues Work to End Developer Subsidies



CUB is on the hunt for savings as budget development for fiscal year 2016-17 is getting underway in City Hall for the Portland Water Bureau (PWB) and the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES).

For example, CUB is continuing our work to end developer subsidies that reduce BES revenue to the detriment of residential ratepayers. For example, \$2 million has been left in the pockets of ratepayers in the current budget year because CUB successfully urged City Council to return to its historic practice of charging developers the full sewer system development fee allowed under state law.

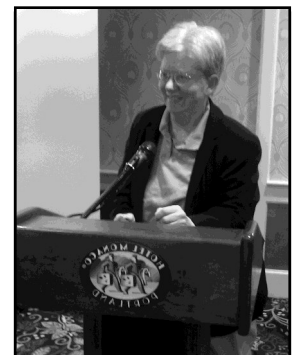
This developer subsidy began when the economy and development slumped but continued even after construction boomed. CUB made sure this subsidy ended with immediate and ongoing benefits to ratepayers.

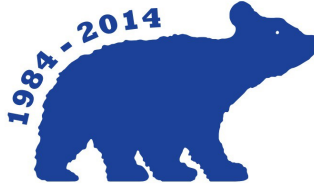
CUB's step for the next budget year is urging the City Council to boost building plan review fees so that time spent by BES staff checking on environmental compliance is paid for by developers and not by ratepayers. Analysis is still underway but it looks like about \$1 million in additional revenue to BES would result from closing this developer subsidy. This means more dollars left in ratepayer pockets.

We'll keep you posted on this and other recommendations we make during utility bureau budget development and advocacy with City Hall.

Janice is available to speak to your group!

Janice Thompson, CUB's consumer advocate for Portland Public Utilities, likes learning about your concerns at speaking opportunities like recent ones at neighborhood associations. Contact her at 503-227-1984 x24 or janice@oregoncub.org to speak to a meeting of your group or an organization interested in Portland policy issues.





Monthly Billing Reminder!

Just a reminder: you can switch from quarterly to monthly billing to pay for sewer, stormwater management, and water services from the City of Portland.

Reading the meter still occurs quarterly, but one bill for the previous three months can now be split into three bills. CUB pushed for making this option available to all residential customers currently getting a quarterly bill using either e-billing or paper bills received in the mail.



Contact the customer service folks to request this change at: **(503) 823-7770** or www.portlandoregon.gov/utilitybill.

You may have heard that autopay using credit cards has been suspended for utility bureau payments. No hacking or loss of data occurred; rather the city department that supplies this service to other city bureaus did not meet a national industry deadline for new security improvements. The utility bureaus' customer service group housed at the Portland Water Bureau had received assurance that this deadline would be met and got short notice that this goal was not achieved. CUB will be supporting the Water Bureau's work to fix this problem with its own system that will also provide more online options for public utility customers to manage their accounts and payment options.



CUB Welcomes - and Watches - the Public Utility Review Board

CUB was a key player in developing and ensuring City Council adoption of improved internal oversight of their management of the utility bureaus that provide sewer, stormwater, and water services. CUB continues as the independent advocate working from outside City Hall. The Public Utility Board (PUB) is the inside oversight group with improved effectiveness since it will have staff capacity and not have to rely on analysis from the utility bureaus.

The new PUB is a solid group, though future appointments would benefit from broader input and more caution about potential conflicts of interest. CUB is committed to a collegial relationship with the PUB to avoid duplication and ensure more effective advocacy in City Hall. The City Council ordinance forming the PUB clearly signals that they want input from both CUB and PUB, though, and we won't hesitate to oppose possible problematic recommendations from that internal utility bureau oversight group. In other words, CUB's primary focus is watching City Hall and the utility bureaus, but we'll be keeping an eye on the PUB too.

It is also critically important that the City Council not start repeating the unfortunate past practice of ignoring its own internal advisory groups. One accountability measure for the City Council is that they hold a spring hearing in partnership with the PUB and participation by CUB on the utility bureau budgets. This practice started two years ago and must be continued since it ensures the opportunity to discuss any disagreements with the utility bureau budgets requested by the Commissioner-in-Charge and to make recommendations to the Mayor before he develops his budget.