

The Ripple Effect

1984 - 2014



Citizens Utility Board
30 Years and Counting
of Oregon

Volume 2, Issue 1

Winter 2015

CUB Victory: Monthly Billing Is Here!

Quarterly bills for sewer, stormwater, and water services getting you down?

You're in luck! You can now request a monthly payment schedule from the Portland Water Bureau at www.portlandoregon.gov/utilitybill or by calling 503-823-7770.

CUB has been pushing for this option and we won!

Meters are still read four times a year, which does reduce costs for ratepayers. But that reading can now trigger three monthly statements that split the cost of what has traditionally been a quarterly bill.

If you want to pay monthly, just request it. If paying quarterly is okay with you, do nothing.

Obviously this new option doesn't change the overall charges, so CUB is also on the lookout for ways to rein in rates with a particular focus on assessing big construction projects that are the major drivers of rate increases.



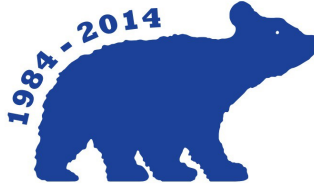
CUB Pushes City Council to Improve Oversight

Portland's City Council has received a comprehensive set of recommendations from the Utility Oversight Blue Ribbon Commission to improve oversight of public utilities. CUB's own Janice Thompson was on this Blue Ribbon Commission that worked from July through November 2014.

The major recommendations are:

- Replace three currently weak oversight committees with one group, the Public Utility Board (PUB) that will have dedicated staff so it won't have to rely on analysis by the utility bureaus it is monitoring. The PUB will have a broad scope, including review of big construction projects that are the major drivers of utility rate increases.
- The City Council must integrate the PUB into all steps of its budget process and adopt new standards to ensure that this new oversight group is not ignored.
- CUB should continue as residential ratepayer advocate, providing analysis from outside City Hall. **CUB is not paid by the City and our work is independent because we rely on membership support.**

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The Willamette River, Sewage Overflows, and Goldilocks

What is the connection between Goldilocks and the design of the Big Pipe project to reduce overflows of sewage into the Willamette River?

Let's start with some history. Portland's first sewer pipes flowed directly into the Willamette River. It was not until 1952 that Portland's first sewage treatment plant went into operation. It was also standard practice for sewage pipes to carry stormwater that flows off yards, roofs, and roads. This meant that sewers pipes would get overloaded with sewage entering the Willamette during heavy rainfalls. The official term for this phenomenon is **Combined Sewage Overflows**, or CSOs.

There used to be an average of 50 CSOs into the Willamette every winter. The Big Pipe project dramatically reduced that number down to four winter overflows, but did not eliminate them.

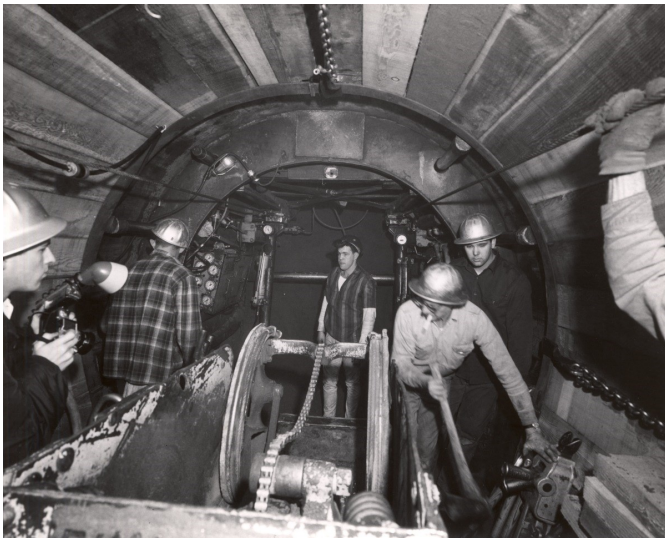
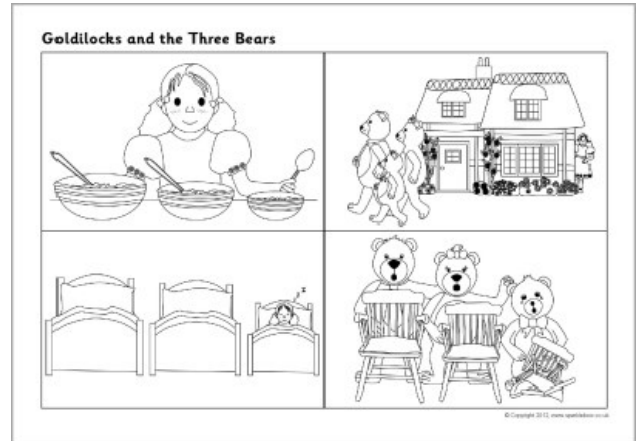


Photo from City of Portland Archives, Oregon, A2001-007.55



This is where Goldilocks comes in. Remember how Goldilocks checked out the beds of the three bears to find the one that was "just right" for her? The Big Pipe project was a "just right" design to reduce the number of sewer overflows to a level that met environmental requirements. A "too little" design would increase the risk of costly fines and leave the Willamette too dirty. A "too much" design to eliminate sewage overflows was possible, but the cost was so high that it wasn't required by environmental regulators.

So if you hear that the Big Pipe project didn't work because there is a sewage overflow, you can now explain to friends and family that the goal was dramatically reducing but not eliminating overflows. The Big Pipe takes a "just right" design approach that balances costs and benefits. This demonstrates the Goldilocks principle, a strategy that CUB supports.

CUB Pushes City Council To Improve Oversight

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Here are the next steps in Portland's utility oversight process:

1. CUB will watchdog the City Council to see that they fully implement these recommendations. New standards for integration of the PUB into the City Council utility budget and rate setting process would result in a level of interaction not seen for advisory groups of any other city bureaus. CUB will make sure that the City Council lives up to these new participation standards.
2. CUB will monitor the new oversight group, which is expected to be up and running this summer. Recruiting great folks for the PUB is essential, so don't hesitate to send your suggestions to Janice Thompson at janice@oregoncub.org, or 503-277-1984 x24.