



The Ripple Effect

Quarterly Newsletter of CUB's Water & Wastewater Program

Winter 2016

Budget Time for Portland's Public Utilities Victories but More Work Ahead

CUB provided early input during the budget development process to Commissioner-in-Charge Nick Fish and to the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) that provides stormwater management and sewer services and to the Portland Water Bureau (PWB). In addition to initial recommendations to influence development of the fiscal year 2016-17 requested budgets CUB also identified numerous issues that may not have immediate budget implications but need to be factored into future planning.

Initial Victories

Several of CUB's recommendations to influence development of the utility bureaus' requested budgets have been adopted.

For example, historic preservation work on the disconnected Mt. Tabor reservoirs whose water storage functions have been replaced by seismically resilient reservoirs on Kelly and Powell Buttes will be managed by the Water Bureau but paid for with dollars from the general fund. There may be pushback from the City Council due to general fund dollar limitations, but CUB will be on the alert to make sure this initial recommendation continues into the final budget.

Resources for residential customer outreach about the monthly billing option are also in the requested budget. Reading the meter will still occur quarterly but now instead of one bill for the previous three months, you can get three monthly bills. Obviously this doesn't reduce the total payment, but it helps with management of household expenses especially for folks on a fixed

income. When speaking with community groups, though, it is clear that most people haven't heard about this option. The reason for the information deficit, though, is that the City Council didn't factor in resources for outreach when it told the Water Bureau to make this change. We're not talking about a lot of money and the dollars will have a tangible benefit by helping residential customers with household budget management.

Next Steps

The requested budgets were released in early February and now that all the details are available CUB will be looking for opportunities for additional savings and ways to ensure improved value for stormwater, sewer, and water customers in Portland. We're also continuing to advocate for our suggestions that were not included in the requested budgets.

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Get Your CUB Water Bottle: Energy Efficient Hydration with Style

Like to have a water bottle at work? Going to the gym more regularly in 2016? Bring along CUB's new water bottle to keep yourself hydrated in style.

An added bonus is that you can share with others an interesting energy conservation factoid: Did you know that the production and transport of water in plastic bottles requires about 2000 times more energy than tap water?

You can educate friends and family with this informative fact on your CUB water bottle. Not only

is using your own water bottle more energy efficient than buying bottled water, but it is cheaper too. One penny buys you 1.9 gallons of Portland tap water.

Available for only \$23.99, the CUB water bottle is BPA free, holds 20 ounces, and is an attractive white with dark blue text and CUB's bear cub logo. That price is a good deal for a water bottle of this size and it helps support CUB too! Be the first at your gym – or wherever you drink water – to get the new CUB water bottle. Purchase at <http://oregoncub.org/get-involved/merchandise>.



**The skyline of
Flint, Michigan**

*CUB continues
to advocate for
BES to pursue
higher cost
recovery from
developers,
saving rate
payer dollars in
the process.*

Drinking Water Lead, Flint, and Portland

The lead that is leaching out of water service pipes in Flint MI is a tragedy that was preventable. Flint River water has a chemical composition that is

more corrosive than water from Lake Huron that the City of Flint had historically purchased from Detroit. When Flint River water started going through Flint's lead service pipes in 2014 a corrosion control treatment step, required by the Environmental Protection Agency, was not taken. The tragic result is that lead began leaching into the water. Treating corrosive water to prevent lead leaching isn't very expensive but that step wasn't taken in Flint, reportedly to save money. There are also serious questions about the wisdom of switching to Flint River water from Lake Huron water in the first place.

There isn't any chance, however, of the Flint situation occurring in Portland.

The crucial difference between these two cities is that the service lines that distribute water from the big cast iron water mains to homes are lead in Flint while Portland has

never used lead pipes. Portland's drinking water meets or exceeds all federal and state drinking water standards. Not only is Portland's water not corrosive, our pipes don't contain lead that could leach into the water like it has in Flint.

Lead can be an issue in Portland homes, generally those built between 1970 and 1985, that used lead solder in the pipes inside the house. Brass plumbing fixtures installed before 2014 can also contain lead with components older than 1985 having a greater likelihood of higher amounts of lead. In these homes lead testing makes sense and a free kit to test for lead in household water is available through the LeadLine at www.leadline.org or 503-988-400.

There are also treatment options if the inside pipes or fixtures in a home are causing high lead levels in the water such as flushing the tap if several hours have passed since the last time water was used. Filters can also reduce lead in household water in these situations. More information is available from the Portland Water Bureau on the lead testing process and treatment options at <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/561933>.

Budget Time for Portland's Public Utilities *(Continued from front)*

In particular, the BES budget does not include CUB's recommendation to end an inappropriate subsidy to developers. BES staff review land use plans and building permits for compliance with environmental standards, but the fee the City Council allows them to charge developers covers less than 50 percent of their costs. More customers are good for other BES ratepayers so the appropriate cost recovery goal isn't 100 percent. CUB is recommending 90 percent cost recovery so more ratepayer dollars are kept in your pockets instead of covering costs for developers. This builds on CUB's victory to end

another developer subsidy in the last BES budget and CUB will continue pushing for this next step in the fiscal year 2016-17 budget.

There will be City Council budget work sessions in March and community forums in April with all the details of the Mayor's budget proposal due in early May. CUB will be actively engaged throughout the whole process.

Process Victories

We pushed Commissioner Fish to ensure a seat at the table for CUB at the City Council work sessions on the BES and PWB budgets. We

won! That means CUB will be right there with the City Council discussing the proposed Portland public utility budgets, a step that plays a key role in the Mayor's preparation of his proposed budget. We also worked to ensure dedicated time slots for public input specifically on public utility concerns at the two community budget forums held in April. By the time the Mayor's budget details are released in May our goal is to have all our recommendations adopted, but we'll continue pushing until the final budget decisions are made.