

The Ripple Effect

1984 - 2014



Citizens Utility Board
30 Years and Counting
of Oregon

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\$2 Million Ratepayer Victory

Ratepayers kept \$2 million in their pockets because the Portland City Council acted on CUB's recommendation and ended a sewer charge subsidy for developers. The savings for ratepayers will be ongoing, beginning with \$2 million in additional revenue from developers in the current fiscal year that ends June 30, 2016. More money from developers is a CUB victory for ratepayers.

Here is what CUB did:

CUB uncovered a City Council decision back in 2011 that reduced the sewer system charge paid by developers to the Bureau of Environmental Services. These charges are essentially fees to ensure that developers pay their fair share for sewer systems that are built to accommodate future growth. State regulations govern the amount of these sewer system development charges. The City Council reduced these charges below the level allowed by state law, evidently to encourage development during the great recession. Regardless of whether or not you think any reduction in these developer fees made sense at the time, it certainly doesn't make sense now as construction has rebounded.

During the last fiscal year, developers were paying sewer system charges that were only 85% of what could be charged under state law.

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Want a Speaker About Portland Public Utilities?

CUB's consumer advocate for Portland Public Utilities, Janice Thompson, recently gave a talk on utility oversight basics at a training event. Contact her at 503-227-1984 x24 or janice@oregoncub.org to speak to a meeting of your group or organization interested in Portland policy issues.



Monthly Instead of Quarterly Bills

Another CUB victory for residential ratepayers is that you can switch from quarterly to monthly billing to pay for sewer, stormwater management, and water services from the City of Portland. While working to rein in your public utility bills, CUB also pushed the City Council to give Portlanders the monthly bill option to help manage their household expenses.

Reading the meter will still be done quarterly, but one bill for the previous three months can now be split into three bills. This option was initially only available to customers if they switched to e-billing. There is still a digital divide, however, and many households that seem most likely to benefit from monthly bills are also more likely to be without computer and internet access.

CUB pushed for the next step of allowing the monthly statement option even if you like to get bills on paper via the mail. CUB won and that means that you – Portland ratepayers – win!

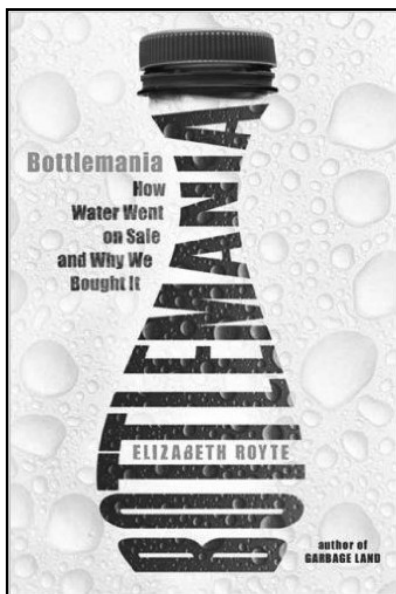
Contact the City's customer service folks to request this change at: **(503) 823-7770** or www.portlandoregon.gov/utilitybill.

\$2 Million Ratepayer Victory (cont'd)

The resulting loss of revenue is an inappropriate subsidy for developers, and without CUB's recommended fix this subsidy would have kept going up each year. At every step in the city budget process – with helpful emails from CUB members – we pushed the City Council. They listened, and returned to the historic practice of requiring developers to pay the sewer system charge at the full level allowed under state law. Ending this developer subsidy means more money in the pockets of ratepayers.

CUB won and that means that you – Portland ratepayers – win!

Book Review: *Bottle Mania: How Water Went on Sale and Why We Bought It*



Elizabeth Royte's *Bottlemania* was published in 2008 but is still informative. Written in a clear and personable style, Royte's goal is to address these two questions:

- What are the physical differences between tap and bottled water, and how does water bottling affect the environment and local communities?
- Even if bottled water makes sense for health or other reasons, is it ethical to profit from its sale?

A controversy in Maine about expansion of Nestlé-owned Poland Spring bottling facilities is a thread throughout the book. Royte also describes the expensive efforts in some Midwestern municipal water treatment facilities to remove the herbicide atrazine while questioning why actions to prevent pollutants from entering water resources in the first place isn't a higher priority. Royte lives in New York City which, like Portland, has high quality municipal water and the author supports investment in water services infrastructure. After all her research she continues to drink tap water, though she does stop using a plastic water bottle.

For more on *Bottlemania* and reviews of other books related to CUB's work, search for "Book Review" at www.oregoncub.org.