

# **The Portland Tribune**

## **Council Supports Expanding Utility Relief Program**

*By Jim Redden*

*February 14, 2018*

Commissioner Nick Fish presents plan for providing water and sewer bill discounts to apartment renters at Tuesday work session.

The City Council expressed support for expanding the utility relief program operated by the Portland Water Bureau on Tuesday.

The program helps low-income residents pay their water and sewer bills. During a Feb. 13 work session, the council indicated it was willing to increase the amount and availability of the assistance in next year's budget — including providing up to \$500 a month to renters in apartments without individual water meters.

"Too many renters are having trouble paying their water and sewer bills," said Commissioner Nick Fish, who is on charge both bureaus and presented the proposal to the council.

According to charts presented at the work session, the number of households earning less than \$25,000 a year has fallen in Portland since 2005 but the number earning between \$25,000 and \$75,000 has remained pretty much the same. Except for Asians, minority households are most likely to be in poverty, the charts showed.

Under the existing program, the bureau has been discounting water and sewer bills for low-income customers in single-family homes by up to 50 percent since 1994. But it has not been providing such relief to similar renters in apartments, despite years of study.

An October 2017 audit of existing program by the City Auditor's Office recommended the city study how to extend assistance to multi-family renters.

To solve that problem, Fish has proposed providing \$600,000 in utility funds to such renters at risk of being evicted because they cannot pay their rent, which includes utility costs set by their landlords. The funds would be channeled through Home Forward, the former Portland Housing Authority, which administers an existing rental assistance program in Multnomah County. Renters would be required to apply for the assistance and be certified as eligible.

Fish also proposed raising the household income needed to qualify for such assistance from 60 percent of median family income (MFI) in Oregon to 30 percent of MFI in the Portland area, where the cost of living is higher. For a single person, the income needed to qualify for assistance would increase from \$23,095 to \$31,380 to year.

And Fish proposed increasing the maximum amount of crisis assistance from \$125 to \$500 a year. The amount was last raised from \$75 in 2004.

Fish told the council the City Attorney's Office has advised the expanded program would be legal under the City Charter. The city settled a longrunning civil lawsuit over questionable utility spending late last year.

With the council's support, Fish said a more detailed version of the expansion will be presented during a March work session on the water bureau's budget. An intergovernmental agreement with Home Forward will be drafted by May. Other potential community partners include the Portland Housing Bureau, the Joint Office of Homeless Services, Human Solutions, Elders in Action.

## **Portland Business Journal**

# **Homer Williams-led Nonprofit to Provide Mobile Showers, Laundry and Other Services for Portland's Homeless**

*By Jon Bell*

*February 13, 2018*

Last fall, Mayor Ted Wheeler said members of the local business community might be ideal partners in an effort to bring mobile showers and laundry services to Portland to serve the city's homeless population.

Now, in a way, that's coming to fruition.

Oregon Harbor of Hope, a nonprofit founded by longtime developer Homer Williams, announced today that it would be putting its leadership and financial resources to work on three different initiatives to help provide more services for the homeless in Portland. Those include a program called Portland Street Medicine, which will find a team of more than 70 medical providers making the rounds and providing first-aid and other medical services to folks living on the streets.

In addition, Harbor of Hope will begin offering mobile showers and laundry services in May, thanks to the donation of two 28-foot-long box trailer trucks from Thomson Equipment Corp., a heavy equipment company in Northeast Portland. According to a release, the trucks will be retrofitted with private showers that will be able to provide up to 160 showers per week. There will also be 12 washers and dryers for tending to laundry. Union Gospel Mission will operate the trucks three to four days a week starting in May, stopping at schools, churches and encampments around the city.

Local companies Parr Lumber, George Morlan Plumbing and Kodiak Plumbing will provide materials to help retrofit the trucks.

The third initiative is the student-led CardsCook program at Lincoln High School. Started by student Hank Sanders in 2016, the program partners with Portland Public Schools, the Oregon Food Bank and Clay Street Table to make and serve meals for disadvantaged youth. The program currently served 25,000 meals in a single year, and students hope to expand the program to other schools with the help of Harbor of Hope.

"This is a crisis of monumental proportions, and no single person or organization can solve this alone," Williams said in the release. "One of the things we hope to accomplish is to help fill gaps in services, and these three initiatives meet a critical need right now on the streets of our city."

Williams initially launched Harbor of Hope in an effort to create a large campus that would offer not only shelter for the homeless, but various social services as well. The group had hoped to launch a pilot at the city of Portland's Terminal 1 property, but that effort met significant resistance. The nonprofit has continued to garner support from the local business community to try and address the city's homeless crisis, and Williams has continued to explore other options to provide more affordable housing options in Portland.