

Title 21 Revision Process: Separate Metering Proposal

October 5, 2020

WHAT IS TITLE 21?

Title 21 is a set of codes that guide our work at the Portland Water Bureau. These codes inform the rules and laws that direct our operations and define the roles and responsibilities of staff who deliver water to nearly a million people in the Portland area.

The Bureau has recently reviewed these codes to revise outdated provisions and add Charter changes resulting from ballot measures approved by voters in November 2019, among other updates. Title 21 was open for public review July 10th through August 21st, 2020.

One provision included in the Title 21 revision process proposes separate water metering for new construction in the City of Portland. The Water Bureau updated this section to require separate metering for newer buildings.

WHY IS THE WATER BUREAU CHANGING THE SEPARATE METER POLICY?

Current city code allows for new buildings to install only one water meter. This one meter can measure water-use for multiple businesses, and residences. However, only having a single meter for multiple businesses and residences also presents challenges. For example, it can create barriers in easily detecting and fixing leaks. It also limits transparency for tenants and their understanding of how much they are paying for water and sewer services. Additionally, separate metering allows the City to more easily provide customer service benefits including bill discounts, water quality testing, and water efficiency program benefits when each community member has access to their own bill.

PUBLIC BENEFITS OF SEPARATE METERING

- **Access to customer service programs**
Separate meters strengthen a direct relationship with customers which, by design, allows for better communication, water quality connections, financial assistance options, and access to water efficiency programs.
- **Tenant Equity**
Separate water metering allows a tenant to be in control of their water use and water costs. In typical multifamily properties, water use can be included in rent, or as a separate bill. As Portland grows, more BIPOC residents are moving into multifamily housing. According to the Housing Bureau, “Rentership continues to increase steadily in Portland, from 46 percent in 2012 to 47 percent in 2017. Rentership rates vary by race and ethnicity. African American, Hawaiian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic-Latinx and Native American comprise the majority of renter households. Rentership rates have increased among African American, Asian, and Hawaiian-Pacific Islander households, while staying the same for Whites and decreasing among Hispanic-Latinx, and Native American households”. Separate water metering is important to make sure

BIPOC Portlanders have the same access to services and the opportunity to understand their bill and water use.

- **Climate adaptation, Water and Energy Efficiency**

Individual meters reduce a tenant's water use. National studies show that customers who receive a water bill use 20% less water than those that don't. Similarly, energy costs are reduced as the water bill encourages less as they reduce hot water-use based on feedback from their meter. Facilitating energy and water conservation is pivotal to helping Portland be prepared for our changing climate.

- **Leak management and property maintenance**

Individual meters allow a property manager to more quickly find and repair leaks. Many multifamily properties struggle with leaks and high bill costs associated with the challenge of identifying where leaks occur. Quickly managing leaks helps keep rents lower and, and allows for easily finding and repairing leaks, because the meter provides the info needed to identify and detect leaks.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PROPOSAL

During the public review process this summer (July 10th through August 21st, 2020) the bureau received comments from developers concerned about additional costs associated with this new metering requirement. The bureau recognizes that installing separate meters is in the public interest and will work to develop policies and procedures that do not increase costs for building a new building under rules. These policies have not yet been developed, but will:

- **Meter Installation Charges:** The bureau will utilize construction methods that will enable costs to be comparable to existing costs for water service that utilized master meters. Where appropriate, the bureau may recognize the broader public benefits of this initiative and cost-share to promote individual metering.
- **Water System Development Charges:** the system development charge assessed for the property will continue to be based on the demand the property will place on the system. Under this new metering requirement, the bureau will assess the SDC at the same level as if the property were to be master metered.
- **Sewer System Development Charges:** Sewer SDC charges are not affected by the Water Bureau's change in its metering requirements.

TIMELINE

- **July 10th through August 21st, 2020:** Public comment period and outreach, ongoing stakeholder conversations through the fall
- **October 27, 2020:** Individual metering Council Work Session
- **November 25, 2020:** Council Title 21 first reading
- **December 2, 2020:** Council Title 21 second reading
- **December 9, 2020:** Council vote on Title 21