

Portland Utility Board

July 18, 2019 11:00am – 1:00pm
1900 SW Fourth Avenue, 1900 Building, Room 2500C
Subcommittee Meeting: Community Engagement

Attendees:

PUB Members:

Heidi Bullock
Ted Labbe (left at 12:30pm)
Robert Martineau
Karen Spencer
Karen Williams (arrived at 12:05pm)
Brian Laurent, ex officio

Absent:

Kaliska Day
Micah Meskel
Dory Robinson
Mia Sabanovic
Gabriela Saldaña-López
Ana Brophy, ex officio
Sara Petrocine, ex officio

Staff:

Aaron Abrams (Program Manager for Community Outreach and Public Involvement,
Bureau of Environmental Services)
Tony Anderson (Strategic Communications Director, Water Bureau)
Alexandra Martin (Executive Assistant, City Budget Office)
Amy Archer-Masters (PUB Analyst, City Budget Office)

Public:

Carol Cushman (League of Women Voters)

I. Call to Order

Heidi called the meeting to order.

The subcommittee meeting began at 11:17am.

Heidi said the meeting does not need a quorum but does need three members. The goal of this meeting is for the subcommittee to bring a recommendation on community engagement to the full board.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Disclosure of Communications

Heidi asked for disclosure of communications.

Heidi said she had communications with Bureau of Environmental Services staff on Portland Harbor and community outreach.

Ted said he had communication with BES related to his nonprofit work. He spoke to Commissioner Fish's office on urban forestry and Parks and on BES and green infrastructure funding.

Brian said he had brief conversation with Portland Harbor staff on a lawsuit.

IV. Subcommittee on Community Engagement (Discussion)

Amy introduced Aaron Abrams, BES's program manager for community outreach and public involvement.

Amy said Ashley Tjaden of the Office of Community and Civic Life will engage with PUB on bylaws at the August subcommittee. Ashley works on guidelines for boards and commissions.

Heidi asked Amy why they were planning to have the bylaws discussion at a subcommittee and suggested it may need full board discussion.

- Amy said she was not sure what the attendance will be at the subcommittee; Ashley will be present to talk through issues in the recruitment process and other issues PUB is interested in. The goal is move the bylaws work forward.
- Heidi asked why they can't have the discussion on August 6th at the full board meeting.
 - Amy said it depends on how much time they can allocate to the topic.
- Heidi asked what is scheduled.
 - Amy said board member introductions, a 45-minute equity training provided by Ashley, an Administrative Review Committee overview which newer members need to participate on the committees, this subcommittee's report. There will probably not be time for Mt. Tabor. The board needs to discuss the annual report, which needs to be finalized by the September meeting.
- Heidi acknowledged there was nothing obvious that could be rescheduled.
- Amy said she could probably find 30-45 minutes to start the conversation.

Amy introduced Tony Anderson, Strategic Communications Director at Water Bureau. She said he is here to take information back to his bureau and has expertise to lend to this conversation.

Amy said she sees this subcommittee as brainstorming session to come to a recommendation to expand PUB's engagement work.

Heidi said she would like to open the conversation on community engagement. She asked for more information on the posting of the meeting.

- Alexandra explained public notices are sent to distribution lists for internal and external stakeholders. The Civic Life distribution list is included and is required for public meetings. The meeting information is also posted on CBO's website.
- Amy added that people opt in to topics on the Civic Life distribution list; there are thousands of people on the list.

Heidi asked what else can be done to promote the meetings.

- Amy said a timeline challenge is finalizing the agenda so it is as accurate as possible. She said the people who have opted into the lists are people who already know about the issues. The notice works as a notification but an improvement may be doing outreach about topics and policy issues and getting more people to connect to the lists for broader outreach and expanded lists.

Tony said PUB should start by thinking about the goals of the outreach. Communications discussions are open-ended. He gave an example of goals: expand the list by 100 including 20 people who would not normally be engaged.

Heidi said she sees the principal goal as having the public attend the meetings. She said meetings should be held in community spaces outside of the downtown core. She suggested PUB find places to meet in community centers. She suggested doing advertising with the help of the organization hosting the meeting by using posters and flyers to reach people not on traditional distribution lists.

Ted agreed and suggested having a meeting at the Southwest community center. They have vast networks of community members engaged and by going to locations and considering a topic of interest to that part of the city they can get more people engaged.

Heidi added that people might opt in for the distribution lists.

Aaron asked what the format of the meeting would be. He said it sounded like a listening session. He asked what the goal of having people come to a PUB meeting was and what will draw people to come to the meeting.

Amy said the goal is to hear what issues the public is concerned about related to the bureaus. There are other ways besides meetings to get to hear from the public. PUB could collect comments online. She said if they are going to hold a public meeting they need a clear outcome. She suggested focusing on some specific policy issue, for example lead and corrosion control. She said they should think about how to frame the conversation in a way that brings people to the meeting and will result in continued interest and contact.

Ted said PUB should create more space in the regular meetings for public dialogue. He said certain members of the public will feel shut out from a listening session and it is important to make more time in PUB's regular meetings for the community. He said the public might see a listening session as putting comments in a box and the public will be made to think about how their comments relate to the PUB's work. They said they must be prepared for negative responses.

Amy said that at listening sessions the public would like to hear about actual progress being made on the issue. For example, with lead and corrosion control, the public might come to the listening session and hear there is concern without being provided with answers on the policy options.

Ted said some people just want to be heard and listening is legitimate goal.

Brian asked who is doing the listening.

Aaron suggested that if the topic were lead and corrosion there could also be an educational aspect with an open question and answer period.

Rob acknowledged they may hear something they don't have answers to.

Brian asked who is attending and bringing material and if they would give a small amount of information or a comprehensive presentation and then asking for feedback. He suggested a question for the public could be what their concerns are about issues the bureaus will be working on in the future. There is flexibility on the level or participation by the public. The objective is an awareness of PUB; we want the public to know PUB exists, understand what PUB is about, and that they can actively participate. He asked if PUB knows enough about constituents to have a strategic approach.

Heidi said she does not believe they are informed.

Amy said there is some information from the past. They are in a time of transition: the board has existed for several years, they have a workplan, are considering board policies. This is a good time to refresh how PUB engages the public. She said they do not need a thorough plan at this stage but just need to start trying some new things.

Heidi said PUB must try something. She said she hears others saying the involvement it is topic dependent. She said when making decisions the workplan will help. She suggested scheduling important topics several months out and planning and organizing education and planning for open public dialogue about policy. Today should result in a recommendation and PUB can create a roadmap for engagement.

Karen Spencer said doing strategic planning now is important. She said with new board members PUB has an opportunity to have listening sessions and have community involvement on PUB priorities. PUB should hear from individuals on if PUB has the right priorities. She said the time should be when people are off work. She said the current meeting times are challenging and PUB needs to find more convenient times to participate.

Brian asked about topic initiation or objectives. He asked if it was appropriate to go to the bureaus and ask about their challenges and objectives. PUB could take up topics because they are important to individual bureaus.

Heidi said PUB speaks on behalf of the public and not bureaus.

Amy said bureaus can bring issues and PUB decides how they will engage. The bureaus bring their concern or interest and some become priorities.

Karen Spencer suggested testing a plan to see if it works.

Amy said the first thing they have discussed is lead and corrosion control. She said PUB will need some coordination to move forward with a public meeting on this topic.

Ted referenced background challenges and setting goals. He said BES conducted a public opinion poll to understand people's knowledge of BES. This gave a sense of what the public knows and doesn't know about Portland's water. He suggested distributing the information to PUB.

Aaron clarified that this was a focus group and not a survey. The results were not statistically significant. The main takeaway was that people don't differentiate between the two bureaus.

Tony said part of the filtration project was a broader opinion 400 sample size telephone survey. They also conducted four focus groups. He said he can share the information; the survey was completed in the last four months. They considered if they need to do more financial assistance outreach. They heard that people are aware of the financial assistance program. There was a strong awareness on where water came from. They found they have work to do with low-income consumers on lead and corrosion control. There was some education needed, such as not boiling water to treat for lead.

Ted said PUB needs to be clear about what they are trying to do. He said the engagement should be with different communities; it is plural.

Brian asked about a poll Dawn Uchiyama mentioned.

Aaron said they engaged DHM Research, a large local polling firm.

Brian said it would be helpful to remember the industrial commercial customers. He suspects industrial consumers know when there is switch from Bull Run to well water. There may be a negligible health impact but there could be other impacts. Industry is a significant stakeholder.

Rob said large users get notified when there is a planned source switch. They may not be notified beforehand if there is an unexpected need to switch, for example if there is a turbidity event. This is because the change has a large potential to affect products. The Water Bureau does notify wholesale customers. Everyone has access to the bureau website.

Rob said some people know about the issues and are willing to engage. The happens at City Council. PUB has been put in the position to run the bureaus instead of advice City Council. This is the opportunity to maximize their role. He agreed they should host a listening session but it should not take the place of regular meetings.

He noted on occasion PUB has engaged with the public at bureau events and hearings. He said he would rather not listen to many people say their water bill is too high. He asked how they can show the basis of rates. He said PUB gets lots of information on rates, including capital improvement plans. He asked if bureaus are having adequate communication with the public. At past bureau events, PUB attendees have been placed on a stage; they were there to listen and report back. He thought that was useful; it showed that there was another body that advises Council and that there is another channel to provide comments. There are certain policies that engage people, such as lead, Mt. Tabor, the filtration solution. He thinks it is important to hear

when the public thinks the bureau is not doing well. He agreed with others who said they should have meetings in other places. He suggested the Southwest community center, IRCO, and City Hall.

Heidi said focusing on a topic will curb the concentration on rants.

Rob acknowledged communication makes people feel better. PUB is aware of the water rate drivers, there is a certain amount of debt service and seismic resiliency costs. People should know the utility board is paying attention and that they can talk to the board.

Ted agreed education at the event would be good.

Carol offered her perspective as someone who sits in on different commission meetings. She said she is frequently the only member of the public there. She said the most she has seen at commission meetings is four or five people. For other meetings the League of Women Voters attend, topics are very clear and agendas are distributed in advance. Some meetings attract three to twenty people because the topic is something that has people concerned. They attend to give support or to learn what is happening. There are commission meetings throughout the city going on all the time and they don't always draw people. Unless the Commission has something of interest more than just concerned people such as League members, there will not be many attendees. They will need to really publicize the meeting cover specific topics.

Brian suggested joining other events. He mentioned tabling at Sunday Parkways. This would serve the objective of awareness and adding people to the listserv.

Rob suggested asking the bureaus to include something in the bill mailer. The mailer could describe what PUB does, provide a link. Throughout the year people are informed by mailers.

Ted said he liked the idea of joining other meetings and events. He said not everyone wants to go to meetings. He suggested for Sunday Parkways they could table at the colocation at Westmoreland Park where there has been restoration and there would already be other community partners. He noted a question Dory had asked last year about a social media strategy for PUB. He said social media could inform some of their decision. It does not have to be complicated. They could pose questions. He noted first they would need followers. He acknowledged they will get some random ideas but it is an opportunity for listening.

Tony said he previously work at the state where the scope and scale is statewide. He said holding meetings was not feasible. He said he was surprised by some people's reluctance to use a digital toolbox. He acknowledges access issues. But that digital engagement offered an opportunity for people who don't want to speak in front of groups, to provide comments on their own time and to really think about the issues.

Karen added that internet browsers have a translation feature.

Tony said a social media townhall opens the possibility of losing control over what's being said. This is the democratic process in action.

Aaron asked what the community engagement was in service of. He reframed the question to what in PUB's mission does community engagement assist? He said PUB it an oversight body

and community engagement should inform recommendation to Council. He said they should consider what methods of community engagement will further their mission.

Karen Spencer said the engagement goal is to ensure that we as PUB members understand customer needs and priorities. Customers should be aware PUB exists so if issues need to be surfaced they understand PUB is a channel. She added she does not see how one vehicle will accomplish this goal.

Heidi said this is something PUB should do regularly or annually. They should ask the public about their true needs or priorities.

Brian asked who would moderate and implement a digital strategy. He asked if it was within the scope and expertise of the staff.

Amy said they are still finalizing coordinator position. She said it depends on the scope and scale. She said improving the website and social media is feasible in their workplan. This work supports other aspects of the workplan such as the connections needed for the annual recruitment.

Brian asked Tony and Aaron about the employee's capacity to do the online engagement.

Tony said it should be feasible to send tweets and post an online survey.

Amy said it depends what PUB needs to achieve. They need to post consistently and have topics of interest.

Aaron said it can take years to develop a community forum and team. They currently have email addresses on databases; people receive communications from the City. People opted in to get the information from the lists. These are self-selecting lists. There are members of the community who are not comfortable with providing their email for government lists. He advised PUB to consider engaging Community Engagement Liaison when reaching traditional underserved communities. CELs are trained members of cultural communities. They advise on strategy, invite people to meetings, provide interpretation services. He said PU could hire a CEL to host a townhall or focus group. They could find an existing event and through a CEL. He said when hosting events, the best practice is to provide childcare, transportation, and food.

Amy added that CELs are advisors and frequently leaders in their community.

Aaron suggested they not engage CELs in interpretation. They should hire an interpreter. An example of work CELs advise on is door-to-door visits in low-income housing with a significant number of Somali residents.

Karen Spencer asked Amy to summarize their conversation for Karen Williams who joined after the discussion started.

- Amy said right now they are considering what the goal is and what initial path they will take. They have discussed having a public meeting in the next few months focused on a policy topic. They have also discussed survey tools and focus groups. Amy said the subcommittee agreed the PUB needs to be informed about customer needs and

priorities and know about PUB as a channel. PUB needs to increase awareness and have an open, public dialogue. This should support PUB's oversight role. PUB stance on issues and their recommendation should be informed by the public. There is a desire to go into the community and have meetings in other locations. There has been conversation on if the meetings should be regular PUB meetings or listening sessions. They have also discussed going to existing meetings and doing other community engagement that would expand their listserv. They also discussed online engagement and surveys to inform decision-making. If hosting events, PUB would have to be aware of their topics.

Karen Spencer mentioned Rob's suggestion of having PUB included in mailer communications from the bureaus.

Karen Williams said it would be helpful to understand the relationships the body already has with community representatives. She said there are ways to build relations with community organizations or groups before they need help or an opinion so trust has been established.

Ted said he could provide a brief history of past engagement. Members attended a meeting when the City was engaging the public on filtration. Water did outreach and PUB went to neighborhood coalition meetings with communications and outreach staff. The meeting was charged because people had questions and some people were very opposed.

- Brian asked if they were in Mt. Tabor.
- Ted said yes. He said when decisions are made last-minute the conversation will be charged.
- Rob mentioned the City meeting at IRCO. He said Tony had just joined. They were discussing the Carpenter Lane site. People were concerned about how loud it would be and what it would look like. Some were asserting it was a no-bid contract and there was some controversy over potential malfeasance.
- Tony said having PUB there added an extra dynamic; it showed there were people there to listen and it was helpful.
- Rob said Commissioner Fritz spoke at the meeting.
- Ted said even though conversations were charged it was valuable to get feedback. He said it was important to revisit how they do public comment. People had great feedback and asked charged questions.

Brian said food is necessary.

Heidi said they were trying to queue-up a lead and corrosion conversation and do some presenting and listening on PUB priorities.

Karen Spencer said there was past interest on lead and corrosion control, Because the meeting is already scheduled it will be the quickest opportunity to do the outreach. They will get to hear more about customer needs and priorities.

Heidi said this topic will pique interest.

Brian asked if there was a geographical location or constituent group that would be the primary target for corrosion education. He said in southwest they would be mostly concerned about storm water and roads.

Heidi said it would be helpful to know where there are older homes there is a potential they have lead pipes.

Brian asked about entanglement or overlap in opinions about corrosion control and fluoridation. He said the argument against fluoridation is the bureau would be adding a chemical to perfect, pure water. He asked if in some neighborhoods that were highly opposed to fluoridation stand to benefit the most.

Tony said being strategic is the best approach for setting a meeting location.

Brian said the people who voted against fluoridation were communities who would benefit.

Aaron corrected the Brian's statement and said low-income communities and community organizations supported fluoridation.

Brian said it is not the same issue but there are the same kinds of concerns and it might guide PUB's approach.

Rob said he wanted to return to his statement on not wanting to hear about high water bills. He said reasons people might be upset is that they don't qualify for assistance. It would be good to ask rate-payers how much they care about seismic resiliency and the environment. He said few people in the conversation would feel their water bill is too high when they understand what goes into running the utilities. People may think seismic resiliency is being worked on too fast. In that case, PUB's advice to Council and the bureaus should be to dial back 10% so the City is ready in 150 years instead of 130 years. He said he does not want to minimize concerns about bills; advising Council on rate setting is PUB's role.

Brian mentioned Commissioner Eudaly's public meeting to talk about code changes. The meeting did not go well. People went to have substantial conversations about the specifics of the topic. Some angry people derailed the meeting and people got shut down by others in the audience. He said hearing people complain about their bill is not productive way to address policies. There are different elements that go into rate increases. He acknowledged people have concern on rates, but PUB has other objectives. They can impose a structure if that conversation develops.

Karen Spencer agreed with Brian and said she is hearing PUB wants to have substantive discussions that lead to actions.

Karen Williams said the public does not see PUB as its own independent entity separate from and critical of City policy. The public sees PUB as a department in the City. This recalls the trust question and how much they can rely on what people convey at forums. If they are hearing from people who think of PUB as an extension of the City, they may not get very good information. In response to Rob's point about rates, if they do not hear about that issue it may be reflective of some people not participating. She said if PUB does not have relationships beyond the usual

participants they will not be getting enough information to provide critical information to the City.

Brian asked if PUB needs a product outline. He suggested three objectives.

Heidi agreed. The subcommittee can bring the goals of outreach to the full board. She referenced the two purposes Karen Spencer named. She also noted what Karen Williams said about established relationships and said PUB thus far has not been well-informed on the community's point of view and interest.

Karen Williams said the next step is to evaluate if PUB should host a listening session. She said they need to start developing trust built up over time. The September meeting should be in a location where people have interest in the topic.

Carol added they should have the meeting at a different time.

Karen Williams asked if there would be other PUB business discussed.

Heidi suggested it be an early listening session.

Karen Williams asked if bureau staff would attend.

Heidi said yes bureau staff should be included but it would be good to have an independent panel so people are not just hearing from government employees. They should have an educator, someone from Multnomah County, and the Oregon Health Authority.

Karen Williams asked if there would there be a moderator for questions and answers.

Carol said they should have someone explaining who PUB is and why they are there

Karen Williams suggested a PUB member be the moderator.

Aaron suggested tabling at the event so people can sign up for the email list and take information. This would be an interactive way to form interest in PUB.

Brian asked if corrosion control affects wastewater.

Rob said no.

Carol said the rate study is interesting.

Aaron said the public may not agree. He mentioned the Festival Latino where the Wastewater Treatment Advisory Committee will be tabling. It is on August 10th and is part of the Summer Movies in the Park series.

The subcommittee agreed to take back to the PUB a summary of the goals identified and a few first steps to move these goals forward. Future work would be done based on the effectiveness of the initial steps and future topics.

V. Discuss next meeting agenda

Portland Water Bureau Mount Tabor Reservoirs Preservation Project Tour
July 31, 2019 10:00am – 12:00pm

PUB Meeting
August 6, 3:30pm – 6:30pm, 1900 SW 4th Room #2500C

PUB Subcommittee – Board Composition and Bylaws/Code
August 15, 2019, 11:00am – 1:00pm, 1900 SW 4th Room #2500C

Amy said she would add discussion of the additional vacancy to the August 6th meeting. The commissioner's offices are asking what they will do with the vacancy. For the subcommittee findings, Amy will create a handout on talking points to provide an input tool to the full board.

Amy will send an email on carpooling to Mt. Tabor.

12:50 Adjourn