

Portland Utility Board

July 31, 2019, 10:00am-12:00pm

Mt Tabor Reservoirs

Subcommittee Meeting: Mount Tabor Reservoirs Preservation Project Tour

Attendees:

PUB Members:

Ana Brophy, ex-officio
Brian Laurent, ex-officio
Heidi Bullock, co-chair
Karen Y. Spencer
Micah Meskel
Robert Martineau
Sara Petrocine, ex-officio
Ted Labbe

Absent:

Dory Robinson, co-chair*
Gabriela Saldaña-López
Kaliska Day
Karen Williams
Mia Sabanovic*

*Notice of absence provided prior to meeting

Staff:

Amy Archer-Masters (PUB Analyst, City Budget Office)
Gabe Solmer (Deputy Director, Portland Water Bureau)
Robert Fraley (Senior City Planner, Portland Water Bureau)
Susan Meamber (Engineer, Portland Water Bureau)
Dylan Cain (Auditor's Office)

Public:

Bing Wong, Community Team Volunteer, Mt Tabor Board
John Laursen, Community Team Volunteer, Mt Tabor Board
Stephanie Stewart, Community Team Volunteer, Mt Tabor Board

I. Introductions and Opening Remarks

Amy called the meeting to order and the group proceeded with introductions. Staff provided a brief overview of the Portland Utility Board's (PUB's) prior discussion of funding related to the Mt. Tabor settlement agreement that is in the final year of funding. PUB has interest in understanding more of the background and projects underway at Mt. Tabor Reservoirs in preparation for future funding requests anticipated during budget cycles.

II. Reservoir Disconnect History – Community perspective

The community team volunteers present provided some background regarding the location and their involvement with some questions and followup from PUB members and staff.

The former Portland Water Bureau (PWB) Bureau Director David Schaff negotiated with the community a settlement totaling \$4 million dollars and commitment to keep water in the Mt Tabor reservoirs. They used collaborative decision making processes and as volunteers dedicated thousands of hours to the process. The funds are managed by PWB staff with input from the community team regarding priorities. There are two projects – the historic preservation construction project and the history project. The community members shared that the collaboration on construction prioritization has been effective but not as strong of a collaboration on the history project.

The changes at the reservoirs was triggered by federal regulations (LT2) and part of the City's response was a plan to disconnect the open reservoirs from the drinking water system (over \$400 million across city). There were historic sites at Mt Tabor and Washington Park that added a component to construction projects at those sites. As an asset owned by the City it needed to be maintained and minimum standards needed to be met at historic sites. Comprehensive plans were created for all sites except Mt. Tabor and community land use representatives identified the deficit in lack of plans for this site. From a budget perspective the Washington Park is a large project with historic features and detailed plans with between \$14-20 million for preservation. There was no budget for Mt Tabor site.

When a discussion happened in early 2000's about disconnecting reservoirs there was a large community discussion and an expert identified that to restore to the nature it would require a water feature and estimate for \$30-40 million. There was a contest to identify a design and the selected design was estimated at \$30 million. Disconnection did not happen at that time.

Once gap identified there were many conversations and negotiations through land use process. Negotiation about how to get protections to keep the park whole and move on. Timeframe was LT2 vote to move forward was about 2009, deadline to disconnect was end of 2015. Negotiations regarding Mt Tabor in spring of 2015 so significant time pressure. Goal was to protect interest of community and make sure the conditional use had discussion about how character of park could change, such as when pipe is layed and creates a tree ban for a stretch. There were things that had to be given up to process in time. Result was [Resolution 37146](#) with carefully crafted language.

Primary goals – wanted water since reservoirs would be cut off from the supply, seat at all those tables deciding how to spend the money and what signs would say, concern about rate impact and affordable approach (settled on \$4 million, would have preferred \$6 million). Did not advocate for complete redesign but to keep the existing features. Settlement allows to meet all historic regulations, capital asset maintenance and recognized that PWB needs to retain the asset (not Parks or other entity).

Sit at a table with the construction team and get into the details of the budget, help make decisions when things get too costly (example of a road closure that could allow quicker timeline). Liaison to bring community opinion to the table.

Need to figure out how to make the process sustainable for PWB without requiring community volunteers.

PUB member asked whether there are existing processes for planning and maintenance?

- Yes, through the Capital Asset Management Plan but not for this location. There are maintenance staff but the skills are different for historic preservation needs so those need to be documented to guide ongoing maintenance needs specific to this site.

PUB member asked if there are similar needs at Washington Park?

- Yes, but project is very different because there are new reservoirs, landslide and other factors.

PUB member asked if there were any conversations about looking for alternative funding sources for the preservation work?

- Steep ask for the dollars looking at, discussed going to City Council for a separate project since it was clear that not all the projects would be funded. It was under a tight timeline with pressure. The historic landmark commission had asked repeatedly during hearings why PWB and community aren't talking to each other and community said willing to talk, PWB would say they'd get back to us but it didn't happen. When commission issued their opinion it was that the reservoirs needed to be preserved with water in them, that was appealed before Council. Director said he was willing to meet so when we came forward before Council with a resolution and solution.

Is there potential in the future to look at funding solutions?

- As a community member without resource it pisses them off to expect them to look for funding when people in the west hills didn't have to look for funding for the Washington Park work. PUB member stated that one difference is that Washington Park is still a functional water source structure and Mt Tabor is not.
- Not saying the community should fund it but is there a way to partner with the City to look at grant opportunities statewide or federal to look at preservation and maintenance. Work in good faith together to look at alternatives.
- Community members – what is the community's role in that? Why not paid City staff?
 - PUB Member – bolsters our chances to get funds and there are potentially resources to share with the community to help in that process. Preservation work is community led and driven by folks that are local and engaged.
 - Community – driven by the obligation to the asset. All for partnerships but not interested in pushing work off paid staff and onto volunteers. It is not a Mt Tabor neighborhood park, we are just closest to sound the alarm that the resource is not being preserved. It is a public space.

PUB member asked about historic preservation inventory and how Mt Tabor figures into the inventory?

- Community member is aware of a ranking in the 1990's with 3 or 4 levels of priority of about 5,000 sites. Of those 52 were at the highest level and 5 of those were the open reservoirs at Mt Tabor.

PUB member asked about public process on spending, is it mandated by the settlement that it is PWB and neighborhood association or is it open to the public.

- Community member – the spirit was public but the Mt Tabor Neighborhood Association is written into all the documents. The neighborhood representatives have been the constant with staff turnover and other changes.
- PUB member gave thanks to the community representatives for all the work that has been done, it is clearly a lot, but it does seem exclusive even though unintentional. Going forward it is an opportunity to go to Office of Civic Life and identify what other voices should be brought to this issue since it is a citywide issue. PUB maybe can help problem solve it.
- Community member – very open and accept everyone including the people who come in and may alienate everybody. There is a risk if it is wide open that people could come in and destroy the conversation.
- Community member – negotiated this with Director and it was not a transparent negotiation. When brought to Council it was criticized by those that fought the disconnection and believed that PWB would never live up to their promises and collaborate the way planned. Still get that from people. We saw this collaboration as a model for how a citizen group and a bureau could work together to get past adversarial and move to collaboration. This was a very heavy lift so to expand it would have been impossible.

PUB member – part of their reservation is that the pattern with lawsuits and when it is used to circumvent public process. PUB grew out of the settlement from the last major lawsuit and the spirit is to try to avoid that pattern going forward. Unreasonable to expect no lawsuit but maybe goal to have fewer lawsuits where the city's position is sustained. Use tools like PUB to air grievances. We identify with notion of Mt Tabor as a citywide asset.

- Community member – concern is that it gets so watered down and aren't knowledgeable enough to ask the tough questions. There is a public fear that PUB will just be a stamp of approval for city projects. The way you phrase it is fabulous and if there could be true dialogue. PUB member – also a place where general public without that knowledge can also come to learn.

PUB member asked is there a project communications plan? How do you know you are being asked the right questions at the right time?

- Community member – we have monthly meetings and ask a lot of questions. Meetings move around to where they are convenient. Also have community meetings to make sure we are representing appropriately. Not all building are disconnected so also making sure that identify which should be paid by ratepayers versus which by the preservation dollars.
- Community member - Susan manages the project and she and her predecessors have been very open and when there is a decision point they keep us in the loop. Meet with staff, historic preservation consultant and project managers from construction side. It has been a very thoughtful and collaborative relationship.
- Community member – concern about large multinational contractors getting work and since we were allowed to be part of decision process we tried to steer scope of RFP to not limit local smaller companies to be competitive and meet minority hiring goals.

III. Background on Preservation Project – Susan Member

Susan provided some additional background following the allocation of the \$4 million in \$1million increments over 4 years ([also provided a handout that summarizes the work](#)). First year was information collection, reassessing condition of facilities, planning to move forward with design in a strategic way to best preserve resources. 2009 historic structures report had a condition assessment of the area. First step was to engage historic architect from that report to update it with a 2016 addendum. That document fed into the process to select design consultant team and used in the RFP process. There were 11 work packages identified as high priority and the firm selected is a DBE/MBE firm.

Year 2 the focus was on work packages and 4 of the 11 priorities were identified within the \$1 million budget. Work awarded to a WBE/DBE/ESB firm. Concurrently a fifth work package to restore a fountain was also awarded as well as a fence replacement.

Year 3 was a bit of spillover from prior year plus identifying 2 more work packages with the additional \$1 million and that work is happening now.

We are just starting year 4 so are strategizing about what to do with the last source of funds. So far identified roof repairs, window and door restoration, but waiting to see on balcony repairs, fence and lighting restoration and replacement of non-historic site lights.

Community member -site analysis in year one to ensure it was real work and then figure out what we can afford. Each year we adjust based on what we can afford because it all costs more than initially. Also constrained by the amount given each year and fitting within that dollar amount. Budget office would leave off the funding and each year have to go in and fight for the dollars.

IV. Reservoir Preservation and Interpretive Signage Walking Tour

Susan provided some before photos for the reservoirs to compare to work completed and in process. The group took a walking tour to view the reservoirs at Mt Tabor and some additional history was provided regarding the locations.

Robert provided some background information regarding the interpretive program to tell the story of the water system and the reservoirs ([also provided details in a handout](#)). They have a historical consultant, design consultant, neighbors all helping with the content and design. Planning to have 8 interpretive signs throughout park, primarily by the 3 reservoirs, one by the visitors center with overview of wayfinding for program and proposing a sign near the summit to tell the story of the water system and maybe how the water came from Bull Run when it originally drained into reservoir one. An example of interesting history at this location is that the stamp on the gatehouse is a patent for the construction method used in reservoir one for a reinforced concrete method.

Currently working on the initial designs for signage, it will tell a variety of stories about reservoirs 1, 5 and 6 and how the water makes its way to the first reservoir. It will discuss elements of history and changes in use leading up to disconnection of the reservoirs. Community members added some history, description of the gatehouses, the style of the structure and how they were sited as aesthetic features as well as functionality.

PUB member – appreciate the history and appreciate the reminder that this was part of our public health infrastructure. Is PWB thinking of giving any future focus, that the folks that built this system committed massive funds to a vision for the future in a way that we can learn about investments we are about to make to update the system and add filtration? Tell where we are going with the system?

- Staff – have not included that narrative and not currently part of the scope of the project. It could be told through some of the other projects like filtration.
- PUB Member – may be valuable to consider that as part of the message for the ongoing need to build and maintain the system and improve upon it. Part of the problem of our segmented approach and not messaging the full picture.
- Community member – using this project as a messaging tool people would be sensitive to and fear it would feel like propaganda. Can see a theme coming up in text about needing to think every generation about what impacts the future generations. Can see that theme though don't have a place for it right now and in a battle over number of words. Maybe the Washington Park program could address it or somewhere in town where people see it. Framing and messaging people can find condescending.
- PUB member – maybe there is another way to do that on web with a story map to drive people to these locations.
- Staff – great point, to think more globally but it is not part of this specific project.
- Community member – legal restrictions around what is the story that needs to be told here. Already difficult to tell that story with limited real estate on signs. Also very cautious with using the funds effectively to tell a substantive story. This is part of the collaboration that is not working very well. We are reviewing only for tone.

Total capacity of reservoirs 1 through 4 was 66 million gallons. When 5 and 6 added they added 125 million gallons of capacity. They were done as Portland was developing economically and growing. Reservoir 5 is at same elevation as 1 so water can be transferred either direction and rest of system is based on gravity.

Staff explained that the reservoirs are not filled when running ground water because it is costly so they are only filled by Bull Run at times when there is surplus water. Part of the resolution was to create a water management plan. The first 3 years was a pilot and have refined the plan. Community has advocated for limiting the drain/clean/fill.

PUB member - What is the trigger for deciding to fill?

- It was a time but now experimenting on how long we can leave it alone before it gets below its historic mandated levels.

PUB Member – question about fill capacity.

- Community member – fill is 85% capacity. Goal was to keep it as close to 85% as possible. Still figuring out what is most cost effective and doesn't generate complaints about water quality in reservoirs.

Community members – encourage PUB to keep asking hard questions and we are also willing to come to PUB to talk about next steps. One of PUB's key roles is as fiscal watchdogs for the bureaus. We have been good stewards of the \$4 million dollars and very careful about what it is spent on and hope PUB can see that.

The tour concluded at approximately 12:10pm