

Portland Utility Board

Thursday, December 19, 2019 11:00 a.m.

Portland City Hall, 1221 SW Fourth Avenue, Rose Room

Subcommittee meeting: Council work session and program offer prioritization

Attendees:

PUB Members: Ana Brophy, ex-officio (arrived a few minutes late)
Brian Laurent, ex-officio
Dory Robinson, co-chair
Heidi Bullock, co-chair
Karen Y. Spencer
Karen Williams
Mia Sabanovic (arrived about an hour late due to meeting conflict)
Sara Petrocine, ex-officio
Ted Labbe

Absent:

Gabriela Saldaña-López
Kaliska Day
Micah Meskel*
Robert Martineau*

*Notice of absence provided prior to meeting

Staff:

Angela Henderson, Equity Manager, Bureau of Environmental Services
Cecelia Huynh, Director of Finance and Support Services, Portland Water Bureau
Dawn Uchiyama, Deputy Director, Bureau of Environmental Services
Eliza Lindsay, Portland Utility Board Coordinator, City Budget Office
Gabriel Solmer, Deputy Director, Portland Water Bureau
Jonas Biery, Business Services Manager, Bureau of Environmental Services
Ken Bartocci, Financial Analyst, Bureau of Environmental Services
Michael Jordan, Director, Bureau of Environmental Services

Public:

Carol Cushman, League of Women Voters

Synopsis, Action Items, Decisions

In these notes the acronym, PUB, stands for the Portland Utility Board; BES for the Bureau of Environmental Services, and PWB for the Portland Water Bureau.

Documents providing background and/or discussed at the meeting can be found [here](#).

In preparation for the January Council work session, PUB members brainstormed accomplishments, priorities, thanks, and questions. The results of the individual prioritization of program offers were discussed. It was decided that the bureaus would bring draft program offers for the top 5 (BES may bring top 7) to the January 7 meeting for discussion. Emerging themes and areas of focus were noted and discussed. These may provide content for the initial budget letter as well as for the in-depth conversations on priority program offers.

ACTION ITEM PUB staff to share link to presentation on Portland's racist planning history.

ACTION ITEM Heidi and Ana to work with PUB staff in drafting talking points for Council work session.

ACTION ITEM Bureau staff to bring draft program offer descriptions for top 5 program offers per bureau (BES may bring top 7) to the January 7 meeting.

I. Call to Order

The co-chair called the meeting to order at approximately 11:15 a.m.

II. Disclosure of Communications

Ted had conversations with various BES and PWB staff and met with BES Director Michael Jordan and Deputy Director Dawn Uchiyama regarding BES reorganization.

Heidi had a meeting with BES staff regarding the Portland Harbor Superfund.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Announcements

Inclement Weather

Please take care and prioritize your safety. Everyone lives/works in different places, if it is icy or unsafe to travel where you are please notify PUB staff. If the Mayor declares an inclement weather day, then since we're an advisory body to the bureaus our meeting would also be canceled.

Portland Building meeting space

PUB staff was able to reserve, sight unseen, meeting space in the Portland Building beginning in February. The guess is the acoustics, A/V, etc. will be better than current meeting location options. If anyone has an issue with the Portland Building, please let PUB staff know. Stay-tuned and do watch meeting notices for location.

Transportation costs

Reminder that we can offer board members parking validation for SmartPark garages for parking related to PUB meetings. We can also offer board members TriMet passes for travel associated with PUB meetings. Let PUB staff know if you would be interested in TriMet passes, as they need to be purchased.

V. Preparation for PUB work session with Council

The PUB-Council work session is scheduled for Tuesday, January 14th, 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. PUB members brainstormed the accomplishments, priorities, and questions to bring to the PUB-Council work session. A theme was that this was a year of transition and change and PUB's evolution is continuing.

Accomplishments

- Increased focus on racial equity
- Support for premium pay for multilingual staff (pending progress update)
- Work on low-income assistance program (pending January 7th update)
- Filtration — thoughtfully responded while being mindful of the intense controversy. Did shift work plan for the rest of the year.
- Input to Commissioner Fritz on Bull Run Filtration Projects which informed community engagement around the project.
- Transition of the board — spent time working on internal processes, communications, and slowing down to work together better.
- New staff and new staffing model.
- Shift in approach to budget work which highlights changes in values and priorities and how PUB wants to engage with the budget process.

Priorities

- Racial equity — in all aspects of the bureaus' work and aligning affordability with racial equity
- Low-income assistance program — with new board composition there is increased support for the low-income assistance program and its alignment with racial equity goals.
- Administrative review as a potential window into some issues around affordability and equity.

PUB staff mentioned that per request from PUB December 3 meeting, they had a follow-up meeting with ARC staff to get answers to PUB questions. During that meeting, the issue of equity came up and PUB staff mentioned they'd ask if PUB was interested in working with ARC staff to look at administrative review through a racial equity lens. Members present at the December 19th meeting expressed general interest.

- PUB meetings in community remains a priority. The Bull Run Filtration work postponed this.
- Strengthen communication, feedback loop, and relationship with Council. How can PUB be engaged early enough in order to appropriately respond? And, what kinds of communications does Council want from PUB, emails, meetings...? It was noted and appreciated that increased communication has begun with regular meetings with both Commissioners.
- The Bull Run Filtration project remains a priority given its impacts and because it encompasses many PUB priorities, e.g., affordability and rate impacts; increased opportunities for equity in hiring and contracting; attention to community and environmental impacts; resiliency to earthquakes and climate change, and development of efficient operations. Engagement during the design phase is especially important.

Thanks

- To Council for confirming new board members and recognizing the value of different voices from different backgrounds on the board. This has enhanced the working of the board.
- For the presence of bureau leadership and Commissioner's staff at meetings.

Questions for Council

- Thoughts on handling community engagement when the issues are intense and controversial, e.g., with the filtration project?

General discussion

A PUB member mentioned a powerful presentation on Portland's racist planning history that was the opening to a Council work session on the residential infill project. They encouraged everyone to watch the presentation. They felt the presentation and discussion at the work session gives an idea of some of the things that are on Council's mind.

ACTION ITEM PUB staff to share link to presentation on Portland's racist planning history.

Noting that the PUB-Council work session is happening later than normal, PUB staff mentioned that the filtration project work fits into the timeframe for next year's report and it seems fine to include it, especially in how it shapes PUB's work for the remainder of the fiscal year.

PUB staff noted that there was not time today to discuss what questions Council might ask of PUB. PUB staff shared tips for responding to any question or comment that comes up. PUB staff also encouraged folks to think about where PUB's work and priorities connect with the work and interests of Commissioners who are not in charge of BES and PWB. This allows PUB to make connections and to guess questions that may be asked.

PUB staff noted that it is in the very nature of advice that it is hard to quantify impact. Someday down the road, if someone remembers to tell you, you might learn how impactful certain pieces of advice were. Don't underestimate the value of advice and recommendations in helping things move forward.

Work session description and next steps

The work session is informal with Council and PUB sitting around a table. It is a chance to go over the annual report at a high level and share plans for the coming year. The Commissioners-in-charge, Commissioners Fish and Fritz, have indicated they would like to make a few preliminary remarks and have asked for a talking point summary from PUB to minimize duplication.

In the past co-chairs presented and other members were encouraged to attend but sat in the back. The Co-chairs invite others to join in presenting. There is room for about 4-5 PUB members at the table. It takes a little more planning and logistics to share the presentation across more people but makes a powerful statement to Council. Both Karens expressed interest in participating. PUB staff and ex officio members can sit in the back or to the side in support of the presentation.

It was noted that work sessions are not intended for audience participation though they are filmed and posted on You Tube.

ACTION ITEM Heidi and Ana to work with PUB staff in drafting talking points for Council work session.

The holidays make it tight but if it's possible the draft talking points can be shared prior to the January 7 meeting so those folks interested in presenting can think about which talking points they would like.

VI. Break

VII. Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget – selection of priority program offers for PUB's focus

The synthesis of individual priority program offer selections can be found [here](#).

General discussion

The Co-chair asked how the process of individually selecting priority program offers went. Some felt the process went well. Some also felt, especially as a new member, that it was hard to make an informed choice. A returning PUB member agreed that the lack of details in the summary lists was sometimes challenging. They found themselves referencing last year's program offer descriptions.

There was a general discussion about how it is useful for PUB to compare across bureaus. The difference in structures and resulting program offers; the level of detail; and the language to describe functions and content can make comparisons hard, e.g., BES has an asset management program offer for the overall system of asset management while PWB's general asset management system is part of the Bureau Support program offer. A PUB member mentioned that they would expect differences in asset management given they are two different utilities. At the same time for PUB, focusing on themes is a manageable way to get a better understanding of what the two utilities do, how they are implementing strategic plans, and how that fits into the budget in order to give recommendations to Council.

It was asked if the program offer approach to budgets was resulting in some cross-bureau alignments. Both bureaus' staff indicated that (a) the budget process and cross-program alignment is so intensive intra-bureau, they didn't see the budget process accommodating cross-bureau alignments and (b) their structure/organization is so different it would take a lot of extra documentation to make those alignments.

Both bureaus said if PUB is interested in comparisons and identified specific things, e.g., asset management planning then the bureaus could work to pull this information together.

Bureau staff said if you read something in a program offer that you don't understand, let us know. That is useful information for us.

It was noted that employee investment and development rose to the top of the list for both bureaus. PUB would like to know more about workforce training and bringing along next generation of bureau leaders and how his work ties into equity goals.

Discussion of selecting program offers for PUB's priority focus

In reviewing the synthesis of individual prioritization of program offers, there was general agreement that certain program offers rose to the top.

There was discussion of winnowing the list of program offers down to a recommendation for PUB's focus for FY 20-21. There was general agreement not to do so and rather to bring the entire list to the January 7 subcommittee meeting. At the same time, per previous meeting discussions, it was also requested that the bureaus bring draft program offers for the top 5 (BES may bring drafts for top 7) to the January 7 meeting for detailed discussion. Bureaus will come prepared to discuss

proposed changes and where relevant, the changes in terms of the themes and values PUB has been discussing today (see below for additional details).

It was noted that several program offers tied for fifth in the PWB list. No decision was made at the meeting as to what would be the fifth program offer.

Anything that didn't make the top 5 that the bureaus would want PUB to focus on?

The simple answer was no. Details follow.

BES is interested in PUB's input on infrastructure and organizational transition

BES staff answered that there is not a specific program offer they would highlight but rather infrastructure and organizational transition. PUB's top 7 reflect those in important ways so there will be the opportunity to talk about infrastructure and organizational transition.

PWB: Decorative fountains – input no longer requested

PWB had earlier mentioned there might be changes to decorative fountains that could be controversial and have equity impacts but has since learned that the Commissioner has no plans to suggest changes to how decorative fountains are maintained. Thus, the Commissioner is no longer requesting input.

PWB: Groundwater – perhaps of interest after the audit

The groundwater program is currently being audited. Once the results are in it may be useful to have PUB's input and analysis, especially into whether/how PWB is implementing suggested changes. It was mentioned that looking at groundwater right now might be frustrating as PUB would likely be asking the same questions as the auditor.

Performance measures

PUB reiterated interest in performance measures and asked if there will be performance measures to support the budget asks and changes to the program offers.

PWB staff explained that the performance measures will get to the baseline, i.e., does the program do what it says it does. For a hypothetical example, a performance metric for the Hydrants program offer might be 99% of hydrants are operative. If PWB is meeting that and asks for more staffing for the Hydrant programs, a question for PUB could be, Why?

The performance metrics likely won't get to the deeper level of some of the questions PUB is asking.

ACTION ITEM Bureau staff to bring draft program offer descriptions for top 5 program offers per bureau (BES may bring top 7) to the January 7 meeting.

Emerging themes and areas of interest

In reviewing the results of the individual prioritization of the program offers, PUB members discussed emerging themes and areas of interest:

- Alignment with bureau's strategic plan
- Commonality between bureaus as a reason to select for closer evaluation. For example:
 - Employee investment/development/training
 - Asset management
- Equity Impacts and opportunities to increase equity. For example:
 - Employee investment/development/training

- Communication and community engagement
- Core mission: regulatory compliance, watershed health, public health, water quality
Next two were not explicitly listed while discussing themes but were woven throughout discussion of program offers.
- Significant changes to program offers
- Performance measures

Initial PUB budget letter

The program offers are due January 29th, so PUB will probably be drafting an initial budget letter before seeing full program offers. PUB staff suggested an approach to this is for the letter to preview what PUB will be focusing on and why as well as highlight any themes, considerations, values, lenses PUB will bring to budget work. PUB staff encouraged PUB members to discuss themes and considerations at a January PUB meeting as part of drafting the initial budget letter.

A PUB member noted that the initial letter does not necessarily have to focus narrowly on specific program offers, especially if it is focusing on themes and values.

Equity Managers at January 7 meeting

There was clarification about the purpose for equity managers attending the January 7 meeting. This would not be a general overview of the work they have been doing, that could happen at a later meeting. Rather it would be to focus on equity as it relates to the budget and to help frame equity impacts in the program offers.

VIII. Next Meeting

January 7, 2020, 3:30pm-6:30pm, 1900 SW Fourth, 1900 Building, Room #2500C

Topics: Final preparation for PUB-Council work session, low-income assistance program evaluation, equity in the context of budget and program offers, discussion of (top 5) draft program offers

The meeting adjourned at approximately ~1:20 p.m.