

## Portland Utility Board

February 4, 2020, 3:30 p.m.  
1900 SW Fourth Avenue, 1900 Building, 2500C  
**Meeting #78**

### Attendees:

*PUB Members:*

- Ana Brophy, ex-officio
- Brian Laurent, ex-officio
- Dory Robinson, co-chair
- Heidi Bullock, co-chair
- Kaliska Day
- Karen Y. Spencer
- Karen Williams (by phone)
- Mia Sabanovic
- Micah Meskel
- Robert Martineau
- Sara Petrocine, ex-officio
- Ted Labbe

### *Absent:*

Gabriela Saldaña-López

\*Notice of absence provided prior to meeting

### *Staff:*

- Alden Boetsch, Bureau of Environmental Services
- Amy Archer-Masters, Portland Utility Board Analyst, City Budget Office
- Aseña Lawrence, Senior Policy Advisor, Commissioner Fish's Office
- Astrid Dragoy, Senior Policy Advisor, Commissioner Fritz's Office
- Cecelia Huynh, Director of Finance and Support Services, Portland Water Bureau
- Corbett White, Financial Assistance Program Manager, Portland Water Bureau
- David Beller, Financial Analyst, City Budget Office
- Eli Rosborough, Bureau of Environmental Services
- Eliza Lindsay, Portland Utility Board Coordinator, City Budget Office
- Gabriel Solmer, Deputy Director, Portland Water Bureau
- Jeff Winner, Capital Improvement Program Planning Supervisor, Portland Water Bureau
- Jonas Biery, Business Services Manager, Bureau of Environmental Services
- Kathy Koch, Customer Service Manager, Portland Water Bureau
- Ken Bartocci, Financial Analyst, Bureau of Environmental Services
- Shyvon Williams, Equity Manager, Bureau of Environmental Services
- Yung Ouyang, Senior Financial Analyst, City Budget Office

### *Public:*

Carol Cushman, League of Women Voters  
Janice Thompson, Citizens Utility Board

### **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](#).

The discussion, begun January 7, of the low-income financial assistance program begun January 7 continued. Draft recommendations were developed and will be further discussed and decided upon at the March 3, 2020 meeting. BES presented the final program offers of high-interest to PUB. A list of budget questions for BES and PWB was generated.

#### **I. Call to Order**

The co-chair called the meeting to order at approximately 3:35 p.m.

#### **II. Disclosure of Communications**

Heidi had a couple of short calls with BES on the Portland Harbor.

Micah also had phone calls with BES staff.

Dory have a conversation with the Mayor on an unrelated matter.

#### **III. Public Comment**

Janice Thompson with the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) discussed the idea of PWB paying the City of Portland a Utility License Fee (ULF) equal to 5% of the bureau's gross revenue as presented in CUB's memo "CUB Input on Development of Requested PWB FY 2020-21 Budget." The amount would vary over the course of the Bull Run Filtration project. Though it would never be a huge amount, it could perhaps be used for rate relief. CUB is continuing to investigate and will keep PUB informed about any decisions to move forward.

A PUB member asked if the rate relief could be tailored to reach those populations in most need. CUB is thinking about this, the complexities, and whether an overall rate reduction would be more politically prudent. CUB is not sure the current vehicles for distributing low-income assistance could handle a huge influx of money. CUB remains supportive of expanding low-income assistance.

#### **IV. Prior Meeting Minutes**

The draft meeting minutes from the December 19, 2019 subcommittee circulated ahead of time were reviewed. The minutes were accepted.

The draft meeting minutes from the January 7, 2020 full board meeting circulated ahead of time were reviewed. The minutes were accepted with the change of noting that Kaliska Day was in attendance in person, not by phone.

#### **V. Announcements**

### **Update on potential PUB opinion piece on Portland Harbor lawsuit**

Ted passed out a draft opinion piece on the Portland Harbor lawsuit and asked PUB members to review it in preparation for a full discussion, tentatively at the April 7 board meeting.

### **Updates on Council work session, meeting with Mayor, and rate hearing**

The Council budget work session is scheduled for March 19, 2020. PUB will have about 5 minutes, sometime between noon and 12:30, directly following PWB and BES presentations. This conflicts with the tentative March 19, PUB subcommittee meeting. At the March 3 PUB meeting a decision can be made about how to handle this.

April 16 or April 20, 2020 are the most likely dates for the approximately 30 minutes PUB has to give the Mayor input on the Mayor's proposed budget.

The rate hearing will likely be on May 13, 2020.

### **PUB recruitment**

PUB staff shared that it is time to begin PUB recruitment. The goal would be to have two recruitment subcommittee meetings in the April 16, 2020 - May 4, 2020 timeframe. The first would be to review applications and the second to interview candidates. These would be public meetings with public notice given and scheduled around everyone's schedules. There is one vacancy and three members whose terms are up. Please think about whether you are willing and able to serve on the recruitment subcommittee. If your term is up and you are planning to apply for a second term, please recuse yourself from the subcommittee.

## **VI. Continued discussion of the low-income financial assistance program**

The discussion begun at the January 7 meeting continued.

### **Updates from the Commissioner**

The Deputy Director for PWB shared updates from Commissioner Fritz. Commissioner Fritz is a fan of the program and the expansions made. The Commissioner is interested in exploring whether funds for administration could increase the amount of money getting out to those in need. The City Attorney is looking into where monies for administration would need to come from.

### **Discussion of dedicated line for the low-income assistance program**

PWB staff shared that there is an unpublished dedicated line that general customer service folks transfer calls to. A PUB member asked about publishing that number on the website or making it generally publicly available. PWB staff replied that they are not likely to do so. The CUB has concerns customers might call their favorite staff, instead of calling the general customer service line.

There are about 800-1000 calls to the general call center per month and about 200 per month are directed to the low-income assistance program. Staff are trained to look for pauses and other indicators in the conversation and explore with the caller the possibility that financial assistance might be needed.

A PUB member asked whether PWB could proactively identify folks who might qualify, e.g., by a lapse in bill payment. PWB shared that all bills, not just late notices, provide information about the low-income assistance program.

### **General recommendations**

Below follows conversation notes and a list of draft comments and recommendations developed from the meeting conversation. These recommendations will be reviewed, discussed, and decided upon at the March 3 meeting.

**General statement:**

The PUB remains concerned about the affordability of rates. As rates continue to increase the financial assistance programs are a critical component to support residents equitably. The PUB is supportive of the PWB's expansions to the program over the past year, and in addition have identified the following recommendations to ensure the low-income financial assistance programs are effective and equitable.

**Accessibility**

The website is difficult to navigate. It is hard to locate information about the financial assistance programs, particularly the opportunities for multi-family residents. If PUB members struggle to find information, as insiders with knowledge of what to look for online, then it is likely also quite difficult for customers.

PWB could use Google analytics and other tools to evaluate and implement changes to improve accessibility of the online information. More graphic materials should be developed on how to access programs and crisis information should be provided in multiple languages like other assistance resources online.

**Marketing and Outreach**

Marketing and outreach for the financial assistance program has been established and PWB is increasing the reach, e.g., by connecting with SUN schools, Neighborhood Prosperity Initiatives, and Rockwood PUD. PWB notes some gaps, e.g., in connecting with religious organizations and in certain areas, e.g., the area east of 122<sup>nd</sup> and south of Holgate. PWB staff noted that Portland Parks and Recreation community centers should have PWB information. PWB is exploring developing a resource section on their website.

PUB recommends that resources be dedicated to a focused push to get the word out to the public, particularly where there are recognized gaps. PUB member suggestions included: summer interns to staff community centers and connect with the public; focused outreach to religious organizations; and focused outreach to immigrant and refugee community partners. PUB recommends a more thorough evaluation of why these efforts have not worked in order to identify changes to improve the impact.

**Leveraging Resources of Related Programs**

Both BES and PWB have other programs that could assist residents that are struggling to afford their utility bills, specifically the PWB Water Efficiency and the BES Clean River Rewards programs. PUB recommends strengthening the connection between the financial assistance program and these other programs so that residents are effectively advised of opportunities for assistance on home repairs and other improvements that could reduce utility bills.

PWB staff noted that customers receiving financial assistance are appreciative of the water efficiency program services and offerings but do not often utilize them.

It was noted that an Auditor report identified that the Clean River Rewards program primarily benefits middle class homeowners and does not effectively reach low-income customers. BES has recently conducted outreach to financial assistance program participants and had a positive

response. PUB supports expanded outreach and recommends exploring new partnerships, e.g., with the renter's assistance program in the Housing Bureau.

### **Address Administrative Challenges**

PUB strongly supports efforts to close the gap between those who are qualified to receive assistance and those who are receiving it. PUB has had heard concerns about Home Forward and STRA agencies capacity. PUB recommends that PWB:

- inquire with Home Forward and STRA agencies about bottlenecks,
- identify whether there are needs for additional administrative support,
- identify whether additional funding could address these challenges, and
- review and identify opportunities to ease access for community members needing resources.

The possibility of forming partnerships with other agencies besides Home Forward was discussed. PWB staff shared that this is a possibility and it is complicated. For instance, they had talked with St. Vincent de Paul. St. Vincent de Paul gives out money directly. Tracking becomes an issue. This is compounded when multiple agencies are involved, e.g., how would Home Forward or St. Vincent De Paul know if the other had already given out assistance?

### **Data Tracking and Analysis**

As the bureau works toward closing the gap on who is receiving resources, data is very important to determine how to improve marketing, outreach, and program services. PUB recommends strengthening tracking of the demographics. Who is being served? Who isn't? There was discussion of tracking the avenues by which folks reach the program in order to evaluate effectiveness. PUB also recommends tracking partners and relationships. This data can be used to help identify gaps and recommendations for expansion.

PWB staff noted that given the national climate asking for and tracking demographic data is complicated.

## **VII. Continuation of discussion of BES program offers**

The three remaining PUB high-interest program offers were discussed.

### **Asset Systems Management program offer**

This is where risk in the system is analyzed, e.g., climate and seismic. This program provides planning and engineering support to other work groups. Some asset management functions occur in other programs. BES is requesting 2 FTE in engineering in order to get ahead of the Capital Improvement Program work. Extra staffing has an equity impact by creating time and space for people to think things through and receive training.

BES staff noted that with the BES transition things will be organized differently and produce efficiencies.

A PUB member asked, with the BES reorganization, would they still need to hire more staff.

BES staff answered that with the reorganization they will get better and more efficient at what they do, **and** they will need to add more staff.

### **Environmental Compliance program offer**

BES is both regulated and a regulator. This program offer involves permit coordination and compliance. Two major federal level permits are coming up for renewal. BES is requesting FTE to address this. The Brownfields program has important connections with equity. Often brownfields are located in historically underserved communities. How can the program be expanded beyond what it used to do?

A PUB member mentioned that the Brownfields program has little staffing. There is one manager split between it and industrial compliance.

A PUB member mentioned that an anti-displacement lens should be applied to the program. The Brownfields program should be implemented in a way that does not produce displacement.

A PUB member asked about the performance measure “Average resources spent in site investigations and cleanup, per site investigated and remediated” wondering if that truly was the average cost and wondering if the measure was too granular.

BES staff agreed it was not an optimal metric and are looking to improve it.

### **Employee Development program offer**

BES is working to increase training and development opportunities. BES is trying to pilot new things like internships. Equity impacts include skills development, retention, succession planning, and preparing employees.

A PUB member mentioned the importance of addressing workplace culture. A number one reason people leave is often because they feel they can't stay given the toxic workplace culture.

Another PUB member also mentioned that time must be built into an employee's schedule for training, so that training is part of the job. They also shared that the upcoming HR Success Factors should add value not just be additional work. BES staff shared that the folks who piloted it this spring, liked it.

There was discussion of having 2-5% of worktime go to community volunteer work. BES staff indicated that this would need to be driven by City Council as a City-wide effort. When BES has tried it, they ran into different complications, e.g., with represented staff.

A PUB member recommended looking at employee training to figure out who is getting training and who isn't.

## **VIII. General budget discussion: questions, requests for further information and analysis, emerging themes and recommendations**

### **Framing**

PUB staff reminded folks that the next major steps are to develop recommendations to deliver in the work session; to develop the final budget letter; the meeting with the Mayor; and the rate hearing.

Timeline – There is one more full meeting before PUB needs to finalize recommendations.

### **Questions for the bureaus**

Questions that came up for the bureaus included:

## **BES**

- A recent Auditor report indicated that BES is not delivering on the Stormwater System Plan. Is this accurate? What is taking so long to deliver? Is there any funding need that would improve timeline and delivery?
  - A CUB member and an ex officio member said this work is more a methodology than a one-time project. It is ongoing work.
- Employee Development – PWB has metrics included to track progress on their Employee Investment program (% of employees reporting that advancement and promotion are fair and equitable; % of employees reporting that they are “engaged” or “fully engaged” in their work). It was recommended that BES develop similar metrics.
- Secondary Treatment Expansion Program (STEP) – Requested an update on the STEP program that accounts for impact on CIP projects and how the 10% value engineering goal is being achieved. The cost escalation on the STEP program will increase rates and affect current and future bureau work. It is important to monitor to ensure rates do not escalate.

## **PWB**

- PUB requested details on how PWB responded to the Mayor’s guidance to offset at least 25% of the rate increase resulting from increased treatment plan estimates.

### **Early thoughts on recommendations**

- Support for concepts captured in the CUB letters.
- Asset Management framework strengthened and integrated into decision making on CIP investment. Invest in resources needed to refine metrics and allow PUB to understand the basis for decision. There was some discussion of the lack of a City-wide approach.
- PUB has identified Employee Investment (PWB) and Employee Development (BES) programs as a priority. Highlight the importance of these programs in the letter. Suggestion to also highlight the importance of influencing employee culture.
- PUB member noted that they would like to see BES take a risk analysis approach in strategic planning like PWB’s.
- PUB member recommended cross-training across bureaus.

### **Wrap-up**

At the next meeting PUB will review the recommendations and decide which to forward on to Council and which are on-going conversations with the bureaus.

PUB staff noticed that there was one discreet PWB decision package requesting General Fund Dollars. See pages 114-115 of the [PWB Requested Budget pdf](#). This is for first year of funding for a Five Year ADA Barrier Removal Plan.

There was a request for clarification on the purpose of the budget letter. It is not just to note where PUB endorses something. It can and, where PUB feels strongly, should note where PUB disagrees with something. It was also noted that things can be removed from the bureaus’ requested budgets or from the Mayor’s proposed budget. If PUB feels strongly about something it is important to monitor the budget process.

## **IX. ARC committee report**

A PUB member shared that at the PWB ARC meeting they recently participated in one person did not show up. The other case was a situation where during PBOT construction a business owner had a big uptick in water usage, but no leaks were found. When the construction was finished the usage went back down to their 10-year levels, so the committee waived the uptick costs.

#### **X. Next Meeting Topics**

PUB staff asked people to stay tuned for next meeting locations. The details on whether and how the Portland Building will be accessible to community and the general public are still being determined.

##### **Feb 20, 2020, 11:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. subcommittee meeting. Topics include**

- PUB recruitment – discussion of qualifications sought, board composition, and high-level outline of process for report back and decision at March 3 meeting.
- Continued budget work – developing recommendations and key points for report back at March 3 meeting.

##### **March 3, 2020, 3:30pm – 6:30 p.m. full board meeting. Potential topics include:**

- Primarily budget work
- Report back and decision about PUB recruitment plans
- If time allows, BES transition initial conversation

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:30 p.m.