

The Oregonian

Portland boil water alert lifted after samples come back clean

By Helen Jung

Drink up, Portland. The city has lifted its boil-water alert, after tests on water samples came back clean Saturday morning.

The Portland Water Bureau said that the samples it evaluated Saturday from 20 sites showed no signs of *E. coli* or coliform, and that its 670,000 customers in Portland and nine suburban water districts can now use water straight from the tap.

The notice comes almost exactly 24 hours after the city announced the largest boil-water alert in its history. The alert was triggered by three separate samples from May 20 to May 23 that tested positive for *E. coli* and coliform. Although the bacteria themselves are not harmful, they are indicators of fecal contamination and state health officials ordered the boil-water notice.

Officials are in the process of draining Reservoirs #1 and #5 in Mt Tabor, where two of the positive samples had come from.

Even for just a 24-hour period, the boil-water alert forced some businesses to shut down, consumers to raid grocery shelves for bottled water and inconvenienced families throughout Portland and nine suburban water districts. Vendors at the Rose Festival's CityFair in downtown Portland were told to dump any food that had been prepared with tap water that had not been boiled.

Interim Tri-County Health Officer Paul Lewis said Friday that the risk of illness was very low, noting that the water's chlorine levels should counteract any contamination.

Water bureau officials do not know the cause of the contamination and are continuing to investigate, said spokesman Tim Hall. They were not able to pinpoint the sources that caused previous boil-water alerts in 2009 and 2012, he said.

Consumers are urged to run their taps first. Read Lynne Terry's post on what to do now that the notice has been lifted.

Portland boil water alert: Advisory is cancelled, but questions persist

By Helen Jung

The Portland Water Bureau might never identify what caused the contamination in the water system that triggered a 24-hour-long boil-alert to 670,000 customers.

Officials will look for clues, such as a dead animal, when two reservoirs at Mt. Tabor are fully drained, said Jaymee Cuti, a spokeswoman for Portland Water Bureau. Those two reservoirs provided two of the three samples that tested positive for *E. coli* and coliform — bacteria that are indicators of fecal contamination. Officials will also review surveillance video footage from around the reservoirs.

But just like two previous times in 2009 and 2012, when the city issued a smaller boil-water alert, it is possible that officials will never determine the cause, officials said.

That's not the only question left over from the 24-hour boil-water alert that forced some businesses to shut down, caused vendors to throw out food already prepared with tap water, and inconvenienced families throughout Portland and nine suburban water districts.

Water officials have not tallied how much it will cost to drain and clean the reservoirs, Cuti said, or calculated other costs associated with the contamination.

It also remains to be seen whether anyone was sick as a result of contamination. Interim Tri-County Health Officer Paul Lewis, said Friday that the risk of getting sick was very low, noting chlorine levels in

the water should counteract fecal contamination. Multnomah County health officials also have not received any reports of diarrhea or sickness connected to the water so far, according to Multnomah County spokesman Henry Stern.

But one Southeast Portland woman told The Oregonian that she suffered several violent, sudden attacks of vomiting and diarrhea Thursday night. Janice Condit said she drank several glasses of water earlier in the evening after biking home from her job at a dentist's office. She saw a doctor Friday morning before either had heard of the water alert and wondered if it could be food poisoning somehow. But after Condit heard the news, she checked with her doctor who confirmed her symptoms were consistent with drinking contaminated water.

"It was the most horrible, violent thing," she said, of her illness. But, she quipped, "I lost seven pounds in one day. I'm trying to stay positive."

The event raised other concerns, regarding the water bureau website's temporary outages as customers flocked to find information as well as how long it took the city's automatic emergency alert system to notify customers not to drink straight tap water.

However, the bureau does have a solid answer to the question of whether customers will receive any credit or reduction of their bills for flushing pipelines, as recommended: "No," the water bureau said succinctly in an otherwise expansive Question-and-Answer sheet on its website.

Two Portland water tests negative for deadly strains of E. coli

By Lynne Terry

Two tests from Portland's water supply that were positive for E. coli contamination last week, triggering a boil water alert, did not turn up deadly strains of the bacteria.

The lab tests did not find E. coli O157 and a few other strains of E. coli associated with severe food poisoning outbreaks, said Jaymee Cuti, spokeswoman for the Portland Water Bureau.

Officials retested the same samples from Mount Tabor's Reservoir 1 and a sampling station downstream at Southwest Second Avenue and Salmon Street that originally were positive for generic E. coli. There are many strains of E. coli and most are not harmful to humans. But some, associated with food outbreaks, can be deadly. The Portland Water Bureau retested the same samples for virulent strains, and the tests were negative, Cuti said.

A sample from Reservoir 5 that was positive for generic E. coli will be sent to the lab on Tuesday for the same fine-tuned testing, Cuti said.

The water bureau did not test for salmonella or campylobacter, two other pathogens associated with fecal matter.

The boil water alert was lifted on Saturday when tests on more than a dozen sources were negative for both total coliform and E. coli.

The water bureau is now working on getting Reservoir 1 and 5 back online. Cuti said officials have emptied Reservoir 1 and hosed it down. They plan to spray the floor and the walls with a high concentration of chlorine on Tuesday to kill pathogens, then partially refill it and test again for bacteria. The water bureau hopes to have the reservoir back online by Wednesday.

Reservoir 5 has also been emptied and will be chlorinated and refilled as soon as Reservoir 1 is done.

Officials don't know what caused the contamination.

"We may never know," Cuti said. "But we're keeping an eye out."

Portland boil water alert lifted: Here's what to do

By Lynne Terry

With clean tests, the Oregon Health Authority has lifted Portland's boil water alert that was issued on Friday.

But before using tap water, or using ice from a machine, here's what residents need to do:

Flush pipes and faucets by running cold water faucets continuously for at least two minutes or until water runs cold.

Flush water coolers by running those with direct water connections for five minutes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Flush home automatic ice makers by making three batches of ice cubes. Discard all three batches.

Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.

Drain and refill hot water heaters set below 113 degrees Fahrenheit.

Change all point-of-entry and point-of-use water filters, including those associated with equipment that uses water.

For more details, check the water bureau's website.

Portland boil water alert: Here's a list of water customers that are affected

By Andrew Theen

Some 670,000 residents of the Portland metro are affected by Friday's emergency boil water notice issued by the city's Water Bureau.

Here's a list of wholesale customers affected:

- Burlington Water District
- City of Gresham (North of I-84)
- Lake Grove Water District
- Lorna Portland Water
- Palatine Hill Water District
- Rockwood Water District
- Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain)
- Valley View Water District
- West Slope Water District

We will continue to keep you updated as this story develops. Here's the map sent out by city officials of the affected areas.

Portland issues boil water notice for the entire city after E. coli detected in 3 tests

By Andrew Theen

The Portland Water Bureau issued a city-wide boil notice on Friday morning after water staffers detected E. coli in three separate tests during the past three days.

The Oregon Health Authority required the city-wide notice, which also applies to Portland's whole-sale customers that also receive water from the Bull Run Watershed.

Routine inspections at two of the city's Mt. Tabor reservoirs produced the three positive E. coli tests. City employees performed the tests, according to Jaymee Cuti, bureau spokesperson.

The boil notice applies to 670,000 customers, according to Cuti. Portland supplies drinking water to 935,000 customers in the metro region.

City officials are hosting an emergency press conference at noon.

"While we believe at this time that the potential health risk is relatively small, we take any contamination seriously and are taking every precaution to protect public health," said Portland Water Bureau Administrator David Shaff in the release.

The Oregonian will be there and this story will continue to be updated.

Cuti said the boil notice will be in effect until the city produces "a clean sample." Cuti said she has no idea when that might be.

Here's the full release from the city:

The State of Oregon Health Authority's Drinking Water Program has required the City of Portland to issue a Boil Water Notice for all Portland Water Bureau customers and some regional water providers.

Until further notice, all Portland Water Bureau customers and those in the affected areas should boil all tap water used for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing and ice for at least one minute. Ice or any beverages prepared with un-boiled tap water on or after May 20 should be discarded. Detailed maps, fact sheets and additional information can be found on the Water Bureau's website at www.portlandoregon.gov/water/boilwaternotice or by calling Customer Service at 503-823-7770.

In three separate incidents from May 20 to May 23, repeat water samples confirmed the presence of total coliform and E. coli in routine drinking water samples. The water samples that tested positive for bacteria were collected at the outlets of Mt. Tabor Reservoirs 1 and 5, and at the SE 2nd Avenue and Salmon Street water sampling station. Both reservoirs have been taken offline.

A press conference will be held at noon today at the City of Portland Emergency Coordination Center, 9911 SE Bush Street in Portland.

All Portland Water Bureau customers are affected. Also affected are customers of the following water providers:

- Burlington Water District
- City of Gresham (North of I-84)
- Lake Grove Water District
- Lorna Portland Water
- Palatine Hill Water District
- Rockwood Water District
- Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain)
- Valley View Water District
- West Slope Water District

"While we believe at this time that the potential health risk is relatively small, we take any contamination seriously and are taking every precaution to protect public health," said Portland Water Bureau Administrator David Shaff.

Consuming boiled and bottled water will ensure public health protection until the Water Bureau can determine that the water system is clean of contamination through surveillance sampling. Customers will be notified when they no longer have to boil their water. The Portland Water Bureau is working with the Multnomah County Health Department to provide health-related information to the public.

"The chance of any health problems related to this water test result is low. If any problems occur, we would expect diarrhea," said Dr. Paul Lewis, Interim Tri-County Health Officer. "We monitor cases of bacterial diarrhea and will be aware of any increase following this event."

The Portland Water Bureau collects approximately 240 routine bacterial samples per month throughout the system. The test to determine the presence of bacteria takes about 18 hours. It is not unusual for one of these samples to test positive for bacteria. Samples to confirm possible contamination are collected immediately after an initial detection of the presence of bacteria in drinking water. Once the detection has been confirmed, public health officials recommend that the public boil all tap water before consuming.

Contamination can occur when there is a loss of water pressure, a pipe breaks, or conditions that expose drinking water to outside elements. The Portland Water Bureau is performing a full investigation to identify the cause of the contamination. However, it is not always possible to make an exact determination.

Customers can visit www.portlandoregon.gov/water/boilwaternotice to determine if their home or business is in the Boil Water Notice area. The Boil Water Notice, fact sheets and contact information are provided on this same website. For more information, affected customers should contact the Portland Water Bureau Customer Service at 503-823-7770.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales has increased cash contributions to TriMet YouthPass program since he took office

By Andrew Theen

When the roughly 12,600 Portland Public Schools students who ride TriMet to school for free arrive at their desks, they can thank the transit agency, the school district and Mayor Charlie Hales.

Oregon's largest school district doesn't have bus service for its high school students. TriMet's YouthPass program existed for years thanks to a patchwork of funders.

Last week, the public transit agency floated a plan to continue the program at roughly \$2.9 million per school year. We've reported on bits and pieces of the plan before. Here's how they fit together:

Who wins and who loses?

Under the proposal, each partner would pay roughly \$966,000 annually. TriMet would expand the program to serve students from other school districts in the region and drop the price for youth tickets and passes outside of the school year.

TriMet's contribution would decline from its current level of \$1.6 million. The school district's payment would remain nearly unchanged. But the city's cash contribution to TriMet would more than triple.

In the current 2013-14 budget year, Portland is making only \$300,000 in cash payments to TriMet, entirely from general transportation revenue raised largely by gas taxes and parking meters. Mayor Charlie Hales proposed to meet TriMet's nearly \$1 million demand in 2014-15 budget by: boosting payment to \$600,000 in transportation revenue; and adding \$400,000 in general fund dollars.

At the same time, Hales' budget plan describes the city's obligations as "continuing" support rather than a threefold increase. Why?

Last year, Portland included another \$700,000 in "in-kind contributions" from PBOT as part of its commitment to TriMet because the money supported roads, sidewalks and other projects that benefited transit. The \$700,000 plus \$300,000 made \$1 million.

TriMet didn't see it quite that way. This year, the agency said, send us a check instead. The construction work, called "In-kind contributions" by bureaucrats, had a positive impact, said TriMet's Mary Fetsch. But it didn't offset the costs of running the YouthPass program. "Cash contributions make the program more financially sustainable," Fetsch said in an email.

What impact does Hales plan for YouthPass have on the rest of Portland's budget?

The \$400,000 in general fund money he proposes giving to TriMet comes from property taxes and business license fees. The general fund pays for parks, police, fire and other essential city services.

This year, the city has roughly \$9.3 million in new general fund dollars to spend, with more than \$34 million in requests from city bureaus to choose from.

Hales' spending plan, while funding YouthPass, omitted projects such as Commissioner Steve Novick's request for \$1 million in new sidewalks in East Portland.

Why is the city paying Portland Public Schools transportation costs anyway?

Prior to 2011-12, the school district and the state's Business Energy Tax Credit program paid for the free transit passes, according to city budget officials.

When the State Legislature scrapped the BETC program in 2011, YouthPass suddenly needed new money. Portland contributed \$225,000 to the program in 2011-12 and \$200,000 in 2012-13.

Dana Haynes, Hales' spokesman, said if the YouthPass program never existed Hales likely would agree that it's not a city responsibility. "Transporting students is not typically a city business," Haynes said.

But YouthPass did exist when Hales took office in January 2013, and Haynes said the mayor "didn't have a really good argument" for discontinuing YouthPass.

Why does the mayor want to spend some of the surplus on YouthPass?

Haynes said the mayor wants to start paying at least part of the city's share of TriMet's YouthPass cost from the general fund to make clear where city money is going. The current fiscal year spending, which included in-kind support for YouthPass through construction projects, left some "ambiguity," Haynes said.

What's next?

The TriMet Board of Directors still has to vote on proposed changes to the YouthPass program and will discuss the changes at a meeting next week. The City Council also votes to adopt Portland's budget next week.

Portland street fee: What readers are saying about the proposed fee on residents, businesses (your comments)

By Andrew Theen

On Thursday morning, the street fee officially became the "transportation utility fee" as Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick unveiled the formal plans for a road maintenance and safety fund.

Portland residents will have a chance to address City Council about the proposed \$11.56 per month charge on homeowners at a 2 p.m. hearing on May 29.

Our coverage of the street fee during the past few months resonated with many readers who weighed in through comments and email.

Hales and Novick outlined their proposal, which they now say could raise up to \$50 million annually, at a Thursday morning press conference in Southeast Portland.

Portland street fee would cost typical household almost \$140 a year

By Brad Schmidt

UPDATED: This post has been updated to clarify small-business charges and options for collecting fees.

Saying that Portland has "no alternative" to fix crumbling and dangerous roads, Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick unveiled their plans Thursday, for a new street fee that would cost the typical Portland household almost \$140 a year.

The "transportation user fee" would cost the typical household \$11.56 a month; poorer households would pay \$8.09 a month and owners of apartment complexes would be charged \$6.79 per unit, with a discount for multifamily complexes that cater to lower-income residents. Businesses and other government institutions, including city agencies and school districts, also would be charged.

Family-run sole proprietorships employing fewer than 10 employees would have to pay the fee, but not the household fee.

According to the draft proposal presented Thursday, at least 80 percent of revenue from the new fee would go for maintenance and safety improvements. Up to 20 percent could be spent on "other transportation services," including paving unimproved streets, mass transit and covering administrative costs.

City leaders estimate the new charge will generate about \$40 million a year, though Novick said he hoped that actual figure would hit \$50 million. Hales and Novick want to spend 53 percent of that on maintenance, 44 percent on safety and three percent on other expenses.

The goal of the fee, which could appear on city water and sewer bills starting in July 2015, is to establish a permanent way to pay for rising maintenance costs on Portland roads and make them safer. City auditors said last year that Portland needs to spend \$70 million annually on maintenance work just to bring its roads up to "a reasonable level."

"We've been talking about this problem for 14 years," Hales said at the Thursday press conference. "... This is one of those times we need to step up and do a difficult thing."

The amount charged will depend on how many trips any particular properties generate, and an oversight committee of 15 people would be created to monitor spending. Hales said the fee would increase annually based on a local construction cost index, but no more than 5 percent.

Hales and Novick, who oversees the Bureau of Transportation, want the City Council to create the new fee without first seeking voter approval. They would ask Portlanders to weigh in on the fee with a November vote to place language in the city charter limiting how street fee revenues could be used. But voters would not get to say yes or no to the fee itself.

"If the voters are really mad at us, we're both up for reelection in 2016," Novick said. "They can throw us out."

City Council members will begin discussing the fee next week and Hales hopes they'll vote June 4. He said he believes he has three votes to impose the fee without asking Portlanders for approval -- his own, Novick's and that of Commissioner Amanda Fritz. Despite his confidence, the debate should be spirited; business leaders have already asked Hales and Novick to slow down.

A phone poll of 800 Portlanders conducted as Hales and Novick first began conceiving of the street fee earlier this year showed tepid support, with support under 50 percent. Nearly twice as many respondents said they were strongly opposed to the fee than those that strongly supported it.

In the first year, the city explicitly promises the street fee would pay for the following projects, among other broad spending categories:

- Add flash beacons at Northeast Sandy Boulevard pedestrian crossings.
- Add rumble strips to Marine Drive in North Portland.
- Build two new pedestrian-friendly crossings on Southwest Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway
- Complete the missing sidewalk network around David Douglas High School in outer east Portland.

- Add safety improvements around Lents Elementary School in outer east Portland.
- Improve pedestrian access to Bridlemile Elementary in Southwest Portland.

Portland street fee: School districts could owe \$610,377 annually, but gain \$3.6 million in safety improvements

By Andrew Theen

Portland school districts could face a collective \$610,377 annual bill if a proposed transportation utility fee is enacted in July 2015, according to figures provided by the city.

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick will bring their proposed transportation utility fee, which could raise up to \$50 million per year from residents and businesses, before the City Council on May 29 for a public hearing.

Hales and Novick discussed the proposal at length Thursday. Estimated costs for public agencies and businesses continue to roll in.

Here's what we know right now:

Portland Public Schools, the state's largest district, would owe an estimated \$489,616 annually. Last week, PPS spokesman Jon Isaacs equated every \$100,000 to one full-time teaching position (including salary and benefits).

David Douglas School District could pay \$87,824 per year toward the transportation utility fee, while Parkrose School District would owe \$27,398 annually under early estimates.

Centennial School District, which has property within the city limits of both Portland and Gresham, would owe \$5,538 per year.

Of the estimated annual revenue generated by the fee, 15 percent will go to safety improvements on local streets, with two-thirds of that spending dedicated to Safe Routes to School improvements.

According to Bureau of Transportation data, the average annual investment in safe route to school improvements around PPS schools would be \$2.6 million. All told, the districts would see \$3.6 million invested annually in improvements around school zones.

The estimated costs do not include the Reynolds or Riverdale School Districts.

Portland street fee: What the lobbyists and business leaders are saying

By Andrew Theen

A public hearing on the proposed transportation utility fee scheduled for 2 p.m. next Thursday at Portland City Hall should be must-see-TV.

Mayor Charlie Hales, who's been advocating for more money for maintenance and safety projects along with Commissioner Steve Novick for months, said he expects a packed crowd and "loud opposition" from some.

But Hales and Novick already staked their positions clearly: the transportation utility fee is a necessary evil to address a growing need. The city needs more money, they say, to address transportation and safety concerns (read more about the transportation utility fee here)

"If the voters are really mad at us, we're both up for reelection in 2016," Novick said. "They can throw us out."

Here's what industry lobbyists, advocates and business types had to say:

Paul Romain - lobbyist, Oregon Petroleum Association

The Oregon Petroleum Association, one of the key organizations that successfully thwarted the 2008 street fee proposal, is on the sidelines as of Thursday. The Portland Mercury reported that Paul Romain (the group's lobbyist) and his clients hadn't made a decision to intervene but were studying the proposal.

On Thursday, Romain said that his clients, gas stations, wholesale petroleum sellers and some area convenience stores, are still studying. "We're trying to get a read from them," Romain said. "We're studying it."

While he couldn't say whether the association would take a stance on the proposed fee by next week, Romain did say Novick and Hales are "much more pleasant" to deal with than then-Commissioners Sam Adams and Randy Leonard.

From his perspective, Novick and Hales are being much more collaborative and aren't cramming the deal down the city's throat. "We may disagree with them on the merits of it, but from a personal and political perspective, it's much more pleasant," Romain said.

Joe Gilliam, president of Northwest Grocery Association

This group has successfully shot down or forced modifications to street fee proposals in Salem and Tigard – and Gilliam isn't pleased with the response he's been getting from Portland City Hall so far.

"They've been trying to do this kind of in the dark, and not show their cards," he said. "We're trying to add up the numbers, and what is it you're going to do with the money?"

Gilliam said his group, which represents 48 grocers in Portland, is skeptical of Portland's methodology to calculate fees based on trips to a business each month. He said the businesses he represents would pay about \$1 million a year collectively.

He thinks fees based on actual parking spaces, or something similar, would be better for businesses. He also doesn't think businesses should have to pay for things like sidewalks.

"We're just saying that everyone should pay their fair share," he said. "And it should be based on something that's tangible, not something that's just taken out of thin air."

The Northwest Grocery Association in 2009 forced the city of Tigard to backtrack on street fees by pursuing a referendum effort, with the city cutting a deal that shifted a greater share of fees to residents. Gilliam said the group also previously pushed street fees to the ballot in Salem, where voters handily rejected the proposal.

Gilliam said his group will meet with Mayor Charlie Hales' office next week. Based on that meeting, and clearer information about the fees, the group will decide next steps. He didn't rule out a referendum effort.

"We're going have to make a decision pretty quickly on what we do," he said.

Sandra McDonough, president of the Portland Business Alliance

As she's said before, McDonough wants the City Council to slow down. But her concerns don't seem to be resonating.

If it seems like City Hall is in a rush, well, that would be right. The City Council knows that even if it passes new fees without a public vote, their decision could still be referred to voters through a signature-gathering referendum. And if that happens, officials want it on the November ballot – where there should be strong turnout, particularly among democrat and independent voters.

"We think there needs to be a better public conversation about this fee," McDonough said. "We are urging them to rethink the process, as this point," she added.

But don't look for any concerns more formal than that. The PBA's executive board won't be meeting until after the City Council is expected to vote June 4.

Portland street fee: What the politicians are saying

By Brad Schmidt

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick proposed a new street fee Thursday that is projected to net the city \$40 million annually for transportation projects.

The City Council is expected to vote on the fees, which would run about \$140 a year for a homeowner, on June 4.

Here's what the politicians are saying:

Charlie Hales, Portland mayor

Hales is the brains behind the decision to send a charter amendment to voters this November. Hales said he's doing that because he wants to set guidelines for spending and assure the public the city won't misappropriate funds.

The city ordinance is much more specific than the charter amendment, which merely says a "majority" of funds need to be spent on maintenance and safety. Hales said he wanted to "give our successors a little bit of wiggle room" in terms of how money can be spent if other technologies make road work cheaper.

He said ballot language needs to be "general and foundational, not completely directive."

When asked what he expects next week, Hales said "loud opposition from some."

Then he cited a favorite Machiavelli quote: "There's nothing more dangerous to plan nor implement than the creation of a new system because the innovator has all the allowed opprobrium from those that are invested in the old, and only lukewarm support from those that will profit from the new."

Follow that?

Hales said while he understands that the business community is concerned, he's trying to win them over. His pitch: "We're trying to make this as palatable as possible, but we know it's expensive, so please work with us."

Steve Novick, Portland city commissioner

Following Thursday's press conference, Novick had some particularly candid moments.

Novick said he did consider referring the fee to voters along with Hales' proposal to safeguard the money. But the prospect of losing was an obvious deterrent.

"We did think about that," Novick said. "And we looked at the fact that no option is particularly popular. And we didn't want to get into a situation where we raised a campaign, and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars on both sides, and we wound up with 49.9 percent (of the vote). And then have to say, 'OK, I guess we're just not going to solve this problem.' And our feeling was, the problem needs to be solved."

Novick was asked if Hales' charter change was largely symbolic, given that the City Council seemingly wouldn't spend a street fee willy-nilly if voters reject the measure.

"It might sound symbolic to you," he countered. "But to the general public, it, I think, is critical. Because there's a perception that money always gets moved around and spent on other unimportant stuff."

But Novick agreed that if the charter amendment failed, the money would still largely be spent the same way. The ordinance calls for at least 80 percent of street-fee funds to be spent on maintenance and safety improvements.

Novick said he wouldn't take voters' rejection of the ballot measure safeguards in November as a repudiation of the fee itself. "I don't think so."

Novick also emphasized that charging a street fee wouldn't be enough to bring city streets up to preferable standards. The city auditor's office noted a need about \$75 million a year for 10 years just to bring roads up to par.

"We will not be able to say that in 10 years, our streets are in the condition ... that we'd like them to be in," Novick said. "We won't be able to do that."

One thing Portland will be able to say? That the city isn't an outlier.

Novick originally kicked around the idea of a \$12 monthly fee but settled on \$11.56, in part, because that's the most any other city in Oregon charges.

"Part of our thinking, I'll be blunt, is that we want to stave off the people saying: this is one of those only-in-Portland things that those wacky tax-and-spend Portland politicians came up with."

Amanda Fritz, Portland city commissioner

At Thursday's press conference, Hales said he thought Commissioner Amanda Fritz would join him and Novick to approve street fees without a public vote.

"I'm hopeful that we can find something that I can support," Fritz said later in the day, adding that she won't make up her mind until the final hearing in June.

Fritz said she expects there will be a lot of question and refinements to the street fee proposal.

"I'm concerned right now about the level of it, over \$11 a month," she said. "That's a lot of money for people."

Nick Fish, Portland city commissioner

Aside from whether residents or industry lobbies succeed in referring the street fee to the November ballot, another lingering question is where the bill would appear.

Hales and Novick are considering options that include a combined utility bill, but Commissioner Nick Fish is not having that. In an interview with Willamette Week, Fish said that was a "bad idea."

Jim Blackwood, his policy director, said talk of including the fee on the utility bill is "a non starter."

Many residents are already upset about the cost of water and sewer services, which are generally billed quarterly. Just this week, the city dodged a ballot measure that would have stripped utility oversight from the City Council in favor of a new elected board.

The newly-dubbed transportation utility fee (previously referred to as the street fee) has Fish's staff concerned.

"Our honeymoon lasted about 32 seconds," Blackwood said Thursday.

Marissa Madrigal, outgoing chairwoman of Multnomah County

Madrigal said she's waiting for more information about the proposal before forming an opinion but she does see the need for road improvements.

"The city clearly has needs. We have roads that aren't safe and need to be maintained, so I appreciate that the city is looking for ways to fund improvements, and I'm eager to hear more about their plan."

Portland street fee: What the advocates and observers are saying

By Andrew Theen

The transportation utility fee (previously known as the street fee), pushed by Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales, continues to provoke reaction from public agencies, institutions and local advocates.

Cost estimates for Portland Public Schools and other districts that serve Portland residents trickled in late on Thursday. The total annual price tag for districts could be more than \$610,377, with more than \$3.6 million in concurrent safety improvements expected on an annual basis to help kids get to school safely.

On Sunday, we reported that many public agencies and districts were still awaiting "certainty."

But what are observers and advocates saying about the roughly \$40 million in net revenue the city is expecting under the current proposal.

Here are a few reactions:

Jonathan Ostar, executive director of OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

For the past few months, Ostar has been serving on the closed-door transportation committee evaluating the street fee proposal. He said he's pleased that the city rolled out reduced fees for low-income residents and Portlanders who live in apartments.

But Ostar said he also wants the city to exempt fees for housing that serves the poorest of the poor. "Our support is conditional on that to be in there," he said.

Ostar said he's also like to see the city agree to end the fee at some point, perhaps 10 years, but that's not a deal breaker. He also praised the city for acknowledging the fee as regressive.

But he said he thinks the distribution of benefits will be progressive, noting the prospect of spending some money to increase bus service in low-income neighborhoods such as along 122nd Avenue in east Portland.

"I want to make sure the city avoids the kind of parochialism that can often happen, where every neighborhood is fighting for their share" and the one with the loudest voice wins," he said.

Rob Sadowsky, Executive Director of Bicycle Transit Alliance

Sadowsky also sits on the transportation needs and funding committee. He said because of the speed at which the street fee plan came to fruition, the BTA board hasn't had a chance to formally take a position. The BTA was a key backer of then-Commissioner Sam Adam's 15-year \$454 million plan in 2008 to impose a street fee.

Sadowsky said he personally favors the structure of the transportation utility fee because it ties a revenue stream directly to a policy goal – transportation and safety improvements.

He said while bicyclists would certainly pay a "higher proportion" of the fee than automobile users and others who create more wear and tear on roads, the system's problems are borne by everyone and should be paid that way.

"In some ways, we're excited and scared at the same time to have bicyclists pay an appropriate fair share of the road," Sadowsky said.

He said while the BTA board hasn't voted on the proposal, the promise of 7-10 miles of protected bike lanes and other improvements make the policy potentially palatable for the BTA.

Sadowsky said he's interested in the politics driving the street fee. "The assumption is that at some point it could go to a referral," he said, noting that the PBOT committee and city officials were "absolutely" concerned about that prospect.

Portland State University

Wim Wiewel, president of Portland State University, said his university is still processing the estimated costs and has some concerns.

The university is facing a constrained budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

"Like everyone else," Wiewel said, "We want our streets to be in good shape and understand that the money has to come from someplace. However, students provide about 70-80 percent of our revenue and any additional costs make it more difficult for us to balance our budget without raising tuition."

The city of Portland's open wallet: Editorial Agenda 2014

By The Oregonian Editorial Board

Imposing discipline upon the city of Portland's spending appears to be a one-step-forward, one-step-back process. Mayor Charlie Hales and his colleagues have moved forward, for instance, by reducing the diversion of utility funds to programs that are related only tangentially to sewer and stormwater management. They haven't fixed the problem entirely, but progress is progress.

Rather than preserving this responsible-spending momentum, unfortunately, the city this month struck a tentative agreement with TriMet and the Portland Public Schools that would continue Portland's contribution to a program in which the city should not be involved at all. Through that program, every Portland Public Schools high schooler receives a free YouthPass, which allows unlimited use of TriMet's trains and buses.

The program is glaringly inequitable, as Portland teenagers who attend other schools aren't eligible. Tough look, Central Catholic and St. Mary's Academy. But the most significant problem with the city's involvement isn't equity. It's mission creep.

Paying to bus high school students is not the responsibility of city government. If Portland Public Schools, which does not provide yellow bus service to older students, wants to distribute free public transit passes, that's fine. But the city of Portland has plenty of other claims on limited dollars without borrowing responsibilities from a school district.

Unfortunately, commissioners are more than happy to blur budgetary lines when it suits their purposes. The consequences are often ugly. The creative use of dedicated utility funds motivated ratepayers to propose a public utility district, for instance, and the undisciplined use of transportation dollars contributed to the sorry state of Portland's streets.

"In recent years," the city auditor noted in a February 2013 report, "Council gave higher priority to funding some investments that are not City responsibilities than they gave to street maintenance." This is the government version of a teenager who spends hours helping a friend with his homework while neglecting to do his own.

Commissioners are ready to do it again. Hales' proposed budget triples the city's cash payments for YouthPass, which will hit nearly \$1 million in 2014-15, The Oregonian's Andrew Theen reported. The mayor's office did not respond to our requests for comment. Perhaps everyone was too busy fine-tuning the details of the strange street-fee proposal we'll discuss on Sunday.

Saying "no" to TriMet and PPS wouldn't be easy, as the YouthPass program is very popular. About 12,600 high school students use the pass, according to TriMet. Nor would the city's participation be particularly costly, even at the elevated level to which the city has agreed.

Still, saying "yes" will continue Portland's contribution to a program from which commissioners should be disentangling the city. If they can't discipline themselves, they shouldn't be surprised when voters impose discipline upon them by shutting their wallets at the next available opportunity.

The Portland Tribune

Boil water notice ends for Portland water customers

By Jim Redden

The boil water notice for Portland water customers has been lifted.

Tap water is safe to drink for all customers of the Portland Water Bureau, Burlington, city of Gresham, Lake Grove, Lorna Water, Palatine Hill, Rockwood, Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain), Valley View and West Slope Water Districts.

Follow-up testing of drinking water has shown the absence of bacterial contamination. The Portland Water Bureau recommends flushing all taps for two minutes or until the water runs cold before consuming for the first time. This will flush any potentially contaminated water from the plumbing.

The Portland Water Bureau issued a "Boil Water Notice" on Friday, May 23, in response to bacterial contamination detected at three locations in its system.

Tests conducted throughout the affected area since the notice was issued were clear of contamination.

As a precaution, the Portland Water Bureau will be draining and cleaning Reservoirs one and five. An investigation into determining the source of contamination is ongoing. The reservoirs will be put back into service once it is determined to be safe to do so.

For more information visit:

www.portlandoregon.gov/water

<https://www.facebook.com/PortlandWaterBureau>

or call the Water Bureau Customer Service line at (503) 823-7770.

The original alert was ordered by the state of Oregon Health Authority's Drinking Water Program after water samples taken at the three locations test positive over three-day period for total coliform and E. coli bacteria.

The alert came at the start of the Portland Rose Festival and Memorial Day Weekend, a time when many people are traveling into the region.

"While we believe at this time that the potential health risk is relatively small, we take any contamination seriously and are taking every precaution to protect public health," said Portland Water Bureau Administrator David Shaff.

A map of the affected areas can be found [here](#).

According to the water bureau, in three separate incidents from May 20 to May 23, repeat water samples confirmed the presence of total coliform and E. coli in routine drinking water samples. The water samples

that tested positive for bacteria were collected at the outlets of Mt. Tabor Reservoirs 1 and 5, and at the S.E .2nd Avenue and Salmon Street water sampling station. Both reservoirs have been taken offline.

The bureau is working with the Multnomah County Health Department to provide health-related information to the public.

"The chance of any health problems related to this water test result is low. If any problems occur, we would expect diarrhea," said Dr. Paul Lewis, Interim Tri-County Health Officer. "We monitor cases of bacterial diarrhea and will be aware of any increase following this event."

The bureau collects approximately 240 routine bacterial samples per month throughout the system. The test to determine the presence of bacteria takes about 18 hours. It is not unusual for one of these samples to test positive for bacteria. Samples to confirm possible contamination are collected immediately after an initial detection of the presence of bacteria in drinking water. Once the detection has been confirmed, public health officials recommend that the public boil all tap water before consuming.

Contamination can occur when there is a loss of water pressure, a pipe breaks, or conditions that expose drinking water to outside elements. The Portland Water Bureau is performing a full investigation to identify the cause of the contamination. However, it is not always possible to make an exact determination.

Boil water alert for all Portland water customers

By Jim Redden

Portland has issued a boil water alert for all city water, including water sold to suburban customers outside the city limits.

The alert was ordered by the State of Oregon Health Authority's Drinking Water Program after water samples taken at three locations test positive over three-day period for total coliform and E. coli bacteria.

The alert comes at the start of the Portland Rose Festival and Memorial Day Weekend, a time when many people will be traveling into the region.

Until further notice, all Portland Water Bureau customers and those in the affected areas should boil all tap water used for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing and ice for at least one minute. Ice or any beverages prepared with un-boiled tap water on or after May 20 should be discarded.

All Portland Water Bureau customers are affected. Also affected are customers of the following water providers:

- Burlington Water District
- City of Gresham (North of I-84)
- Lake Grove Water District
- Lorna Portland Water
- Palatine Hill Water District
- Rockwood Water District
- Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain)
- Valley View Water District
- West Slope Water District

"While we believe at this time that the potential health risk is relatively small, we take any contamination seriously and are taking every precaution to protect public health," said Portland Water Bureau Administrator David Shaff.

Detailed maps, fact sheets and additional information can be found on the Water Bureau's website at www.portlandoregon.gov/water/boilwaternotice or by calling Customer Service at 503-823-7770.

According to the water bureau, in three separate incidents from May 20 to May 23, repeat water samples confirmed the presence of total coliform and E. coli in routine drinking water samples. The water samples that tested positive for bacteria were collected at the outlets of Mt. Tabor Reservoirs 1 and 5, and at the S.E .2nd Avenue and Salmon Street water sampling station. Both reservoirs have been taken offline.

Consuming boiled and bottled water will ensure public health protection until the the bureau can determine that the water system is clean of contamination through surveillance sampling. Customers will be notified when they no longer have to boil their water.

The bureau is working with the Multnomah County Health Department to provide health-related information to the public.

"The chance of any health problems related to this water test result is low. If any problems occur, we would expect diarrhea," said Dr. Paul Lewis, Interim Tri-County Health Officer. "We monitor cases of bacterial diarrhea and will be aware of any increase following this event."

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Contamination can occur when there is a loss of water pressure, a pipe breaks, or conditions that expose drinking water to outside elements. The Portland Water Bureau is performing a full investigation to identify the cause of the contamination. However, it is not always possible to make an exact determination.

Customers can visit www.portlandoregon.gov/water/boilwaternotice to determine if their home or business is in the Boil Water Notice area. The Boil Water Notice, fact sheets and contact information are provided on this same website. For more information, affected customers should contact the Portland Water Bureau Customer Service at 503-823-7770. Do not call 9-1-1 unless you have an emergency. Follow updates on Twitter at #PDXBOIL.

Transportation fee tops busy City Council agenda

By Jim Redden

The City Council agenda is jam packed with major issues this week.

The most controversial is a Thursday hearing on a new Transportation Utility Fee proposed by Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick. It would impose various monthly fees for maintenance, safety, bicycle, mass transit, and other transportation-related projects on all residents, businesses, governmental agencies and non-profit organization in the city.

The proposal, as written, is facing opposition from within the business community.

Hales and Novick want the council to approve the fee structure without submitting it to Portland voters for approval. However, Hales and Novick also want the council place a measure restricting the proceeds from the fee to transportation-related projects on the November 2014 General Election ballot.

The residential fee would be \$11.56 a month with discounts for low-income households. The other fees would be based on how many vehicle trips the businesses, government agencies and non-profit organization are estimated to generate.

The fee is estimated to raise between \$40 million and \$50 million a year.

The Northwest Grocers Association opposes the current fee proposal because it does not believe the trip-generation estimates are accurate. The organization believes the city's calculations overestimate the number of trips generated by grocery stores, meaning they would pay more than their fair share.

NGWA President Joe Gilliam says his organization will support the proposal if the projects to be funded are narrowed to street maintenance and the fee is fairly assessed against residents and businesses. If not, Gilliam says the NWGA is prepared to place the fee proposal on the ballot, either through a referendum petition or an initiative drive.

Other business organizations have yet to take a stand on the proposal. Hales and Novick want the council to approve the fee and ballot measure on June 4, allowing little time for compromise.

The other major items are on the council's Wednesday agenda. They include:

- Approval of the city budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1.
- Approval of the Portland Development Commission budget for the next fiscal year.
- Approval of water, sewer and stormwater management rate increases averaging around 5 percent.
- Approval of monthly solid waste collection rates that will remain the same or be slightly lower for approximately 80 percent of customers and increase slightly for the 18 percent of customers with every-other-week 32-gallon can service.
- Approval of an ordinance allowing Google Fiber to install equipment structures called "Network Huts" in the public right-of-way as part of its potential ultra-high speed broadband system in Portland.

New infill rule riles up neighbors

By Jim Redden

Portlanders are organizing to fight a city proposal to encourage developers to voluntarily notify neighbors when a house is going to be demolished for an infill project.

Members of neighborhood association boards and neighborhood coalition offices say such notifications should always be mandatory for health and safety reasons. As an example, they point to the recent demolition of an older Eastmoreland-area house that contained asbestos next to an elementary school that was started without state-required precautions.

"DEQ rules require that all asbestos-containing materials be removed from structures before demolition and renovation work," says Kimberly Koehler, a member of the Land Use Committee of the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association.

Neighbors had not been notified of the demolition, but contacted the state Department of Environmental Quality after it started. The remodeling company, Classic Image Homes, says it did not know there was asbestos in the house across the street from Duniway Elementary School until being contacted by DEQ.

A subsequent inspection confirmed the presence of asbestos, which was then removed by workers in hazardous material suits, as required by DEQ rules. A DEQ investigation into the incident is underway.

The proposal to encourage voluntarily notification is being considered by the Development Review Advisory Committee, a 17-member appointed board that advises the city's Bureau of Development Services. A subcommittee of the group is drafting a proposal, which involves offering pre-printed door hangers to developers to be distributed to homes within 150 feet of houses scheduled to be demolished. The developers would not be required to distribute the fliers, however.

The proposal could be presented to the full advisory committee on June 19. Opponents are preparing to testify against it at the meeting. They include members of the boards of the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association and Southeast Uplift coalition office, who will offer alternative proposals. One would require inspections for hazardous materials — including asbestos and lead paint — before any house could be demolished. They also support mandatory neighbor notifications of all demolitions.

Infill issues take center stage

The fight over the notification requirement is just one battle being waged on the growing number of infill developments in Portland. Although many neighbors and their representatives have complained about such projects in the past, the number dropped significantly during the Great Recession, when practically all development ground to a halt. But since the economy began to recover a few years ago, the number of demolitions for infill projects has increased significantly.

According to Bureau of Development Services statistics, about 230 demolition permits were issued in 2013, an increase of more than 40 percent from 2011. Most were issued along with construction permits, eliminating the need for neighborhood notification. In addition, around 2,700 alteration and addition

permits were issued in 2013, an increase of 370 from 2011. They included projects where a majority of the home was demolished.

Such issues will be discussed at an upcoming forum on Demolition, Residential Infill and Housing Affordability in Portland Neighborhoods. It will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on June 11 at Concordia University's Luther Hall Auditorium, 2811 N.E. Holman St.

The forum is being sponsored by four neighborhood coalition offices, including Central Northeast Neighbors, North Portland Neighborhood Services, Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods and Southeast Uplift. The panel is expected to include home builders, housing and community organizers, and representatives from the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and the Bureau of Development Services.

The city has started addressing some of the concerns expressed by the neighborhood representatives. In addition to the notification proposal in the works, BDS recently reinterpreted an existing rule to require developers to always notify neighbors of demolition projects that will replace an existing home with more than one house. BDS still requires no notification if the developer applies for a demolition permit and a permit to build a single house at the same time, a practice opposed by the neighborhood representatives.

City street fee tries to avoid political traffic

By Jim Redden

Mayor Charlie Hales will ask the City Council next Thursday to approve a new street fee for all residents, businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations. Hales and Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick want the council to approve the fee without sending it to the voters for approval.

"We've been talking about this problem for 14 years," Hales said at a May 22 press conference where he and Novick unveiled the proposal. "This is one of those times we need to step up and do a difficult thing."

It is not clear a majority of the council will go along with that idea, however. And several business organizations are still deciding whether to refer it the ballot if the council acts on its own.

Shawn Miller, a lobbyist for the Northwest Grocery Association, says the organization opposes the calculations used by the city to determine how much businesses would pay. "Unless the city changes that, we will oppose it," Miller says.

The council could vote on the fee — officially called a transportation user fee — as soon as June 4. It would take effect in July 2015 and be used for maintenance, safety improvements and other transportation needs.

The proposed fee would raise an estimated \$40 million a year. A majority of the council has not yet said they will approve the fee without a vote of the public, however. Hales and Novick have already said they will vote for the fee without referring it the ballot. They have developed it together and presented the proposal to residents, business owners and other governments within the city limits at numerous forums during the past few months.

When asked who else on the council supports the fee, Hales said he expects Commissioner Amanda Fritz to support it. A short time later, Fritz said she was surprised by the comment and has not yet made up her mind. "I agree the city has transportation needs and I'm hopeful we can come up with a package that meets them, but I am not going to make a decision before the public hearing," Fritz said.

Fritz thinks the proposed fee for single-family households — \$11.56 a month or \$138.72 a year — is too high. She declined to offer an amount she could support.

Fritz, who is in charge of Portland Parks & Recreation, is also thinking about asking voters to approve a parks levy to replace the one that expires this year.

Commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman have previously said they believe the fee should be referred to the voters. It is unclear whether they have changed their minds since winning re-election at last week's primary election, however.

A dedicated fee

The council approved such a fee in 2007. It was proposed by Sam Adams, who was transportation commissioner at the time. Adams had the council repeal the fee after a lobbyist for the Oregon Petroleum Dealers Association said the organization would refer it to the ballot.

The association had not taken a stand on the new proposal by the end of last week. Neither had other business organizations that could support a referral drive, including the Portland Business Alliance and the Neighborhood Stores Association. All were still studying the details of the proposal, which were not released until the press conference.

Hales and Novick have ruled out asking voters to approve the fee, saying it is time for the council to show leadership after many years of knowing the city is not adequately maintaining its roads. At the press conference, Hales said 28 other Oregon cities have adopted similar fees without referring them to voters. He called it the least worst of the bad options facing the council for funding needed transportation projects.

"If the voters are really mad at us, we're both up for re-election in 2016, and they can throw us out," Novick told reporters.

Fritz has already said she does not intend to run for re-election in two years, when her term expires.

But Hales and Novick also want to refer a charter amendment to the voters this November that would dedicate the fee to transportation projects. Although not the same as asking voters to approve the fee, it would ensure that future councils cannot divert the funds for other purposes.

The proposal to be considered by the council on May 29 would provide discounts for low-income households and households in multifamily buildings, such as apartments.

Businesses and governments would pay monthly fees based on the estimated amount of motor vehicle trips they generate. An online calculator is available at OurStreetsPDX.com to help them estimate their fees.

Hales admits that imposing the fee on other government and nonprofit organization many sound unusual. Governments and nonprofit organization, including churches, are exempt from city and county property taxes. But Hales noted the fee is not a property tax. He says it would be payment for a utility service, like a water bill.

"Churches have to pay their water bills," Hales told reporters last week.

Street fee on fast track, fate uncertain

By Jim Redden

Mayor Charlie Hales will ask the City Council to approve a new utility fee to pay for road maintenance and safety improvements next Thursday.

The council could vote on the fee — which would be assessed against residents, businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations — as soon as June 4.

It is not clear whether a majority of the council will support it, however.

Both Hales and Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick support the Transportation User Fee, which has also been called a Street Fee or Road Fee. Hales and Novick have developed it together and presented their proposal to residents, business owners and other governments within the city limits at numerous forums.

When asked who else on the council supports the fee at a Thursday morning press conference on it, Hales said he expects Commissioner Amanda Fritz will vote for it.

But when contacted by the Portland Tribune a short time later, Fritz said she has not yet made up her mind.

"I agree the city has transportation needs and I'm hopeful we can come up with a package that meets them, but I am not going to make a decision before the public hearing," Fritz said.

Commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman both said they believe the proposed fee should be referred to voters during their re-election campaign earlier this year.

Hales and Novick have ruled out asking voters to approve the fee, saying it is time for the council to show leadership after many years of deteriorating roads. At the press conference, Hales said 28 other Oregon cities have adopted such fees without referring them to voters.

"If the voters are mad enough, Charlie and I are up for re-election in 2016 and they can vote us out," Novick said at the press conference.

Fritz has already said she does not intend to run for re-election in two years, when her current term expires.

Hales and Novick want to refer a charter amendment to the voters this November that would dedicate the fee to transportation projects, however.

The proposal to be considered by the council on May 29 would impose a monthly fee of \$11.56 for single-family households. Discounts would be provided to low-income households and households in multi-family buildings, such as apartments.

Fritz thinks the \$11.56 amount is too high, but she is not yet proposing a lower figure.

Businesses and governments would pay monthly fees based on the estimated amount of motor vehicle trips they generate. An online calculator is available at OurStreetsPDX.com to help them estimate their fees.

The board of the Portland Business Alliance has not yet taken a stand on the proposal.

EPA cleanup delay leaves 'cloud' over harbour Disputes, other issues push Superfund plan to 2017, or beyond

By Steve Law

Cleanup of the long-polluted Portland Harbor won't commence for at least three more years, after the Environmental Protection Agency announced another delay in completing its final action plan for the Superfund site.

EPA regional Administrator Dennis McClerran told Portland city officials last week the agency won't complete its final Record of Decision for the 11-mile-long Superfund cleanup until 2017, and that's a "soft target," says City Commissioner Nick Fish.

Lori Cohen, deputy director for Superfund projects at the EPA's regional office in Seattle, says the early-2017 target could be delayed further if there are continuing disputes among the various parties.

Such disputes seem inevitable, given that scores of Portland Harbor employers face a cleanup tab that could top \$1 billion. The EPA and other parties are even disputing who's to blame for the latest delays.

The EPA named the Portland Harbor a Superfund site back in 2000. But little cleanup has taken place, leaving the Willamette River bottom laden with PCBs, DDT and other toxic chemicals dumped into the river decades ago.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales has made it a priority to finally launch the harbor cleanup, and Fish is working closely with the mayor.

"There's a cloud over the river that is damaging to our local economy," Fish says.

Cleanup delays prolong the state of limbo among industrial companies with operations along the river, many of them facing huge liabilities for toxic discharges that occurred decades ago. "There are 40,000 river-dependent jobs, mostly blue-collar jobs which we'd like to protect and grow some day," Fish says.

Delays also prolong Portlanders' exposure to Willamette River fish that absorbed toxic chemicals, which can make their way up the food chain.

Fish says budget cuts at EPA, including the recent retirement of its chief Portland Superfund Project Manager Chip Humphrey, are partly to blame for the latest delay. The EPA is having to slash 100 positions from its roughly 600-employee workforce at its Seattle regional headquarters, Fish notes. Humphrey was one of 25 Seattle staff who took early retirement incentives offered as part of the staffing cuts.

The Lower Willamette Group, a consortium of 12 harbor industrial companies plus the city of Portland and Port of Portland, also faults the EPA for delays. "We would like to see EPA devote additional resources to the project so the process can move more quickly," the Lower Willamette Group's spokeswoman Barbara Smith relayed in an email.

But EPA says the delay is due to inadequate work by the Lower Willamette Group.

Polluters pay

Unbeknownst to most citizens, Congress doesn't provide money any more for Superfund cleanups. Instead, the Superfund process now relies on getting advance funding from Potential Responsible Parties — those likely to be billed for the cleanup. About 150 parties have been identified.

The Lower Willamette Group stepped up to advance some \$110 million so far to fund technical studies and other Superfund work at the harbor, including EPA staff time. The largest chunk of that money has come from Portland sewer ratepayers.

EPA officials insist the Portland Superfund project is a national priority for the agency, and say the latest delay has nothing to do with Humphrey's retirement or staff cuts.

"The reason for the delay is the fact that the documents submitted by the (Lower Willamette Group) are deficient and need to be corrected prior to EPA developing a cleanup plan," says Kristine Koch, who has been co-project manager with Humphrey.

The Lower Willamette Group submitted a draft feasibility study, which outlines a range of cleanup options, in March 2012. The EPA harshly criticized that draft, saying in a letter it has "many deficiencies and needs substantial revision." EPA charged the group overstated the effectiveness of lower-cost cleanup options and gave short shrift to identifying "hot spots" of highly contaminated parts of the river, among other shortcomings.

Politicians intervene

The EPA vowed in 2012 to take the feasibility study in-house, rather than delegating it to the Lower Willamette Group, and it fined the consortium \$125,500 in April 2013 for the "unacceptable quality" of its report.

But EPA has been pressured to speed up the cleanup by Portland-based members of Oregon's Congressional delegation, including U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer and Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Last October, the EPA conceded to delay levying that fine, on condition the Lower Willamette Group improves its cooperation with the federal agency.

In January, Cohen says, the EPA agreed it would collaborate more with the Lower Willamette Group in revising the 2012 draft feasibility plan. "There's a lot more give and take than the EPA might do on another site," Cohen says. "That's why we modified the schedule."

The Portland Harbor also is among EPA's most complicated Superfund sites, because of the large territory involved and the scores of polluters, including local governments like the city and port, likely to be held responsible.

EPA's top national Superfund Director Jim Woolford came to Portland for last week's meeting with Fish and other key leaders, Cohen says. "That shows this is a very high priority project for our Superfund program," she says.

While it stands to reason that EPA staff cuts — and political pressure from Portland's Congressional delegation — are affecting EPA's timetable, some say the agency is being unfairly criticized by the Potential Responsible Parties who will ultimately pay for the cleanup.

"They've been a convenient punching bag over the years," says Travis Williams, executive director of Willamette Riverkeeper.

The timetable slid when the EPA found fault with the Lower Willamette Group's draft feasibility study, Williams says.

Jim Robison, chairman of the Community Advisory Group that has represented everyday citizens in the Superfund process the past 14 years, also defends the EPA. The agency largely agreed with the criticisms raised by the citizens group, Robison says, and undertook a total rewrite of the draft feasibility study.

The latest delay may be beneficial in one respect, he says, because it allows more time for the EPA to study the effectiveness of alternative methods of removing pollutants, such as using natural biological agents to break down the contaminants.

"You want it to move forward, but you want it to be done right," Robison says.

Willamette Week

City Finds E. Coli in Reservoirs, Tells Portlanders to Boil Water SATURDAY UPDATE: Water safe to drink again, city says.

By Aaron Mesh

UPDATE, SATURDAY, MAY 24: The Water Bureau lifted the boil-water notice at 11 am, saying tap water is again safe to drink.

"Follow-up testing of drinking water has shown the absence of bacterial contamination," Water Bureau officials write. "The Portland Water Bureau recommends flushing all taps for two minutes or until the water runs cold before consuming for the first time. This will flush any potentially contaminated water from the plumbing."

The Portland Water Bureau has told its customers to boil their tap water after samples in the Mt. Tabor Reservoir tested positive for E. coli bacteria over the past three days.

The notice is precautionary. No one has reported getting sick and, as WW reported after a similar scare in 2012, the chances of disease are extremely small.

But the repeated findings of bacteria at Mt. Tabor mean residents should "boil all tap water used for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing and ice for at least one minute," the Water Bureau writes on its website (which has crashed repeatedly following the notice).

"In three separate incidents from May 20 to May 23," the bureau writes, "repeat water samples confirmed the presence of total coliform and E. coli in routine drinking water samples."

"The water samples that tested positive for bacteria were collected at the outlets of Mt. Tabor Reservoirs 1 and 5, and at the SE 2nd Avenue and Salmon Street water sampling station," the notice says. "Both reservoirs have been taken offline."

That timing is remarkable—it means the first sample was found on Election Day, when voters were deciding whether or not to remove control of Portland's water supply from City Hall. (They voted no.)

But the timeline of the tests and the warning appears to follow a similar schedule to the 2012 boil-water notice, which was issued two days after a positive test.

E. coli and coliform are types of bacteria common in animal feces.

WW reported in 2012 that the chances of illness from finding such positive samples was vanishingly small. We asked Dr. Gary Oxman, then health officer for Multnomah County, how many bears it would take defecating in the Bull Run Watershed to cause a disease outbreak.

His answer: Many, many bears defecating continually, or "one bear that had just the right organism, defecating repeatedly."

Business Groups Opposed to Transportation Fee Begin Organizing Restaurant lobbyist Bill Perry on voter referral: "I think they know it would get shot down in a heartbeat."

By Nigel Jaquiss and Aaron Mesh

Business groups—including associations of hotels, restaurants and convenience stores—will meet next week to begin planning opposition to the street fee Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick announced today.

Among the options available to opponents: Referring a fee passed by City Council to voters in November. The Oregon Petroleum Association stopped a similar fee proposed by then-Commissioner Sam Adams in 2008 by threatening to refer it. The Oregon Neighborhood Store Association was also involved in that fight.

Richard Kosesan, a lobbyist for the Oregon Neighborhood Store Association, which represents convenience stores, says his group is concerned about the pace at which Hales and Novick are moving. "It feels like they are in a hurry, yet they say they won't impose the fee until July 2015," Kosesan says. "There's an inherent disconnect there. To push and push and say you aren't going impose until next year."

The larger concerns for Portland's 500 to 600 convenience stores, Kosesan says, are cost and equity. The preliminary structure of the fee would charge homeowners a flat fee and charge businesses based on square footage and number of trips generated.

Convenience stores, of course, generate relatively little revenue per trip compared to department stores, appliance or car dealers.

"There's an inherent issue of equity," Kosesan says. "Are you comparing apples to apples and are you charging businesses for trips made by people who don't live here?"

Another powerful group concerned about the proposed fee is the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association.

Bill Perry, a lobbyist for ORLA, says his members already feel overburdened by high water and sewer bills, soaring food prices and the cost of new mandates such as the sick leave ordinance City Council passed in 2013.

"The size and scope of the proposed fee is a problem," Perry says. "Surrounding communities have fees that are nowhere near as high."

Perry says he met with city officials, who explained to him that budget constraints were leading them toward imposing a new fee. "The city has budget constraints, and we recognized that," Perry says. "But they seem to fail to see that there are budgetary constraints for businesses too."

On Thursday, The Oregonian reported that Hales and Novick may refer a change to the city charter that would attempt to ensure that the transportation fee be dedicated to transportation projects and not spent on anything else. Perry calls that idea "disingenuous."

"They'd like to use that kind of vote to show there's support for this fee, but my non-scientific view is there is widespread opposition from citizens, businesses and non-profits," Perry says. "If they put this fee to a vote of the people, I think they know it would get shot down in a heartbeat."

Perry says it's too early to say whether his group would participate in an attempt to refer the fee to the November ballot for a vote, but a number of groups with the heft to fund a referral are planning to gather next week to begin discussions.

"I hope the city will consider its position," Perry says. "What they are proposing is just too much."

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick Debut \$138-a-Year Street Fee

They won't refer it to voters.

By Aaron Mesh

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick will try to charge Portland households \$138.72 a year without taking their "street fee" proposal to voters, they announced this morning.

The fee, which City Council will vote on June 4, is expected to raise \$40 million in the first year for city transportation projects, with proceeds rising as high as \$50 million. But city officials still haven't decided how they will collect it.

The announcement confirms that Hales and Novick will attempt to avoid placing the fee on the November ballot. Instead, they will try to put up a political shield against a ballot referral by asking voters to approve restrictions on how the money can be spent—on road maintenance and transportation safety.

Hales and Novick announced what they dubbed a "transportation user fee" at a press conference by turns apologetic and defiant.

"None of us want to be doing this," Novick said. "If the voters are really mad at us, we're both up for reelection in 2016, and they can throw us out."

The fee, which Hales and Novick have been shopping for months, will charge low-income households \$97.08 a year. It offers further discounts for people living in apartment buildings.

The proposal also creates a sliding fee scale for businesses, nonprofits, churches and other governments—some of whom could pay hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. (Parking lots and railway yards get the only exemptions, which would pacify downtown land owner Greg Goodman and railroad giant Union-Pacific.)

"We think this is the least obnoxious option," Hales said.

The mayor said he didn't know if business interests would refer the fee to the ballot, as they did to scuttle a similar proposal by Sam Adams in 2008.

"I think they understand that the problem is not going away," Hales said. "We're all in this together. Any of us can see the problem, even if we're not happy about the solution."

The Portland Bureau of Transportation has debuted a fee calculator for businesses to figure out how much they'll pay. The business side of the fee is based on the square footage of the property and the number of trips generated to that location.

The proposal needs three votes on City Council. Commissioners Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman have said they'll vote no, leaving Commissioner Amanda Fritz as the tiebreaker.

Hales said this morning he believes he has secured Fritz's support. But she did not appear at the press

conference, held under a blooming tree swarming with bees.

The gathered officials said they were still trying to decide how to collect the fee—mentioning water and sewer bills as the leading option. (City Hall kept control of its utilities in a public vote Tuesday.)

Hales said Portland could no longer afford to delay on paving roads and building safe crosswalks.

"This is one of those times where we as elected officials have to step up and do a difficult thing," the mayor said. "If we punted every difficult decision to the voters, nothing difficult would ever get done."

UPDATE, 10:45 am: The street fee proposal has already lost the support of one newspaper editorial board. Bi-weekly newspaper Street Roots is opposing the fee.

"It's being sold as a safety issue, but the fee is largely to back fill maintenance costs," says the editorial board. "We cannot support a flat fee of this size with no end in sight that will disproportionately hurt low-income families and small businesses regardless of their use on the roads."

UPDATE, 12:02 pm: Business groups—including restaurants and convenience stores—are preparing to fight the street fee. City Commissioner Nick Fish says he's opposed to collecting the fee on water and sewer bills.

City Commissioner Nick Fish: I Won't Stand For Using Water, Sewer Bills To Collect the Mayor's Street Fee

By Aaron Mesh

If Mayor Charlie Hales and City Commissioner Steve Novick are going to collect a \$138-a-year street fee from Portland households, the most obvious place to charge residents is on their water and sewer bills.

Hales said at today's press conference debuting the street fee that he and Novick were considering utility bills as a possible means of collection.

"Another reason for the yearlong buildup here is to make sure the right collection mechanism is in place," the mayor said.

But Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the water and sewer bureaus, says the mayor will have to look somewhere else. Fish doesn't want the street fee anywhere near utility bills.

"I've been very clear with the mayor that I don't think the street fee should be on the combined water and sewer bills," Fish tells WW. "I've been very clear from the get-go: I think it's a bad idea."

The city is currently being sued for \$127 million in spending of utility ratepayer dollars on projects not related to the water and sewer bureaus. Voters on Tuesday rejected a ballot measure that would have removed control of the water and sewer utilities from City Hall.

Fish is especially concerned that placing the fee on utility bills would open the city up to new legal jeopardy.

"It raises legal issues," he says. "We run the risk of crossing that line again. That's what gives me heartburn."

The Mercury

There Might Be E. Coli in Your Tap Water. Boil It Before You Drink It.

By Denis C. Theriault

Portland's water bureau has begun urging its customers all across Portland, and beyond, not to drink tap water unless its been boiled—after state officials, doing routine tests, discovered E. Coli in water samples taken from two reservoirs on Mount Tabor and elsewhere in the system over the past few days.

The city's got a website set up with info, www.portlandoregon.gov/water/boilwaternotice, but it was down when I was typing this.

It's not been announced why there's poop bacteria in the water, but a press conference is scheduled and maybe we'll learn more there. And don't worry if you're reading this right after guzzling a cold, refreshing glass of Bull Run's bounty.

This is from the city's news release. You might get a case of the trots, but that's about it.

"The chance of any health problems related to this water test result is low. If any problems occur, we would expect diarrhea," said Dr. Paul Lewis, Interim Tri-County Health Officer. "We monitor cases of bacterial diarrhea and will be aware of any increase following this event."

Hit the jump to read the rest of the release.

The Portland Water Bureau issued a city-wide boil notice on Friday morning after state health officials detected E. coli in three separate tests during the past three days.

Routine inspections at two of the city's Mt. Tabor reservoirs tested positive for the bacteria.

City officials are hosting an emergency press conference at 11 a.m.

The Oregonian will be there and this story will continue to be updated.

The Portland Business Journal

Street fees, Google Fiber are top of mind for Portland's City Council this week

By Andy Giegerich

It's a short, but very active, week for Portland's City Council.

At the first of two meetings this week (on Wednesday), the council will begin examining the proposed 2014-15 budget, submitted by Portland Mayor Charlie Hales. The Council will also analyze the proposed Portland Development Commission budget.

The budgets must be in place by July 1.

At 11:15, the Council will vote whether to authorize a "network hut license agreement" with Google Fiber Oregon LLC. Google is considering bringing its high-speed network to Portland and several other cities.

Then, the Council will consider whether to revise residential solid waste and recycling collection rates and charges. The new rates would take effect July 1.

Finally, the Council's chambers could be packed on Thursday as commissioners pore over proposals to create new transportation user fees. Some businesses are objecting to the proposal, which would fund road repair and other infrastructure needs.

The discussion, which will also include talk about a ballot measure that actually earmarks the new fees for road repairs, starts at 2 p.m.

Portland lifts water alert

By Andy Giegerich

Portland's Water Bureau has lifted an alert that advised residents to boil water after E.coli was found in three water samples earlier this week.

The alert lasted 24 hours.

Here's the advisory issued this morning by the Bureau.

As of 11:00 AM Saturday May 24, 2014, the Boil Water Notice issued on May 23, 2014 is lifted. Tap water is safe to drink for all customers of the Portland Water Bureau. Customers of the Burlington, City of Gresham (North of I-84), Lake Grove, Lorna Water, Palatine Hill, Rockwood, Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain), Valley View, and West Slope Water Districts may now drink tap water without boiling it first.

Follow-up testing of drinking water has shown the absence of bacterial contamination. The Portland Water Bureau recommends flushing all taps for 2 minutes or until the water runs cold before consuming for the first time. This will flush any potentially contaminated water from the plumbing.

The Portland Water Bureau issued a "Boil Water Notice" on May 23, 2014 in response to bacterial contamination detected at three locations in its system ... Tests conducted throughout the affected area since the notice was issued were clear of contamination. As a precaution, the Portland Water Bureau will be draining and cleaning Reservoirs 1 and 5. An investigation into determining the source of contamination is ongoing.

The reservoirs will be put back into service once it is determined to be safe to do so. The Portland Water Bureau thanks customers for their cooperation and understanding during the boil water notice.

While the contamination was likely minimal, the health and safety of customers is the first priority of the bureau. The Portland Water Bureau consulted closely with the Oregon Health Authority – Drinking Water Services and the Multnomah County Health Officer to ensure that all state and federal health procedures were followed and standards were maintained.

Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

Portlanders may need to boil water at least another day

By Andy Giegerich

Portland officials are urging residents to dump any ice or beverages made with water poured before last Tuesday.

The alert comes as a boil-alert was issued for Portland residents and those served by several surrounding water districts. Officials detected E.Coli in Portland's water supply on three testing occasions.

Read the city of Portland's alert for advice on handling the alert

The alert is expected to last at least until tomorrow.

Officials in Beaverton said that city's water supply was not affected. Gresham leaders said the boil alert is not in effect for residents living north of Interstate 84 or who are in the Rockwood water district.

The alert also affects those in the Burlington, Lake Grove, Lorna Portland, Palatine Hill, Valley View and West Slope water districts as well as the Tigard Water Service Area.

The notice means residents should boil all tap water before drinking, preparing food and brushing their teeth.

Boil-water alert issued for Portland and surrounding areas

By Staff Portland Business Journal

City of Portland water customers, as well as those throughout the area, are being asked to boil water after samples taken over the last three days showed the presence of bacteria.

The samples turned up positive for total coliform and E. coli.

"Until further notice, all Portland Water Bureau customers and those in the affected areas should boil all tap water used for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing and ice for at least one minute. Ice or any beverages prepared with un-boiled tap water on or after May 20 should be discarded," the water bureau said on its website.

The city is planning a press conference at noon to address the matter.

The water came from Mt. Tabor Reservoirs 1 and 5. Both reservoirs have been taken offline.

Along with Portland, residents served by several other districts must boil their water as well. That includes the:

- Burlington Water District
- City of Gresham (North of I-84)
- Lake Grove Water District
- Lorna Portland Water
- Palatine Hill Water District
- Rockwood Water District
- Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain)
- Valley View Water District
- West Slope Water District

"While we believe at this time that the potential health risk is relatively small, we take any contamination seriously and are taking every precaution to protect public health," said David Shaff, the Portland Water Bureau's administrator.

The Skanner

UpDated: Water Advisory Lifted for Portland

By Helen Silvis

Portland Water Bureau retracted its boil alert and says tap water is good for all purposes. Flush your taps for two minutes or until the water is cold before drinking.

PORTLAND WATER BUREAU: Press Release

Tap water is safe to drink for all customers of the Portland Water Bureau. Customers of the Burlington, City of Gresham (North of I-84), Lake Grove, Lorna Water, Palatine Hill, Rockwood, Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain), Valley View and West Slope Water Districts may now drink tap water without boiling it first.

Follow-up testing of drinking water has shown the absence of bacterial contamination. The Portland Water Bureau recommends flushing all taps for two minutes or until the water runs cold before consuming for the first time. This will flush any potentially contaminated water from the plumbing.

The Portland Water Bureau issued a 'Boil Water Notice' on May 23, 2014 in response to bacterial contamination detected at three locations in its system. All customers of the Portland Water Bureau and Burlington, City of Gresham (North of I-84), Lake Grove, Lorna Portland Water, Palatine Hill, Rockwood, Tigard Water Service Area (including Durham, King City and Bull Mountain), Valley View and West Slope Water Districts were affected.

Tests conducted throughout the affected area since the notice was issued were clear of contamination. As a precaution, the Portland Water Bureau will be draining and cleaning Reservoirs 1 and 5. An investigation into determining the source of contamination is ongoing. The reservoirs will be put back into service once it is determined to be safe to do so. The Portland Water Bureau thanks customers for their cooperation and understanding during the boil water notice. While the contamination was likely minimal, the health and safety of customers is the first priority of the bureau. The Portland Water Bureau consulted closely with the Oregon Health Authority - Drinking Water Services and the Multnomah County Health Officer to ensure that all state and federal health procedures were followed and standards were maintained.

Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

For more information

visit www.portlandoregon.gov/water, <https://www.facebook.com/PortlandWaterBureau>, @portlandwater, or call the Water Bureau Customer Service line at (503) 823-7770

Urgent: Portlanders Advised to Boil All Water Before Use

By Helen Silvis

The Portland Water Bureau says everyone should boil water before using it, for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing or making ice.

The advisory affects everyone who gets water from the Portland water bureau, including:

All Portland homes, Burlington, City Of Gresham, Lake Grove, Lorna Portland Water, Palatine Hill, Rockwood, Tigard Water Service Area—including Durham, King City And Bull Mountain— Valley View, and West Slope Water Districts.

E. coli detected in Portland, Oregon, water supply

By Steven Dubois

A citywide boil notice was issued for Portland, Oregon, after state health officials detected E. coli in the water supply.

The Portland Water Bureau said Friday that residents should boil all tap water used for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing and ice for at least one minute. Ice or any beverages prepared with un-boiled tap water on or after Tuesday should be dumped.

The notice, which also covers some suburban cities, affects about 670,000 people. It will remain in effect until tests show the water system is clean.

The samples that tested positive for bacteria were collected this week from two uncovered reservoirs at Mount Tabor. The Water Bureau said it collects about 240 bacterial samples per month throughout the system, and the test to determine the presence of bacteria takes 18 hours.

The Water Bureau is investigating the cause of the contamination. The city said contamination can occur when there is a loss of water pressure, a pipe breaks or when conditions expose drinking water to outside elements.

"The chance of any health problems related to this water test result is low," Tri-County Health Officer Dr. Paul Lewis said. "If any problems occur, we would expect diarrhea."

The Water Bureau drew national attention last month when it discarded more than 35 million gallons of drinking water because a teenager allegedly urinated into a reservoir at Mount Tabor. That reservoir was one of the two that tested positive for E. coli.