

The Oregonian

With more money, fewer complaints, City Council ready to adopt budget: Portland City Hall Roundup

By Brad Schmidt

The Portland City Council on Thursday will formally adopt the city's \$3.64 billion budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

The process promises to be smoother than last year, when Commissioner Amanda Fritz issued a lengthy diatribe while voting against the budget, only to return later in the day to offer support so it could pass procedural muster.

Spending is up for the approaching fiscal year, with big gains in the city's discretionary general fund. That's the pot of money that pays for police, fire, parks and some of the politicians' favored programs, such as the Regional Arts & Culture Council.

Highlights have been outlined long ago: \$1.2 million for a westside emergency operations center, \$1.25 million for housing and homeless efforts; \$700,000 to pay for high school bus passes; \$650,000 to study transit options, including light rail, into Southwest Portland and the 'burbs; \$250,000 to restore the chief financial officer position; but no money toward a \$1 million plan for safer street crossings in east Portland.

Now that the dust has settled, here's a quick look at three key numbers for the 2014-15 budget, compared to what officials adopted a year ago.

Total city budget: \$3.64 billion, up 5.8 percent from last year's \$3.44 billion

General fund budget: \$515.1 million, 4.2 percent more than last year's \$494.3 million

General fund discretionary: \$426.7 million, up 7.6 percent from last year's \$396.7 million

Portland street fee: Tuesday town hall moved to Oregon Convention Center to accommodate crowds

By Andrew Theen

Portland transportation officials are moving a street fee town hall for business owners scheduled for next Tuesday from the offices of the Venture Portland business group to a ballroom at the Oregon Convention Center.

Bureau of Transportation officials cited "higher than expected" interest in the Tuesday meeting to discuss a proposed street fee that could cost businesses thousands of dollars a year as the basis for relocating the meeting.

The 8 a.m. meeting was initially scheduled at the offices of Venture Portland in Southeast. The business advocacy group asked business owners and nonprofits to RSVP to attend the meeting. According to a Facebook group in opposition to the fee, Venture Portland's space only accounted for 50 people. Calls to Venture Portland, the umbrella network of neighborhood small businesses, weren't immediately returned Thursday. A PBOT spokesman confirmed the city would only be able to accommodate 50 people under the previous plan.

But now the meeting will be held in a 4,700-square-foot ballroom at the Oregon Convention Center that can accommodate more than 400 people, according to Metro's website. PBOT will pay roughly \$1,000 to rent the facility, according to spokesman Dylan Rivera.

Rivera said the city would've spent roughly \$300 on audio video equipment to run the Venture Portland meeting.

Dana Haynes, Mayor Charlie Hales' spokesman, said city leaders changed the venue because they didn't want space to be a limiting factor.

"When we said, 'come one, come all,' we really meant it," Haynes said.

City officials scheduled the two town hall meetings a few weeks after tabling a controversial vote scheduled for June 4 on the street fee plan, backed by Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales.

Business groups, such as the Portland Business Alliance and Venture Portland, asked Novick and Hales to slow down the fast-moving plan to approve a street fee.

PBOT officials noted in a press release on Thursday that public meetings on a funding plan to raise tens of millions for street maintenance and safety projects began in earnest in February.

Community reaction came to a head during a more than five-hour public hearing before the City Council last month.

Here's a link to the city's online rate calculator for businesses.

Next week's meetings:

- Town Hall on Business and Non-Residential Fee: 8 - 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, June 24, at Oregon Convention Center, Portland Ballroom 255, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
- Town Hall on Residential Fee: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 25, at Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N Interstate Ave.

Portland water-testing discrepancies show lab work is both art and science

By Lynne Terry

After last month's boil-water event, the Portland Water Bureau gave the public good news: A particularly virulent and potentially deadly form of *E. coli* did not turn up follow-up lab testing.

In fact, that pathogen, which sickens nearly 100,000 people and kills more than 20 a year in the United States, has never been detected in Portland's drinking supply, said Yone Akagi, the bureau's water quality compliance manager.

Since 2005, the Portland Water Bureau has sent cultured samples of contaminated water to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, asking the lab to identify the specific organisms in the water. Of 185 tests, Legacy has only found *E. coli* about a dozen times but none of those were O157:H7, one of the deadliest strains. Legacy's tests last month of three samples that tested positive for *E. coli* in the Water Bureau's lab also failed to turn up the bacterium.

The apparent discrepancy between the two labs prompted a Legacy lab specialist to question Portland's boil water notice. But independent microbiologists say the different results do not mean that the bureau's test is faulty, nor that Legacy's lab made mistakes.

Microbe testing is both a science and an art, said Robert Vega, manager of microbiology at the Oregon Public Health Lab. Finding a specific organism can sometimes be a matter of luck.

The water bureau tests the drinking supply about 240 times a month using Colilert-18, a test that's approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and is the most widely used in Oregon.

"It's a good test," Vega said. "It's a standard of the industry."

It's also the quickest, churning out results in 18 hours instead of 24, which was the case with the agency's previous contamination test.

Colilert-18 tests 100 milliliter samples. Bottles that turn yellow after 18 hours of incubation are positive for coliforms, bacteria that signal possible fecal contamination. Those that fluoresce under an ultraviolet light are contaminated with *E. coli*.

A Water Bureau microbiologist then dips a tiny loop into the bottle, capturing a drop of water and smears it on a plate. If that one drop does not contain *E. coli*, it won't turn up in at Legacy.

"It's like reaching into a bag of M&Ms and trying to find a green one," Vega said.

The drop is mixed with a medium that spurs all microbes to multiply, not just *E. coli*.

"It is not selective," said Kim Hutchinson, a microbiologist and owner of Biologic Resources in Tigard. "You'll get everything growing that's in there."

The most aggressive organisms dominate the slide so that when a Legacy official picks one off for testing, that's what turns up.

Last month when Legacy tested the contaminated samples associated with the boil-water notice, it found two groups of coliforms -- *Enterobacter Amnigenus* and *Enterobacter cloacae*. Both have turned up 70 times in Legacy's testing, said Akagi, the bureau's water compliance specialist.

But neither is a cause for concern, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Dr. Paul Lewis, health officer for Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, agreed.

"I do not consider these bacteria to be pathogenic when ingested in drinking water," Lewis said. "Drinking water is not sterile, and since both of these species are found both in humans and in the environment, they are not used as markers of human or animal fecal contamination in drinking water monitoring."

The Legacy tests have been useful to the water bureau in tracking organisms in the drinking supply. They were never intended to isolate *E. coli* nor find O157:H7.

"We don't have a lot of *E. coli* positives," said Marsha Farooqui, manager of the Portland Water Bureau's lab. "So for process control, we look at what's most economical. What gives you the most bang for your buck."

But following questions from the media about the boil water notice, the bureau is now reconsidering the Legacy test, said Akagi, the bureau's water compliance manager.

The bureau might drop them, though nothing has been decided, she said.

Portland water testing follows regulated procedures with checks, balances

By Lynne Terry

Lab microbiologist Otilia Plesiu put the small bottle of water under an ultraviolet light, as two other Portland Water Bureau employees hovered around, waiting for the verdict.

The bottle glowed baby blue.

That fluorescence on May 23 marked the third time in as many days that a sample of Portland's water had tested positive for *E. coli*. It triggered a boil-water notice that shut down businesses and disrupted the lives of 670,000 people.

Portland has only had three boil water alerts in its history.

Today's heavily regulated water system involves precise protocols set by the Environmental Protection Agency, with regular monitoring, detailed record keeping and a certified lab that uses checks and balances to try to prevent false results.

The process, which started with a sample drawn May 20 from a tap downhill from Mount Tabor's Reservoir 1, worked as intended last month, said Kari Salis, water quality manager for the Oregon Health Authority.

"We feel confident in Portland's results," Salis said.

Logan Bourdon, a Water Bureau environmental technician, recently demonstrated the process for an observer, offering a public glimpse at the regimen that led to the alert.

First step, he unlocked the green metal box encasing the tap.

"All of our sampling stations are protected in some way," Bourdon said.

Before collecting a sample, Bourdon fired up a torch and heated the tap to kill bacteria. Then he turned on the faucet, letting water flush out the pipe. He checked the water's temperature, acidity and chlorine level, jotting down all three.

Next, Bourdon rubbed sanitizer on his hands to avoid contaminating the sample. He capped the tap with a plastic hood, keeping the elements at bay. To draw a sample, he filled a small plastic bottle, checking to make sure he had between 100 and 110 milliliters. After completing the paperwork, he continued on his rounds.

The sampling took about 15 minutes.

In the afternoon, Bourdon dropped the sample off at the bureau's North Portland lab to test for total coliforms, bacteria that signal possible fecal contamination, and *E. coli*, a group of coliform bacteria that live in the intestinal tract of people and animals. When *E. coli* are present, so is fecal matter.

The testing, like the sampling, is regimented.

Lab employees check the bottles to ensure they are cold when they arrive. Samples are kept iced during travel to prevent the growth of bacteria, which multiply in warm temperatures.

"You don't want to be incubating it on its way here," said Yone Akagi, Portland's water quality compliance manager. "You want it to get here, and then you have a set amount of time that you incubate it."

The bottles are processed in a batch with 20 to 30 other samples plus three controls – a bottle with *E. coli* as a positive control, one with non-coliform organisms as a negative control and a sterile bottle of water.

Batches are nested in a bath of water and put in a refrigerator-size incubator set at 35 degrees Celsius, or 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Each batch sits 18 to 22 hours in the incubator, long enough to let organisms multiply.

The next day is showtime.

On the morning of Friday, May 23, microbiologist Otilia Plesiu removed a batch from the incubator as she always does, except this time the lab manager and another bureau specialist were watching, said Renee Chauvin, the lab's quality assurance coordinator.

When Plesiu spotted the yellow sample from Reservoir 5, she held it next to a pale yellow bottle, which serves as a comparative sample. Sure enough, the first one was darker, giving Portland its third positive coliform test in three days after Reservoir 1 and a sampling station at Southeast Salmon and Second. Plesiu put the yellow bottle under the ultraviolet light. It fluoresced with *E. coli*.

No one gasped or fretted, Chauvin said, as they went through the prescribed procedure. Plesiu called the supervisor in charge of sampling, recorded the results in an electronic database and sent a notice to a group of Water Bureau staff, kicking into gear the process of informing the state and determining resampling sites.

Under Environmental Protection Agency rules, a positive coliform test must be followed within 24 hours with a resample at the same site and taps five links upstream and downstream.

In the subsequent tests, all of those resamples were clean, but the state ordered a boil water alert anyway. Salis, water quality manager for the Oregon Health Authority, said officials didn't want to take any chances despite the inconvenience and cost to businesses.

"It's not that common to get *E. coli*," Salis said. "That means there is fecal matter in the water. It's a public health risk."

The Mercury

Town Hall on Street Fee (the One for Businesses) Moves to Larger Location

By Denis C. Theriault

Unsurprisingly keen interest in the future of Commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales' proposed new "transportation user fee" has forced city officials to relocate one of two town halls on the fee scheduled for next week.

Instead of meeting to talk about the non-residential portion of the proposed fee at Venture Portland's headquarters next Tuesday, the Bureau of Transportation has obtained a much larger meeting at the Oregon Convention Center. Venture Portland, an umbrella group for neighborhood business districts, had made some sense as the host. On paper. But critics of the proposed fee quickly complained that space at Venture Portland would be limited.

Hence today's announcement that the meeting was being moved:

- Town Hall on Business and Non-Residential Fee: 8 to 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, June 24, at Oregon Convention Center, Portland Ballroom 255, 777 NE MLK
- Town Hall on Residential Fee: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 25, at Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N Interstate

That's a generous move. Although—in looking at the time the meeting's scheduled to start, 8 AM? On a weekday?—is it fair to wonder if that gesture will go for naught? That maybe it's such an unfriendly start time for owners of small businesses, wage slaves, and families on summer break... that a lot of people who might want to show up won't be able to show up?

The Portland Business Journal

With Portlanders seeking more info, city moves key street fee meeting to larger space

By Andy Giegerich

"Higher-than-expected interest" in a proposal to fund Portland's street repair programs has led officials to move a meeting to a more sizable venue.

The city's Town Hall on transportation funding will now take place Tuesday, June 24 between 8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. at the Oregon Convention Center. The event takes place in Portland Ballroom 255.

The event had been scheduled to take place at Venture Portland's offices in Southeast Portland.

The proposal has drawn concerns from businesses faced with paying a median fee of about \$76 a month for infrastructure work. Residents would pay around \$10 monthly in the new fees.

The council pushed a decision on the matter to later this year.

"Portlanders are passionate about participating in local government," Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said in the release announcing the new Town Hall venue. "We welcome ideas about how they want to improve the transportation fee, or alternative proposals on par with the \$53 million it would raise. There's no question we need to invest in basic transportation maintenance and safety."

A second Town Hall is set for June 25 at Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N. Interstate Ave.

The city plans to collect more data and opinions on the proposal through October.