

## The Oregonian

### Portland could expand low-income utility discounts, panel says: City Hall Roundup

*By Brad Schmidt  
April 10, 2015*

Without question, Portland utilities have the ability to extend discounts to thousands of low-income residents who are currently ineligible, a city panel concluded Thursday.

Whether it actually happens - that remains a political calculation for the Portland City Council.

"That's the whole question: if we're willing to invest time and effort into creating the system," said Jill Smith, chief operating officer for Home Forward, the housing authority serving Multnomah County. "It's possible."

The recommendations may carry far-reaching impacts for all ratepayers. If the City Council expands low-income discounts, everyone else would need to pay more or officials would need to tap the general fund to offset millions of dollars in lost revenue.

For two decades, city officials have acknowledged a fundamental flaw in their system for awarding low-income water and sewer discounts: low-income renters are considered the neediest but are largely ineligible.

City estimates suggest about 40,000 households meet income guidelines but can't receive the discount.

That's because Portland offers markdowns only to low-income individuals who directly pay a water and sewer bill. Most renters pay indirectly to a landlord through monthly rent.

Despite knowing about the problem, officials never solved it.

This year, Commissioner Nick Fish reluctantly took up the issue after being called out by Commissioner Steve Novick during the street fee debate. Fish, in charge of the Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services, convened a panel of experts who met for a final time Thursday and will issue formal recommendations by May.

The work group determined that Portland could most easily expand discounts to about 11,000 low-income households - about one quarter of those who are currently ineligible.

The panel decided that reaching low-income renters in market-rate projects would be too difficult but members believe discounts could be extended to regulated properties. That would include units owned or operated by Home Forward or non-profit providers that rent only to low-income residents.

Experts recommended offering fixed-rate discounts to more residents. As an example, officials estimated that a low-income renter could save about \$40 a month on rent if discounts were extended.

At the group's final meeting, even the Water Bureau's customer service manager who oversees billing acknowledged the city could do more.

"Is it possible? Sure," said Kathy Koch, later acknowledging that she was beginning to feel overwhelmed because of the work involved. "Is it probable or practical or efficient? I don't really know."

The work group suggested that city officials study administrative expenses of expanding the system as part of a cost-benefit analysis. Members suggested the possibility of a pilot project to determine effectiveness, noting that it could take years to reach 11,000 households without additional Water Bureau staffing.

They also stressed that the city shouldn't expand markdowns if it means reducing existing breaks for roughly 8,500 households who currently participate.

David Shaff, the city's retiring Water Bureau administrator, said officials will follow whatever policy the City Council sets.

Shaff also acknowledged his surprise that so much progress has been made after previous efforts fizzled over the decades.

"It'll be interesting to see if something comes of it," he said. "I was really not thinking that much would."

## The Portland Tribune

### City may require building owners to report energy use

*By Jim Redden  
April 13, 2015*

The City Council will consider a new policy Wednesday to require the owners of around 1,000 commercial buildings report their energy use to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability every year.

The city will begin publicizing the reports next year with the hope of encouraging the owners to reduce the energy used by the buildings to help fight climate change.

The proposed policy is prompted by the city's 2009 Climate Action Plan. It will apply to buildings over 50,000 square feet in 2016, and between 20,000 and 50,000 square feet in 2017.

Many buildings will be exempt, however, including those used predominantly for housing, parking, worship, industrial processes, warehousing, or K-12 education.

According to an ordinance submitted by Mayor Charlie Hales, buildings are the largest source of carbon emissions in Portland. The 2009 Climate Action Plan includes a goal of reducing the total energy use of all buildings built before 2010 by 25 percent by 2030.

"The world's leading scientists consistently conclude that climate change caused by human emission of greenhouse gases is among the most significant problems facing the world today and potentially poses the greatest economic, environmental, and social challenge of the 21st century," the ordinance says.

The proposed policy allows the city to fine building owners who do not comply with it up to \$500 for every 90 day violation.

An impact statement submitted with the ordinance says similar policies have been adopted by three states and 11 other cities, including Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Minneapolis. It claims a building energy use has been reduced 3 percent a year in Washington DC since a similar policy was adopted.

The proposed policy has been presented to several organizations whose members will be affected by it, including the Portland Business Alliance, NAIOP, Venture Portland, the Development Review Advisory Committee, the Building Owners and Managers Association, and American Institute of Architects Committee on the Environment.

The impact statement says some building owners are expected to support it and some are expected to oppose it at the hearing.

## Willamette Week

### Five Questions Portland City Hall Still Hasn't Answered About Uber City Council delayed a vote on Uber and Lyft last night—and still has no road map for taxi regulation.

*By Anna Walters and Aaron Mesh  
April 10, 2015*

Just as Uber appeared ready to roll back into Portland, City Hall hit the brakes again Thursday.

A six-hour hearing ended last night with the City Council delaying a vote on whether to legalize ride-hailing app Uber and its competitor Lyft. Instead, commissioners scheduled a work session for April 21—nearly two weeks after Uber drivers expected to return to Portland.

The delay is a temporary victory for Portland cabbies who argued the new technology was getting favored treatment on rules ranging from insurance to pricing.

"It does strike me that we are potentially creating a separate but unequal system," said City Commissioner Nick Fish, "if we allow someone to set the price and another is regulated."

A council vote might have formalized a deal struck with Uber by Mayor Charlie Hales in December. The expectation going into Thursday's hearing was that the City Council would move toward approving a three-month test drive for Uber, and a deregulation of the cab industry that City Commissioner Steve Novick dubbed "Taxis Gone Wild."

Instead, Commissioners Nick Fish, Amanda Fritz and Dan Saltzman—none of whom had taken a public stance on Uber's return—poked dozens of holes in the plan.

The one certainty coming out of Thursday's hearing: After 22 months of Uber's banging on the door of City Hall, Portland government still has no road map for how to deal with the company. Here are the five biggest questions raised by Thursday's hearing:

### **1. How long will Uber wait on City Hall?**

It's not clear when the City Council will let Uber return. Delaying the next discussion until April 21 means a vote isn't likely until May. That's nearly two years after Uber first asked to enter the Portland market. And city transportation officials have refused to answer WW's questions about how long it would take to set up a test program for Uber and Lyft once the City Council gives the green light. Uber general manager Brooke Steger told commissioners last night the company would wait for Portland's approval. But the company defied City Hall last December when the process stretched on too long—and Thursday's delay places Uber in roughly the same limbo it faced then.

### **2. Can the City Council level the playing field for taxis?**

Here's a fun drinking game that would have shortened last night's hearing: Do a shot every time a cabbie or commissioner asked for a "level playing field" for taxis and Uber. (Everybody would have been asleep under the table halfway through.) On dozens of issues, the city task force appears to have given Uber less regulation than taxis: insurance, price caps, and vehicles accessible to people with disabilities. "The task force has not even begun to address the broader issue of whether equal access is still an ideal that Portland strives to uphold," the coalition of six cab companies told the City Council in its testimony—a sentiment Fish and Fritz echoed.

### **3. Does City Hall want more regulation for Uber, or less regulation for cabs?**

Taxi representatives hammered at their traditional themes last night: the process was too rushed, Uber was getting special treatment, small cab companies would go out of business. But they continued to dodge the question of what rules for Uber would be sufficient. Meanwhile, Fish and Novick debated whether the City Council should release cabbies into the free market, or force Uber to meet existing taxi regulations. To get out of its current mess, City Hall will have to pick one of these paths.

### **4. Will Uber and Lyft provide the city with data on its riders?**

This question is crucial because City Hall can't measure the effects of its regulations without knowing how much Uber is charging, and whether it's serving all neighborhoods. Steger told commissioners Uber would be happy to provide some data. "We do want to supply data to help the city better plan their transportation system and also plan their accessibility," she said. But she didn't want drivers—who each independently contract with Uber—to be required to apply for individual business licenses, or give the city their driver's license numbers. Fish smelled a rat, describing Uber's vague assurances as having "shades of short term rentals." (He was referring to the room-rental company Airbnb not supplying City Hall with the addresses of scofflaws not getting city permits.)

### **5. Do Hales and Novick have a third vote?**

This question may sound familiar, because Hales and Novick faced it repeatedly while trying to pass a \$46 million annual "street fee" to fund transportation projects. The answer then? Nope. Fritz, Saltzman and Fish balked on the street fee—and all of them sounded skeptical about Uber. Actually, "skeptical" is underselling Fritz's position. "I am never going to use Uber," Fritz said—and reminded her colleagues they don't have to vote for Uber's return at all.