

The Oregonian

Why Portland utility bills will rise a bit (OPINION)

By Nick Fish

January 30, 2016

On Monday I will release my proposed budgets for the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) and the Water Bureau. For the third straight year, I directed our public utilities to keep their combined rate increase *under* 5 percent, and once again they've delivered.

Budgets reflect values, choices and priorities. As part of our continuing commitment to transparency and accountability, I want to address three important questions I am often asked: What drives rate increases, what do I get for my money and does my voice count?

Let's start with some basics. The city's utilities manage \$21.7 billion in infrastructure, oversee more than 1,000 dedicated professionals and protect the health of six watersheds. The Bull Run Watershed is the envy of the nation. We provide clean, safe and reliable water to nearly a million people in the region. We manage 30 billion gallons of wastewater and stormwater annually. And last year, thanks to a partnership between BES, the Parks Bureau and the community, we welcomed salmon back to Crystal Springs.

So why are we proposing to increase rates? At the top of the list is the cost of complying with unfunded federal and state regulations. Like the \$1.4 billion Big Pipe project, completed on-time and on budget, which keeps sewage out of our streams and rivers. Or the federal rules requiring us to disconnect and bury our reservoirs.

Next is the cost of replacing old and damaged pipes. More than 2,000 miles of pipe deliver water throughout the Portland metropolitan area, and 2,500 miles of pipe carry billions of gallons of wastewater to our treatment plant annually. While our system is an engineering marvel, many of our pipes are more than 80 years old. The question isn't whether they'll break, but when.

Finally, we are committed to making our system more resilient. Portland is at risk of a major earthquake. When the "Big One" hits, we need to be prepared. That's why the budget includes critical investments to fortify our reservoirs and the pipes under the Willamette River.

No one likes to pay more for a basic service, especially when other household bills keep going up. A key issue for my family is: Are we getting good value in return?

As Portlanders, we enjoy some of the highest quality water in the nation. The Bull Run Watershed and Columbia South Shore Well Field meet or exceed all safe drinking water standards. The city delivers two gallons of water to my house for about a penny—a pretty good deal. And by investing in green infrastructure like bioswales and trees, we are harnessing the power of nature to capture runoff and save ratepayers money.

How do our combined water, sewer and stormwater bills stack up against comparable cities? A family of four would pay double or more for the same services in Seattle, San Francisco or Atlanta. Another way of looking at value is to ask what would happen if we cut corners. Flint,

Michigan, is a stark reminder that investing in our water system isn't just good policy, it's a matter of public health and safety.

Last year, in response to community concerns, I fulfilled a commitment to improve oversight and transparency by creating a new citizen-led Portland Utility Board (PUB). I also invited the highly regarded Citizens' Utility Board (CUB) to serve as an outside, independent advocate for our ratepayers. The CUB paid immediate dividends, recommending that we end an outdated developer subsidy. Together, the PUB and the CUB are helping us craft a responsible budget and plan for the future.

Your voice matters, too. In the months ahead, there will be plenty of opportunities for the families and businesses we serve to weigh in. Our proposed budgets will be posted online at <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/cbo>. I encourage you to attend a PUB meeting, participate in one of our community budget forums, or contact me directly at nick@portlandoregon.gov.

It is an honor to lead our public utilities. Working together, we can continue to deliver high quality services at a fair price, invest ratepayer dollars wisely, and protect our precious natural resources for generations to come.

City Council ready to approve Right 2 Dream Too move

*By Brad Schmidt
January 29, 2016*

An entrenched downtown homeless camp may finally have new digs if the Portland City Council has its way.

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz want to vote next week on a controversial plan to move the [Right 2 Dream Too camp](#) from its existing location in Old Town Chinatown to the Central Eastside.

Business leaders in the Central Eastside have protested the long-anticipated move. In 2013, similar opposition – and the threat of a legal challenge – [foiled a city plan to move the camp to the Pearl District](#).

At 2 p.m. Thursday, the City Council is set to approve the relocation plan and confirm its legality under zoning laws. The City Council also will vote to make the proposed homeless site larger by vacating an adjacent cul-de-sac.

Mayoral spokeswoman Sara Hottman on Friday said Hales plans to meet with business leaders over the weekend. The Central Eastside Industrial Council already contends that the camp isn't permitted, but it's not clear if they'll appeal the City Council's pending decision.

If ultimately approved, the homeless camp would move by Oct. 1 to a city-owned parking lot at Southeast Third Avenue and Harrison Street. The nearly half-acre site would include new showers, toilets and laundry facilities.

Up to 100 campers in tents would be permitted. Campers would receive free passes to use the Portland Streetcar.

Right 2 Dream Too began camping in 2011 at the corner of Northwest 4th Avenue and Burnside Street. Campers would pay nothing to use the new site, and the city's agreement would run 10 years.

Portland police won't staff new events for 2016, leaving city's big event culture in limbo

*By Jamie Hale
January 29, 2016*

Big events have been thriving in Portland. This is the city that hosts the biggest World Naked Bike Ride in the world, the famous Oregon Brewers Festival, annual marathons that attract tens of thousands of runners each, and music and beer festivals galore.

But in 2016, that culture could change – or at least enter into a state of limbo. The Portland Police Bureau announced earlier this year that it will no longer staff officers for new events, a decision that could have serious implications for organizers of local gatherings.

So what's the problem? Portland police say they are [severely short-staffed](#), and that they don't have officers willing to volunteer for the overtime shifts necessary to man so many big events. The Portland Bureau of Transportation, which issues the permits for these events, is in support.

"Last year we were over capacity for events and were unable to find enough people to staff events," said Pete Simpson, spokesman for the Portland Police Bureau. "We are in a worse place now than we were then, and will continue to be in a worse place moving on."

But as police spend the year replenishing their ranks, their inability to staff new events could be a headache for local organizers, some of whom are already frustrated working with a city that doesn't treat all events equally.

Who's affected?

Dylan Rivera, spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Transportation, said not *all* new events would be affected by the moratorium.

First and foremost, it's only "special events," which the bureau describes as "moving events on the right of way." Among those, the decision affects primarily large-scale athletic events that charge people to participate and require a large police presence, like marathons and bike rides.

Civic events that use city streets, like parades or protest marches, as well as events in parks and on private property, shouldn't be affected.

"They tend to be smaller and use less resources than athletic events," Rivera said. "Whether they're new or a repeat event, we'll try to get to 'yes' with them."

Some of Portland's marquee events expect to be entirely unaffected. Organizers with the [World Naked Bike Ride](#), [Shamrock Run](#) and [Oregon Brewers Festival](#) all said they had heard nothing from police about changes in 2016.

That still leaves athletic events in the dust. So far, only a few established events have been affected by the new moratorium, according to city officials, and most – including Portland's [Race for the Cure](#) – have negotiated to scale back planned expansions.

To date, only one event has been denied a permit for 2016 – but it happens to be run by one of Portland's biggest organizers: the Rose Festival Foundation.

Permits, money and rock 'n' roll

Since 2012, the Rose Festival has made the [Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon](#) the big kick-off to its two months of festivities. But this past October, the foundation learned that race organizer The Competitor Group was [pulling out of Portland altogether](#).

That left the foundation in a lurch, but led to the tentative formation of a more localized event, a special Rose Festival marathon scheduled for Memorial Day in downtown Portland. But when organizers submitted the permit, they received a response they didn't expect.

"We've been told that the city of Portland at the moment is not permitting new events," foundation CEO Jeff Curtis said at the time. "Our appeal is quite simple, we're not a new event, we have a desire to continue."

That appeal fell on deaf ears, as both the police bureau and bureau of transportation denied the permit a second time. The foundation worked with organizers of the Portland Marathon to reduce the necessary police staffing for the race, but the city officials held firm.

The staffing issues came early for another Portland event, [Bridge Pedal](#), the city's largest cycling event at 20,000 strong.

In 2015, 11 days before the event, director Rick Bauman said he got an email from Portland police saying that they weren't going to be able to fully staff the ride.

He was given two choices: Change the date or hire certified flaggers to fill the void.

"I can't guess how many hours we spent finding certified flaggers," Bauman said. In the end it worked out, but it only added to the bill he said has been growing astronomically in recent years.

With the \$6,500 the event spent on flaggers, the total cost of the 2015 Bridge Pedal came to roughly \$115,000. Of that, \$74,333 went to the city of Portland – \$40,789 for police, \$18,259 for the bureau of transportation services, \$12,285 for the permit fee and \$3,000 to Portland parks.

When Bauman first started Bridge Pedal in 1996, he said he paid the city around \$2,100 in fees.

The "cost recovery" fee structure, which was implemented after a 2009 Revenue Bureau study found that the city was losing hundreds of thousands of dollars every year on special

events, charges large-scale athletic events much more for permits than it does for free community events like parades.

Sidewalk and street events that keep crowds to fewer than 200 and obey traffic signals don't have to pay any permit fees at all, according to [current bureau of transportation permitting](#), while parades pay either \$150 or \$1,000 depending on size.

Athletic events, however, pay along a scale that runs from \$300 to \$3,500 for permitting fees – plus 15 cents per participant, actual costs of police and bureau of transportation resources, and an additional 10 percent surcharge of those costs.

Portland forever was so generous to events," Bauman said of the rising fees. "It's becoming clearly a much less event-friendly town."

City officials disagree. The big athletic events make up about a quarter of the city's 120 or so "special events" every year, they argue, but they account for 63 percent of the police costs and 88 percent of bureau of transportation costs for all events.

The department of transportation is not shy about the fact that they charge those events much more. Their fees help recover city costs, they content, and besides, organizers can afford to pay them.

Bridge Pedal paid big to the city of Portland in 2015, Rivera said, but with nearly 20,000 participants paying somewhere around \$35 each, they should have had plenty in their coffers to do it.

The big athletic events are taking up a "disproportionate" amount of city resources, bureau of transportation officials said, and the fees they pay are fair for "for the privilege of near exclusive use" of the public right of way.

The implications

For some local event organizers, the police moratorium doesn't provide a clear-cut policy so much as it raises a lot of difficult questions.

What does this mean for the economic impact that big events have brought to Portland? How will it affect Portland's thriving culture of big events? And, perhaps most troubling, can city officials really treat certain kinds of events more preferably than others?

Simpson said, for their part, Portland police don't actively discriminate against for-profit athletic events, but admitted it was harder to require officers to work them, as the bureau often does for big civic events like the Rose Festival parades.

"The problem for that, again, is that it's a for-profit event and people don't want to work it," he said. "That's a bad policy decision."

Organizers of those for-profit events could argue that they bring in a far greater economic impact than, say, the World Naked Bike Ride.

Jeff Dense, a professor of political science at Eastern Oregon University who conducts an [economic impact study](#) for the Oregon Brewers Festival each year, said the amount of money an event brings to the city can vary broadly, but can often be a huge boon to Portland.

"A large part of it is driven by two expenditure categories: lodging and food and drink," he said. "It's got to be dependent on the ability to attract out of town visitors."

Much of that money goes straight into city and county coffers via the 11.5 percent [occupancy taxes](#) on hotel rooms and short-term rentals, which can draw more than \$1 million for a single event.

Rose Festival organizers contend that a marathon would bring in plenty of out-of-town visitors, and they can already point to previous economic impact studies of the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon, which claim the race [injected around \\$14 million](#) into the local economy.

But that doesn't seem to factor into the decision to permit events, for police or the bureau of transportation. What it really comes down to is how much each event demands from the city.

"I think the issue is, if you're an event organizer and you're charging the public for use of a public space ... that's a different scale and different type of event that has different resource requirements," than say, a neighborhood parade, Rivera said. "That's really the difference here, that these event organizers are putting a different strain on the system."

Rising fees have attempted to recoup the high costs the city ate for years on special events, but Portland police assure their decision has nothing to do with not getting enough financial reimbursement.

"Quite honestly it's not an overtime or money issue ... It's merely we don't have the people," Simpson said. "You can write a check and, OK thanks for the money, but we don't have the people to give this to."

So how long will the moratorium on staffing new events last? The Portland Police Bureau doesn't know for sure, but it's safe to assume it will last through 2016 and beyond – as long as staffing remains an issue.

Mayor Charlie Hales' new budget adds funding for 17 new bureau positions, including five sworn police officers, but the president of the Portland Police Association union is [calling for 100 more officers](#) over the next 18 months to fill the "dangerously understaffed" force.

Until those holes in the force are filled, organizers of new events will have to find creative ways around using officers to block off Portland streets. The bottom line, officials stress, is that there just aren't enough bodies to go around.

"There's just a capacity issue with how much we can support," Simpson said. "Maybe we as a city have reached capacity for some of these (big events) right now."

That's one great question to ponder as Portland's big event culture hangs in limbo.

The Portland Tribune

Housing report: Progress, missed opportunities in plan

*By Jim Redden
February 1, 2016*

A \$20 million city program to mitigate the effects of gentrification in North and Northeast Portland has made some progress but failed to buy land for future affordable housing projects.

Those are among the conclusions that the Oversight Committee of the N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy will report to the City Council at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 3.

The committee was created to monitor the spending of \$20 million in urban renewal programs approved by the council following protests over longtime area residents being forced out because of increasing housing costs.

The committee's first report cites the following major accomplishments:

- Adopting of a groundbreaking Preference Policy to give some of those forced out of the area a chance to move back into affordable housing. The report says the policy "can be a national model for rectifying past mistakes in housing and urban renewal policies."
- Ground is ready to be broken on the Grant Warehouse project at 3368 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Boul. to provide 81 family-sized units of affordable housing.
- Helping a significant number of African-Americans stay in their home by helping to fund needed repairs.

But the committee found the city has not yet adopted a policy for buying land for future development, a practice known as Land Banking."

"The slow start to the land bank described in the Strategy is a significant failure," reads the report, which says "the market is hot and the cost of land is rising. Therefore time is of the essence."

GoLocalPDX

Novick's Gas Tax Bill Receives Wide Support as it Heads for Ballots

*By Brendan Murray
February 1, 2016*

Things are looking up for the gas tax proposed by Portland City Commissioner and Transportation chief Steve Novick. On Wednesday, the proposal passed through the city

council, riding support from wide-reaching areas of the Rose City and guaranteeing the bill would be on voters' ballots in May.

Novick's gas tax was approved for ballots by the Portland City Council on Wednesday via unanimous vote. Now, voters are the only thing keeping the tax, which would be used to fund costly street repair projects, from being instituted.

That may not be much of a hindrance. In a poll conducted when Novick first proposed the tax last year, roughly 55 percent of 400 Portlanders surveyed say there would vote in favor of the gas tax. 37 percent said they would vote against it and 8 percent said they were undecided.

Jim Moore, Director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University, told GoLocal that while those poll numbers are encouraging, they are far from a guaranteed victory for Novick's proposed tax.

"With a poll of 400 people 55 percent of the people in favor of it translates to something like 50 to 60 percent in an election, which is definitely a majority, but it could be a razor-thin one," Moore said. "The numbers he really should have confidence in are the fewer 'no' responses. 37 percent translates to about 40 to 42 percent of voters who said they were against it, and that is very good news for the tax."

Endorsements Too

The proposal seems to be popular not just with voters, but with politicians and city leaders as well. Mayoral candidate Ted Wheeler and current Mayor Charlie Hales both lent it their support already.

The City Club of Portland said they found the gas tax to be "the most feasible" proposal to repair the city's streets. The Portland Business Alliance, the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance also have indicated they support a gas tax.

Most recently, Stuart Emmons, Novick's opponent in his quest for re-election, said that he supports the proposal, though he has concerns with its effects.

"I am for addressing our huge street maintenance problem, it has only gotten worse since some on the City Council bungled the street fee so badly. I am supportive of the gas tax with reservations," Emmons told GoLocal.

"Trust needs to be restored after the street fee imbroglio with new leadership. PBOT has to get their accounting cleaned up so funds going in are properly spent. I am (also) concerned that a gas tax may tax lower income Portlanders more, as they may use more gas. Vehicles that do the most damage to our streets - busses and large trucks - need to be part of helping to pay for street maintenance. The money from the tax needs to be spent on what is stipulated in the tax language. The gas tax will help, but it will not fix the problem by itself."

Novick said the support from the public and city leaders was "extremely encouraging."

"It gives me enough confidence to say we've got a good shot at passing it if we work hard," Novick said.

How The Tax Would Be Used

Estimates by Novice and the PDOT say that the ten-cent per gallon tax would raise \$64 million over four years.

Novick asked the Portland Bureau of Transportation to draft a list of possible projects that could be funded by the tax. It includes major street repair projects, funding for safe routes to school throughout the city, and traffic safety improvements in high crash corridors.

In that breakdown, \$35.8 million would be used for paving projects, including more than 30 lane miles of busy street paving. \$8.8 million would be used for safe routes for school projects, which including school crossings, paths and missing connections, sidewalks, traffic calming, and bicycle route connections. \$6.34 million would be used to repair the city's busiest sidewalks.

The remaining \$13 million would be split among other projects, including improvements to bike lanes, crosswalks and high crash areas.