

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: From Exceptionalism to Septic System

Will the City Pick a Pricey Water Treatment Plant, or a Really Pricey One? Both, Probably.

By Dirk VanderHart

June 28, 2017

ROUGHLY a month from now, the Portland City council will decide whether to move forward with an expensive plant for treating Portland's very clean water, or **a really expensive plant** for treating Portland's very clean water.

I'm guessing it will choose both.

This is purely unscientific, but sitting in on city council meetings, you get accustomed to seeing **a glimmer in the eye of council members** when they seize on something they like, and prick up your ears when they begin asking lots of follow-ups on one point or another. More often than not, those are trusty dousing rods pointing to future decisions.

On Tuesday, when council had its first formal hearing on how it's going to treat the **Bull Run water supply** for the parasite cryptosporidium (often called "crypto"), there was plenty to divine.

The city's facing two essential choices—at least as the **issue is framed** by Portland Water Bureau Director Mike Stuhr. Portland can treat its water system with ultraviolet light, at a cost of roughly \$105 million. Or it can use a more comprehensive filtration system, which could cost \$500 million or more.

We have until August 11 to decide.

There's a lot to balance in this equation. At a time when the water bureau is building **a seemingly endless stream of expensive shit**—and therefore hiking up water rates—the UV plant is cheaper, and could be built in relatively short order. But it only does one thing: fry the crypto parasite.

Filtration is massively more expensive, and would take more than a decade to install. But there's also an argument that it's ultra-effective, and will better position Portland to comply with regulations as they pop up.

"If I was made of money... I would build a filtration plant and **I wouldn't think twice about it,**" Stuhr told council on Tuesday.

But Stuhr's not made of money, and neither are you. So after council members began talking about laying groundwork for a filtration system in coming decades, the water bureau director made a pitch: Build the UV plant and run it for 25 or 30 years until the parts begin to fail. When they do, **move forward with filtration.**

"I would have it in my head to put money away for a filtration plant," Stuhr said. "When the time came for this [UV plant] to get a time-out because it's too old, I have planned and I have designed" a filtration system.

It's a compromise that seemed to set elected officials' eyes a-glimmering, and as I said up top, I'm guessing city council will largely follow Stuhr's lead. But let's also acknowledge this is **a head-snappingly fast pivot** for Portland.

Until this year, this city peacocked and flaunted its clean water supply to no end. We were the lone system in the country to not be required by the federal government to treat for crypto, which lives in animal droppings, because we *hadno* crypto.

Then **this winter's wretched rains** washed scads of the stuff into the watershed, causing 14 positive hits from January to March. Suddenly, Portland's unique federal hall pass is being revoked—even though we've not found crypto since March, and there's no indication anyone's health was jeopardized—and we're not talking about cleanliness of our water as much. We're talking about a \$500 million, full-on filtration plant.

I don't have much doubt we'll get it, eventually. **Whether it's at all necessary is another matter.**

The Skanner

County's Homeless Population Increases by 10 Percent

By Melanie Sevchenko
June 29, 2017

Last week Multnomah County released the results of its bi-annual homeless count. A requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the count includes all people living in shelters, transitional housing and on the streets in a single night.

On Feb. 22, 2017, the number of homeless people sleeping outdoors in Multnomah County was 1,668, while 2,509 people were living in emergency shelters and transitional housing, including self-managed homeless camps like Dignity Village, Right 2 Dream Too and Hazelnut Grove.

Altogether, some 4,177 people are without permanent housing on any given night.

Most disheartening is the fact that while people of color make up more than 40 percent of the total homeless population and 35 percent of the unsheltered population, they represent only 29 percent of county's residents.

Increase in sheltered, but still more homeless

Since the last “point-in-time” count in 2015, the findings represent an 11.6 percent decrease in the unsheltered population – the lowest it's been since 2009.

Moreover, the sheltered population has increased by 31 percent, due to the county's efforts in making available 637 additional beds since January 2016.

Investments in shelters and housing aid have largely been the work of A Home for Everyone, a partnership between the county, city and community members. As the region's first community-wide plan for tackling homelessness, the group has placed a record 4,600 homeless people into permanent housing in three years. That's a 55 percent increase since 2014. Among those who found homes, 62 percent are people of color.

Adding to that, more than 5,200 homeless – 67 percent of those people of color – have received prevention services since A Home for Everyone launched in 2014.

Yet in two years, the county's homeless population has in fact increased by 10 percent, or 376 individuals.

Income disparity, soaring rents

A major reason for the increase in homelessness, according to county figures, is the growing income disparity and rents that have far outpaced wages.

The average cost of a one-bedroom apartment – now far above \$1,100 a month – has grown 20 times faster than the median income since 2015. For those making minimum wage, rent increases since 2005 have cost thousands of dollars more in real income, making it much more difficult to afford other basics like groceries and transportation.

“The people that folks used to turn to in their lives for help, with maybe a room to stay, are now facing homelessness. That’s where we are right now,” Denis Theriault, spokesperson for the Joint Office of Homeless Services, told *The Skanner*.

While Portland is sometimes characterized as a destination for homeless and transient people, perhaps due to its moderate temperatures and image of public tolerance, the numbers show otherwise.

According to research by city officials and Portland State University, about 85 percent of homeless people are from the community in which they dwell; about 15 percent come from elsewhere.

Moreover, the Rose City’s homeless population is lower than other West Coast cities, which saw notable increases in their unsheltered populations.

King County, which encompasses the greater Seattle area, saw a 45 percent increase in its unsheltered population since 2015. Los Angeles County increased by 38 percent and Alameda County (Oakland) by 61 percent.

Disproportionate homelessness among people for color

In Portland and surrounding Multnomah County, communities for color continue to experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness.

Furthermore, African Americans, along with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, are homeless at a rate more than twice as high as their percentage of the county’s population.

Significant, however, is the fact that the African American homeless population did see a drop during the recent count.

Compared to 2015, there were 185 fewer Black Portlanders without housing, a decrease in eight percentage points, from 22.6 percent to 16.2.

There was also a 57 percent drop in African Americans experiencing unsheltered homelessness, from 396 in 2015 to 169 in 2017.

Following the 2015 count, A Home for Everyone made a concerted effort to increase services for homeless African Americans. The partnership focused on what it called “disaggregated populations,” essentially breaking data down into smaller subpopulations.

“So rather than just talking about the homeless as a group, they had priorities,” Mayor Ted Wheeler told *The Skanner*. “They were concerned about the jump in the number of people of color, so they focused on sheltering and transitional strategies for people of color.”

Minorities are also disproportionately represented in homeless populations of veterans, families and female victims of domestic violence.

Disabled people the most vulnerable

People with disabilities continue to make up the largest group of people experiencing homelessness. Of the 4,177 homeless counted in February, 60.5 percent are living with one or more disabling conditions, including mental and physical disabilities and substance abuse issues.

“We do know that those folks have a particular challenge when it comes to attaining permanent housing,” said Theriault.

One solution the county is proposing is permanent supportive housing, which provides homes along with wraparound services that include treatment and case management.

“That’s one of the ways we’re going to stabilize those folks who cycle in and out of emergency rooms and shelter beds,” continued Theriault.

As to why particular groups continue to face homelessness over others, Multnomah County’s Joint Office of Homeless Services said PSU is currently preparing the full “point-in-time” report, to be released in July.

Mayor Ted Wheeler at Six Months

*By The Skanner News
June 29, 2017*

Last week, Mayor Ted Wheeler visited *The Skanner’s* office to talk about criminal justice reform, homelessness, national politics and what his administration has accomplished since he took office Jan. 3.

This interview has been edited for space and clarity.

THE SKANNER NEWS: Six months is not a lot of time, but in those six months, what do you feel you’ve accomplished?

TED WHEELER: I see myself very much as a transitional mayor. We’re going from being a city that is a medium-sized city to one that is truly becoming a global city. We cannot stop the number of people that are coming here. We can’t change the fact that we are very much on the radar screen nationally and internationally.

As people are aware we have significant challenges around race, which I have not shied away from calling out quite intentionally – from my City Club speech to the framing of the search that I’m conducting nationally for a police chief, to conversations that I’ve had in the community.

We’re becoming a more diverse community, but at the same time, the number of African Americans in our community is declining. We have not yet found the right frame for that conversation and that success.

Getting more to what we’ve actually done, we balanced the budget with little fanfare, created some good opportunities – a \$600 million program to invest in infrastructure, predominantly transportation, civic and parks infrastructure. We created the community service officer program, which is part of the reform package that I initially put on the table, around police reform. These are non-sworn officers who will not carry weapons, who will work with the community as part of our intensification around community policing.

Obviously, we've worked very hard on the homeless front. There are three new shelters that we've opened since I took office through partnerships with private-sector developers and real estate people that has made an impact on street homelessness. We've obviously, now, successfully passed our housing bond, and we've put into place both the advisory committee and the oversight committee that will be responsible for making sure that that \$250 million investment in workforce and lower-income housing is very successful. I've worked with Commissioner (Chloe) Eudaly to make sure that all of the thousands of workforce and lower-income housing units that are in the pipeline for permitting, that we see those go from permit to actually shovels in the ground and cranes in the air.

We now have what I would describe as the most aggressive climate action plan in the United States. And it intentionally is a just climate action plan, meaning that everybody in the community who is impacted by the plan – including lower-income folks, including people who are not typically invited to the table, including communities of color – are very much part of the process, and gain the economic benefits from making investments in renewable energy strategies, infrastructure, R & D, educational opportunities. We're working hand in glove with the Coalition of Communities of Color to make sure that everybody benefits from that program. So those are just some of the things we've done in six months.

TSN: You appoint a lot of board and commissions. On some public boards and commissions, people will serve six or eight terms. Do you think those boards can become stagnated?

TW: I do think that's a possibility, and as communities change – particularly a community changing as rapidly as Portland is – I think it is healthy to bring new people onto boards. I'm very proud, actually, of my record in the first six months, in terms of bringing new people onto boards and commissions and supporting new leadership at city hall, supporting new leadership on my team, that I think is more reflective of the community that we're going to see in the future. I don't need to lecture you on demographic change, but people are keenly aware of the fact that for school-aged kids under the age of 10, we have a minority-majority community.

My question as mayor is, are we doing everything on the civic side to ensure that this next generation of leaders is ready to take the lead in all institutions -- not just government, but the private sector, the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors? We've got to make sure that we're setting the table for this next generation to not only be fully participatory in a meaningful way but also that they are ready to lead. And I'm highly committed to that.

TSN: On police reform, why did you decide to take the search for a new police chief nationwide, and where are we at with that?

TW: First of all, we have to go back. Former Mayor Hales had a problem with his police chief. He lost his police chief and he appointed Chief Marshman to be the police chief. I was, of course, in the final throes of my mayoral campaign and I was asked, would I just stick with that chief or would I do a national search? I said I would do a national search.

I think it is very important in this position to make sure that given the changes that are taking place in the community, given the changes that are taking place nationally around policing, it's very important to me, as the police commissioner, to make sure that I have a police chief that is on board with the stated reforms that I put on the table during my campaign. It may be that Chief Marshman is the best candidate. That being said, I want to see what the national field of candidates are. This isn't about Marshman. I just want to make sure that we have the best police chief that we can, given the agenda that I want to accomplish as the mayor of this city. The day I said that I would do a national search, he was also asked whether he thought I was making the right call or not, and he said I was, that I was making the right call. So it's a campaign promise.

Campaign promises mean something to me, and I think it's a good idea. I think all of us should be under the assumption that at any given moment, we could be held up to a national standard in terms of our abilities.

There is definitely a culture to policing and it's not just in Portland, but nationally.

On the whole, I'm very supportive of the work that the men and the women in our police bureau do. It's a very difficult job and I think they do it very well. That being said, there is a culture there. That culture and other bureaus have their cultures too. Given the fact that a sworn police officer has the authorization to use deadly force in certain circumstances makes it different than the transportation bureau and different than the budget office and different than the other city bureaus.

It is important for me as the police commissioner to make sure that our police bureau is the national model in terms of community policing, in terms of engagement, in terms of the best practices around public safety, that we fulfill the commitments around 21st-century policing and that people in our community feel truly safe in the community in every respect.

TSN: What are the city's plans to maintain the community oversight now that COAB is gone?

TW: That's part of the conversation that we're having with the Department of Justice. The big frame of is respecting community input while creating a safe and respectful and productive environment for people who actually serve on the COAB to make sure that they can do the work that they need to do without being heckled or harassed while they're trying to do it. And I think we're talking through a couple of ideas that could help us respect both of those competing interests. I'm actually pretty optimistic on that front.

TSN: Switching to transportation, there's been a lot of talk in Vancouver to restart the Interstate-5 bridge again. What's your feeling about that? And what, if it were to happen, would the city's feeling on this be?

TW: Here's the bottom line: the bridge definitely needs to be replaced. It is antiquated, it is on wooden pilings, it is highly subject to seismic activity. It is a major transportation link on the West Coast.

Here's the "however." When this process started, you'll recall one of the signature achievements that I'm most proud of as the former Multnomah County chair was the Health Disparity Initiative, which became a national model in terms of looking at how decisions we make – around urban planning, around transportation planning, around other issues – can disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income people. It is not accidental that I-5 and I-84 run right through the heart of the historic Black community in the city of Portland. That was intentional. It was the path of least resistance.

TSN: By the way, you can go to Spokane, you can go to Seattle, you can go to Miami, you can go to St. Louis, you can go to Gary, Indiana -- and it's the same.

TW: Absolutely, and the result of that placement is that asthma, stress levels, blood pressure issues – all of those things come in higher concentrations in those immediate corridors. So when this idea came forward to re-engineer the I-5 corridor we made sure that the county was in there with the report on health disparity and the impacts. I want to make sure that any new project has that exact same impact analysis taking part. Number two, there has to be a real-world financial plan and we never quite got there with the last iteration. And it's got to be bi-state. As state treasurer, I was very skeptical of an Oregon-only solution. Why would we and our taxpayers take all of the financial risk for something that has a clear benefit for two states? And in fact, I can

make the argument that California and British Columbia benefit from it as well. And yet Oregon was going to take all of the risk and issue all of the bonds and put our state's credit rating at risk – that's not going to happen under my leadership.

If we do this – and I think this is, we're a long way from there, but if it gets there, I want to see a real-world financial plan. In addition, since we have to start from scratch, let's start looking at some of those alternative strategies that would reduce traffic that were discounted more or less early in the process without a real thorough vetting. We have a chance here to do it right and, last but not least, if we don't have two governors who are fully supportive and willing to lead, let's not even start. Because it's got to be a bi-state leadership moment. The feds need to know that the region is unified and committed. And I'm ready to participate in that conversation as the mayor of Portland, but I'm most certainly not ready to go it alone. We've seen that that doesn't work.

I can safely prognosticate that there will be a new bridge. The question is when. But it's got to happen. If anything, it's decades overdue and the community obviously has to be an active participant in getting that process going. It can't just be a couple of elected officials behind closed doors priming the pump. The community really needs to stand up and say, "This is what we need. This is how we want it to be. These are the issues we want the government to take into account as they're thinking about building this."