

The Oregonian

Portland Will Have More Salt, More Plows to Handle Winter Storms

*By Elliot Njus
October 31, 2017*

Portland is beefing up its storm arsenal in an effort to avoid a repeat of last winter, when snow and ice throttled the city for days at a time.

The new plan includes more widespread use of road salt, which city transportation officials had until last winter rejected as too environmentally hazardous.

The city's transportation bureau is buying six new salt spreaders that can be installed on city trucks, and it's turning to other bureaus and private businesses to get more crews out clearing roads.

"I think we're much better prepared," said Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the transportation bureau. "We've learned a lot of lessons from the last winter."

This year, extreme conditions prompted the state's transportation agencies to take extraordinary measures.

The new investment falls short of the \$1.2 million in new equipment Saltzman and the transportation bureau had sought in the latest city budget.

And the city will still rely on rising temperatures and traffic to clear ice and snow off the many roads and side streets it doesn't plow at all. It will also count on Mother Nature to clear the last vestiges from the roads it does plow, because plows intentionally leave up to half an inch of snow or ice in place.

Portland's moderate climate usually comes through. But when it doesn't, it can cost the city in productivity.

An inch of snow, which would be charitably called a "dusting" in other parts of the country, brought Portland to its knees Wednesday.

Last winter, Portland Public Schools lost nine days of school due to snow. Businesses, too, were closed for days at a time, and hourly workers lost wages. Mayor Ted Wheeler asked landlords to waive late-rent fees in the wake of the storm.

That was an exceptional winter for Portland. But some forecasts call for a similarly fierce, snowy season ahead thanks to the influence La Nina, a pattern of atmospheric and oceanic cooling.

This year, the city will keep 300 tons of salt on hand, enough to treat between 2,000 and 3,000 lane-miles of roadway. It can also procure and store another 1,000 tons of salt ahead of a big storm.

Portland will still try to limit its use of road salt to a handful of roads that are routinely rendered impassable in snow, and where runoff won't send salt into rivers and streams. But in severe storms, the city will consider more widespread use, Saltzman said.

The city transportation bureau will also draft drivers and trucks from the city water bureau during storms, and it will hire private contractors to supplement city plows. And it will potentially call on Seattle to send aid, and return the favor if that city is socked in.

As in later storms last season, the city will assign police to enforce tire-chain orders, keeping drivers from trying their luck on hills and getting stuck, blocking traffic and snowplows in the process.

And it will offer parking meter amnesty when storms hit to encourage drivers to take transit rather than risking a trip in their private vehicle.

Saltzman previously sought \$1.2 million to buy new snow-clearing equipment and \$1.6 million a year to beef up PBOT's weather-response staff and materials.

Instead, the bureau got \$30,000 for the new salt-spreaders, and the city set aside \$300,000 in contingency funds to pay for any unforeseen snow removal costs.

"If we do see a major snow or ice event on the level of last year, I won't be hesitant to ask for more money," Saltzman said.

After January's storms, Wheeler, then just two weeks in office, said the city didn't do enough to keep roads clear and commerce flowing.

"I think the public can expect to see a marked improvement this year from last year," his spokesman, Michael Cox, said Monday. "Last year we faced an unprecedented series of winter weather events. We learned a lot of lessons and we believe those lessons have been applied to our planning this year.

Portland didn't do enough to keep roads cleared and businesses able to operate in the aftermath of last week's snowstorm, Mayor Ted Wheeler said Tuesday.

He said the mayor would also announce plans to address concerns about housing and emergency shelter available during severe winter storms. At least four homeless people died of exposure last winter.

Certain limitations of the city's snow-removal plan won't change.

The city will still only plow roughly a third of its roadways, with a focus on public transit and emergency routes. Starting this year, however, it will include key school routes and the central business district -- where heavy traffic was previously thought sufficient to keep roads clear -- in an effort to avoid a citywide shutdown like last winter.

The city will also keep its goal of achieving "passable" roads that are navigable for vehicles with front-wheel drive or traction devices on their tires.

Portland city plows leave up to half an inch of snow on the road, relying on chemical deicer, the weight of passing vehicles and improving weather to remove the rest. Portland officials say that avoids damage to plow blades or the roads surface, and therefore repair costs when the snow season ends.

But that's an uncommon practice in areas more practiced in snow removal, and with more funding dedicated to that work.

Six days of freezing conditions gave readers plenty of time to ponder life's big questions — and also some smaller ones, mostly about ice.

Cities in the nation's Midwestern "snow belt," for example, which set target times to achieve bare and wet pavement after snowfall. Seattle, too, tries to reach that standard within 12 hours after a lull in the storm.

Portland can't be compared to those areas because of the tendency for temperatures to hover near the freezing point, said Peter Wojcicki, the transportation bureau's street system division manager.

Last year's storm was complicated by a short thaw followed by a days-long deep-freeze that turned packed snow into a sheet of ice that plows can't remove. Those freeze-thaw cycles are less common elsewhere, Wojcicki said.

Even with its conservative approach to plowing, Portland still incurred significant road-repair costs after the last winter storm season. The transportation bureau in the spring identified more than 1,000 potholes left behind after the snow and ice storms and made worse by drivers' use of tire studs and chains.

The city temporarily quadrupled the number of road crews typically assigned to pothole repair to address the backlog in what it called a "Patch-a-Thon."

The Portland Tribune

Spending of Affordable Housing Cash Slow Coming

By Jim Redden

October 31, 2017

Complexity of bond fund policy adds another five-month delay to next spending decisions

The Portland Housing Bureau is soliciting proposals for spending the affordable housing bond funds approved by Portland voters in November 2016.

But according to PHB Director Kurt Creager, the City Council might not receive the first proposals until March — five months after it approved the policy framework for spending the money and 16 months after the \$258.4 million bond measure was first passed.

"We need to vet the proposals and forward the most promising ones to the mayor, who is in charge of the bureau. He will then submit them to the council," Creager said.

And even then, the first proposals to go before the council are not likely to include the option of buying any newly completed, ready-to-occupy developments. Creager said the PHB is still working with the City Attorney's Office on a pilot project for buying so-called "turnkey" developments to be submitted to the council for approval before the end of the year.

Some think such projects could reduce the cost of them significantly, allowing more units to be built or acquired than the 1,300 called for in the bond measure.

"I'm encouraged the city is willing to consider turnkey projects. We are in the middle of a housing emergency. If the city can reduce the cost of its projects, it can build more units," said Rob Justus, co-owner of Home First Development, a private company that builds projects for affordable housing developers.

The company's most recent project, the Maple Vine apartments in east Portland, cost an average of around \$90,000 per unit to build. That compares to more than \$200,000 per unit in affordable housing projects traditionally supported with city funds.

"The question is, do we want to build the most affordable housing units at the lowest cost?" Justus asked.

Land, existing buildings sought

For now, the PHB is only soliciting proposals for land where projects that can be built and existing buildings can be preserved or converted to affordable housing. The drawn-out schedule reflects the complexity of approving rules and procedures for what is essentially a new city policy for providing affordable housing. In all other cases, the city has contributed a share of the cost of projects proposed by other partners, including both nonprofit and for-profit affordable housing developers.

But because of restrictions in the Oregon Constitution, the city is prohibited from partnering with private partners on projects funded by the affordable housing bond. The city also will own and operate the completed projects, although it can contract out the management of them.

To help work out the details, the council appointed a 22-member Stakeholders Advisory Group that drafted the framework the council approved on Oct. 11.

That does not mean the city hasn't spent some of the bond money, however. In February, it bought the existing 263-unit Ellington Apartments in Northeast Portland for \$47 million after it was put up for sale. PHB pledged \$37 million in bond funds toward the purchase and is working to raise the remaining \$10 million from other sources.

Creager said PHB is developing a policy to submit to the council for transitioning the apartment complex to affordable housing while minimizing the eviction of current tenants earning more than 60 percent of the area's median family income. It will apply to future purchases of existing residential properties, too.

The city also has paid administrative costs with bond money, leaving around \$205 million available for additional purchases and construction costs.

Other projects underway

Despite the delay in spending the bond funds, more and more affordable housing projects are opening, under construction, being announced, or are in the planning process.

The most recent one to open is the 148-unit Vine Maple apartments at Southeast 146th Avenue and Burnside Street. It is the fifth affordable housing complex built by Home First Development for Relay Resources, the nonprofit affordable housing developer and operator formerly known as PHC Northwest.

"I'm thrilled we're able to add significant inventory to East Portland. Our largest property to date will increase the supply of affordable housing in Portland, which helps us serve our mission," said Relay Resources President Alysa Rose.

No public funds were used to finance the new complex. Relay Resources declined to accept them because they include strings that increase project costs, such as having to pay workers government-set "prevailing wages" that equal union wages.

Despite the lack of public subsidies, the Vine Maple rents are affordable to households earning 60 percent or less of MFI. Studio apartments rent for \$535 a month, while one-bedroom units go for \$726 and two-bedroom units are priced at \$868 a month.

Justus said the recently completed project is an example of the kind of turnkey project the city could buy with the affordable housing bond funds. It has many of the amenities the council says it wants in affordable housing developments, including easy access to transit. Justus said it also meets Earth Advantage standards, although it did not go through the costly certification process.

And Metro recently announced it will help develop a 48-unit affordable housing building at Southeast 82nd Avenue and Division Street. The regional government acquired the property in December 2014 in anticipation of a bus rapid transit project on 82nd and Division. When that part of the project was canceled, Metro allowed the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon to reopen it as a community center. The group will have its headquarters on the ground floor of the completed project.

Portland gets Zombie RVs off the Streets

*By KOIN 6 News
October 31, 2017*

Outside the turn in, a homeless man who said he was trying to get back on his feet after a surgery, had a sign asking to buy or acquire an RV.

It was a relief, Portland resident Kerry Pataki said, to finally watch his old RV, with an engine that could barely start, properly go.

Pataki was one of 18 now-former RV owners at the Portland International Raceway on Sunday to unload their run-down vehicles. The City of Portland took the zombie RVs in the hope they wouldn't be abandoned or back in the streets without proper prepares.

"I'm so grateful for the city to the Portland Bureau of Transportation," Pataki said.

Dylan Rivera, a spokesperson with PBOT, said getting the zombie RVs off the streets can improve safety.

"If we get 18 RV's as we are scheduled to today, that means potentially 18 homeowners don't have an RV parked in front of their house that's been abandoned, leaking sewage, becoming a fire hazard," Rivera said.

Rivera said Portland Fire & Rescue has responded to at least 25 RV fires just this year. One time, a burning RV torched power lines in a neighborhood. He also mentioned abandoned RVs can be a hub for criminal activity. The city had to hire additional parking staff to deal with abandoned RVs.

The task in total has earned quite the price tag.

"We expect to spend more than a million dollars this year, getting RV's off the streets of Portland," Rivera said.

Outside the Raceway, George Jurdy, a homeless man who said he was trying to get back on his feet after a surgery, had a sign asking to buy or acquire an RV.

"I figured this might be a good place to pick up a motor home," Jurdy said.

Rivera said the goal of Sunday's RV disposal was to get abandoned RVs off the street.

"That's what we are up against," Rivera said, "folks who are trying to buy these on the cheap and sometimes disposing of them on city streets."

Two Bureau Directors Replaced

*By Jim Redden
October 31, 2017*

Plus, parasite detected twice in city water and deputy police chief position authorized

Two top city bureau personnel changes were announced last Wednesday.

First, Bureau of Human Resources director Anna Kanwit announced her retirement. In an email to city officials, Kanwit gave no reason for her retirement but said her last day will be Nov. 30. Mayor Ted Wheeler, who oversees the bureau, replaced her with assistant director Serida Summes-McGee, who was hired last year.

Then Commissioner Chloe Eudaly announced the appointment of Rebecca Esau as director of the Bureau of Development Services. Esau had been acting as interim director since Eudaly ousted former director Paul Scarlett in April. Eudaly previously replaced the director of another bureau she oversees, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, with Suk Rhee.

Parasite detected twice in city water

Cryptosporidium was detected in Bull Run water for the second time in five days in a sample collected Sunday, Oct. 22. The previous positive sample was collected Wednesday, Oct. 18.

Although certain strains of crypto are potentially deadly to humans, Portland Water Bureau officials insist Bull Run water is safe because the amounts are very low and the strains detected are unlikely to affect humans. But they recommend people with compromised immune systems consult their doctors about drinking the water.

Bull Run is the primary source of water for Portland and much of the region. Crypto had not been detected in it until earlier this year. Many of the positive results have followed heavy rains, which could have washed animal feces, where crypto is found, into the city reservoir.

Under orders from the Oregon Health Authority, the City Council recently approved the construction of a filtration plant that will remove crypto and other contaminants from the water. It will take 10 years to complete and cost up to \$500 million.

Deputy police chief position authorized

The City Council voted unanimously Wednesday to authorize the new position of deputy chief at the Portland Police Bureau.

Mayor Ted Wheeler requested the position to serve between the chief and existing assistant chiefs. The maximum salary would be \$186,576 a year.

Wheeler appointed former Oakland Deputy Police Chief Danielle Outlaw to head the bureau in August. She is being paid \$225,750 a year, which includes a 5 percent bonus for living in the city.

Crypto Detected Four Times in a Week

*By Jim Redden
October 30, 2017*

Portland officials say Bull Run water is safe to drink but advise those with compromised immune systems to consult their doctors

A potentially disease-causing microorganism has now been detected in Bull Run water four times in a week.

According to the Portland Water Bureau, Cryptosporidium was detected in two separate samples of Bull Run water on Tuesday, Oct. 24. Before that, crypto — as the microorganism is commonly called — was detected in samples collected on Sunday, Oct. 22, and Wednesday, Oct. 18.

According to the Portland Water Bureau, each of the Oct. 24 samples had just one oocysts, an microscopic indicator of crypto. Other positive detections have also been very low. About two dozen additional samples collected during the week tested negative.

Portland water and Multnomah County health officials continue to insist the Bull Run water is safe, but advise those with compromised immune systems to consult their doctors. There has been no documented increase in illness caused by crypto.

Many of the positive results have followed heavy rains, which could have washed animal feces, where crypto is found, into the city reservoir there. When used as the sole or blended source of water, reservoir serves Portland and many surrounding communities.

The bureau is continuing to use Bull Run as its sole source of water, but groundwater wells along the Columbia River remain available as a backup.

Because Bull Run water has historically been very clean, the Oregon Health Authority granted Portland a variance to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules requiring that government entities providing water treat it for crypto. But, beginning earlier this year, crypto has been repeatedly detected in it. Because of that, the state declared it was canceling the variance and the Portland City Council approved the construction of a filtration plant that will remove crypto and other contaminants from Bull Run water. It will cost up to an estimated \$500 million and may not be completed for another 10 years or more.

Exposure to crypto can cause cryptosporidiosis, a serious illness. Symptoms can include diarrhea, vomiting, fever and stomach pain. People with healthy immune systems recover without medical treatment. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), people with severely weakened immune systems are at risk for more serious disease. Symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness. Examples of people with weakened immune systems include those with AIDS; those with inherited diseases that affect the immune system; and cancer and transplant patients who are taking certain immunosuppressive drugs.

Public health surveillance during and after a similar series of low-level detections from January through March of this year did not see an increase in crypto-related illness. The general public is not advised to take additional precautions.

In addition to the city of Portland, PWB provides Bull Run water to Burlington, the City of Gresham, the City of Sandy, the City of Tualatin, Green Valley, GNR, Hideaway Hills, Lake Grove, Lorna Portland Water, Lusted, Palatine Hill, Pleasant Home, Raleigh, Rockwood, Skyview Acres, Tualatin Valley, Two Rivers, Valley View and West Slope Water Districts. To

learn if your drinking water comes from Bull Run, please contact your local drinking water provider.

The public is encouraged to view all sampling results posted to the City's website at www.portlandoregon.gov/water/cryptoresults.

Customers with questions regarding water quality can call the Water Line at 503-823-7525.