

The Oregonian

Costs to build Portland drinking water reservoir soar past expectations

*By Gordon Friedman
August 25, 2019*

The price to construct a new drinking water reservoir in Southwest Portland has ballooned more than 200% over the project's lifetime, according to officials' recent testimony to the City Council.

New expenses were added Wednesday when the mayor and commissioners approved \$8 million in spending increases that officials said were necessary to keep the project going.

All told, the cost to build a 12.4 million gallon underground reservoir at Washington Park in order to satisfy federal regulations has soared far past officials' original estimate of \$67 million when the project launched in 2009. In 2015, engineers at the Water Bureau said the figure was actually closer to \$170 million. Today, the cost is at least \$205 million.

Additional expenses have arisen because of what the Portland Water Bureau has described as unforeseen soil problems encountered at the site.

The cost overruns anger skeptics who question officials' ability to manage large infrastructure projects as Portland drinking water rates remain among the highest nationwide and keep rising.

"We predicted this from the very beginning," said Floy Jones, an activist with Friends of the Reservoirs, a group that has opposed the demolition of Portland's historic water reservoirs.

Jones, who has filed suit against the Portland Water Bureau over what she views as illegal spending, said the expanding budget for the Washington Park project is "totally absurd" and the consequence of what she said was the project's "poor design."

Water Bureau spokeswoman Felicia Heaton said Thursday that the \$67 million amount told to the City Council at the project's start was "a very, very early estimate."

After work began, engineers encountered unexpected costs because the soil at the Washington Park site was more unstable than previously thought, said Teresa Elliot, the bureau's chief engineer. The complexity of the terrain made assessing underground conditions difficult to estimate, said another spokesman, Brian Balla.

Elliot said the City Council in 2015 increased the project budget to \$170 million with an option for it to rise an additional 20%. She said the contracts approved Wednesday are not new spending because they fall under the range authorized in 2015.

Construction costs play a central role in rising water rates. This year, rates increased 7.4% for the average single-family residence, according to the Water Bureau. The typical monthly bill is \$42.15 — an inflation-adjusted 60% increase from a decade ago, according to city figures. (Sewer and stormwater service bills rose an adjusted 23% in that time.)

Elliot, the Water Bureau engineer, said the Washington Park project is nevertheless necessary because it will help provide Portland with water in the event of an earthquake.

"It's important to note that — in addition to complying with federal regulations — this project is an important part of the city's work to become better prepared for earthquakes and other impacts on our infrastructure," Elliot said.

The reservoir and other seismic retrofits, she said, are “extremely valuable investments in our community’s current and future health and safety.”

Portland parking enforcement open to ‘favoritism’ and ‘illegal conduct,’ review finds

*By Gordon Friedman
August 24, 2019*

Portland’s method of enforcing parking tickets is unprofessional and leaves room for “favoritism” and “illegal conduct,” according to a consultant’s report obtained by The Oregonian.

A spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Transportation, which administers the city parking tickets system, provided a statement Friday in which the bureau denied its practices were improper, but which nevertheless acknowledged changes ought to be made.

According to the report, the central issue is how parking enforcement officers handle situations when a person issued a ticket files an appeal, which is ultimately decided by a Multnomah County judge.

The officer and the person who has appealed meet at the courthouse shortly before appearing before the judge. That informal conversation is called a “settlement conference,” during which the officer and ticket holder negotiate whether to reduce or dismiss the ticket. The negotiation is held in a large, open area where privacy is not guaranteed.

“This entire process needs to be changed in an effort to bring a sense of privacy and professionalism into this judicial procedure,” the consultants wrote in the report, obtained by The Oregonian via public records request.

They said the settlement conference procedure is “unheard of within the parking industry” and “absolutely compromises the integrity of the entire process as the officer can issue and then reduce or dismiss a ticket as they see fit.” The report states it would be “very easy to show favoritism or even get into a situation of unethical and/or illegal conduct.”

Consultants also observed traffic court and found the judge, who was not named, accepted 100 percent of officers’ recommendations “with no explanation or justification.” That led to the conclusion that the parking officer “basically becomes the judge.”

Complicating matters was that officers have no “supervision, guidance, instruction, protocols or reasoning” for using their powers to reduce or dismiss tickets.

“It’s all at their sole discretion which is a huge accountability issue and creates possible integrity concerns,” the report states. “There is no one from the city monitoring these proceedings and therefore no consistency for any of the decisions that are being made.”

Representatives of the consulting firm, called SP+, did not return a request for comment.

Their findings raise questions about whether the system of enforcing traffic citations issued by uniformed police officers suffers the same vulnerabilities. A Portland Police Bureau spokesman, Sgt. Kevin Allen, said Friday that settlement conferences are a “common” method for officers to resolve traffic citations, but are not required. He declined to comment on the consultant’s findings.

The consultant's report, which was issued in October 2018, recommends city officials "express their concern" to Multnomah County judges and enact "very strict guidelines as to when a ticket can be reduced or dismissed."

Another suggested option was to create an administrative appeal that takes place before the court date. Such systems are used nationwide and reduce court system workloads, the report states.

John Brady, a spokesman for the Bureau of Transportation, said the agency will put in place "new guidelines for the settlement conferences" within three to six months. He said the agency did not yet have a draft of the regulations.

Brady said the purpose of the guidelines will be to "ensure the conferences are conducted in a consistent and equitable manner."

The bureau had not tracked data that could show whether settlement decisions favor certain drivers. And Brady said it does not plan to track such data in the future, either.

"We believe that these and other changes still to be made will bring heightened transparency and equity to the current process," the statement said. "At the same time, it is important to note that we believe in the overall integrity and soundness of the current settlement practice."

Brady said that is because settlement conferences offer members of the public "a valuable opportunity to humanize what could otherwise be an impersonal process." Even if an agreement is reached, he said, the decision to accept it is ultimately the judge's.

Barbara Marcille, the Multnomah County trial court administrator, said the court was aware that a review was taking place but had not seen the report. Upon being provided a copy by The Oregonian on Thursday, Marcille said there had not been enough time to review it for the presiding judge, Stephen Bushong, to comment.

Marcille said court officials met with the consultants, who were "unfamiliar" with municipalities like Portland where parking citations are handled in the courts rather than via an administrative process.

"It isn't clear to us what differences they see between the administrative processes they are more familiar with and our judicial process that would generate the stated concerns," Marcille said, adding that the court "supports settlement conferences" because they offer both sides an opportunity to resolve differences.

Marcille and Brady noted that the new Multnomah County courthouse, set to open in 2020, will have meeting spaces for private settlement conferences that the current courthouse lacks.

Willamette Week

Vast Majority of Portlanders Are Displeased by the City's Response to Homelessness

*By Sophie Peel
August 25, 2019*

People in every racial and age demographic said the number of people experiencing homelessness is the top challenge facing the city.

Nearly nine in 10 Portlanders are unhappy with how City Hall is handling homelessness.

That's the top finding in a new survey of residents' views on what is and isn't working in Portland—a survey that was discontinued in 2016, but resumed this year. The results were released Friday.

Portlanders polled by City Hall remain clear on the top problem the city faces: homelessness. People in every racial and age demographic said the number of people experiencing homelessness is the top challenge facing the city.

Not only that: Eighty-eight percent of respondents said that they were “dissatisfied with the City’s response to homelessness.” The report notes that this is “the highest level of dissatisfaction with any of the questions included in the survey.”

Other major grievances included lack of affordable housing opportunities and transportation concerns.

Certain topics were of higher priority depending on race. White respondents showed an increased desire for police services, while the Asian, black and Latinx people surveyed showed a greater concern for a lack of economic opportunity, including support for small businesses and job creation.

When asked about potential shortcomings of law enforcement in the city, the black population expressed the need for more dialogue and understanding between residents and police, while the white population expressed the need for increased police presence in neighborhoods.

Older people, longtime residents, and black respondents were more likely to feel negative about the future of the city. Despite city efforts to represent all Portlanders by sending out bilingual canvassers to collect surveys, people with a higher education, white people, and people with a higher paycheck were more likely to respond.

When asked about the top three perks of living in Portland, respondents were most likely to choose access to outdoor and natural areas, amenities like restaurants, and access to public transit. Black and Latinx respondents were more likely to choose public transit as a top attraction than white respondents, whereas the white respondents were more likely to prioritize amenities.

When presented with the statement, “In Portland, we are making progress on becoming a city where a person’s outcomes are not based on their race,” responses starkly varied based on the respondent’s race.

About 12 percent of white respondents said they “strongly disagreed” with the statement, and roughly 30 percent of black respondents chose the same answer.

One possibly surprising finding: Preventing climate change was not a top concern for most Portlanders, across all demographics.

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Industrial area gaining businesses, but little parking

*By Chuck Slothower
August 23, 2019*

The Central Eastside Industrial Council has commissioned a parking study as an increase of jobs in the urban district has not come with additions of spaces for motor vehicles.

The study is “to determine exactly how much parking we have and how much parking we need, and whether we’re using the parking that we have efficiently,” said Brad Malsin, the council’s president and a Beam Development principal.

Portland’s zoning, in particular the Central City 2035 plan, limits residential and office uses in the Central Eastside in an attempt to protect the district as an industrial sanctuary. As multifamily and office development creates pressure on industrial space across the city, the Central Eastside is meant to remain a place where industrial businesses can continue to flourish.

That has become a challenge.

“I think it needs to be done,” Jim Kennison, director of bakery operations at Franz Bakery, said of the parking study. “It is the industrial district, and the industry is getting kind of crowded and pushed out.”

Pressures have grown. In June 2018, Autodesk moved from Lake Oswego to the Towne Storage building, a renovated 100,000-square-foot warehouse south of the Burnside Bridge that was originally built in 1916 and has no parking. Media reports at the time said Autodesk had 200 employees at the location, with room to scale up to 500.

The construction software firm declined a recent interview request, and did not respond to an email asking how many employees work at the Towne Storage building.

Whereas the parking situation is a problem for many employers, it’s an opportunity for some developers. Harsch Investment Properties’ 7 SE Stark building, nearly completed, has six floors of parking with 265 stalls.

“It’s a critical need,” said Jordan Schnitzer, president of Harsch Investment Properties. “Many tenants realize that while lots of people walk and bike and use Uber, there’s a lot of people that still drive their cars and a lot of people that want to visit businesses.”

Some of 7 SE Stark’s parking will be available to other users, Schnitzer said.

“We’re first going to take care of our tenants, and then any excess parking, we’ll take care of Olympic Mills and the public,” he said.

The Olympic Mills Commerce Center, a commercial building near 7 SE Stark, has tenants including Olympia Provisions and Fish Marketing.

Gerding Edlen’s 5 MLK, another building under construction in the area and expected to be delivered early next year, has three floors of underground parking. A spokesperson for the developer did not respond to a message seeking comment. An executive with Apex Real Estate Partners, the leasing agent for the project, also did not respond to requests for comment.

District Office, a six-story building from Beam Development and Urban Development + Partners at 525 S.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., will have one floor of underground parking.

The growth affects many longtime industrial businesses, which rely on parking and easy access for trucks to transport their products. Franz Bakery has operated in the neighborhood since 1906, and is in a relatively good position with three parking lots for its approximately 500 employees in the district. Few employees use public transit, Kennison said, because of schedule challenges.

“Our problem here is we work pretty much 24/7,” he said. “Bus service and light rail is not great on holidays or weekends.”

TriMet spokeswoman Tia York stated via email that the Central Eastside “enjoys some of the best supply of transit in the region.” Next spring, bus line 20 will be upgraded to frequent service

– every 15 minutes – joining six frequent service lines currently operating in the area. TriMet is also working with the Portland Bureau of Transportation to accelerate bus service to make riding transit more attractive, York stated.

The Central Eastside Industrial Council also operates the Water Avenue Shuttle, which runs two shuttle buses during peak commuting hours from the Dairy Building on Southeast Eighth Avenue to the Oregon Convention Center.

Kennison said some small businesses have moved out of the district. That’s hardly an option for a company the size of Franz, he said.

“We’re a big company,” he said. “It’s going to be really hard for someone like us to move – I’m not saying that’s happening.

“Smaller businesses that can be more mobile, they don’t want to hassle with the parking,” he added.

The Lloyd area, just north of the Central Eastside, has its own parking challenges. Go Lloyd, a business group, conducts an annual parking survey of more than 13,000 on-street and off-street parking spaces. In 2018, the survey found usage rates were 10 percent higher than during the previous year.

The Skanner

Records: Portland Spent \$1,100 per Night for Aide’s Hotel

August 23, 2019

Documents show that Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler’s office billed city taxpayers \$1,123 a night for an aide’s hotel accommodations while at a conference in Texas, in likely violation of city rules.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports the files show Wheeler’s office paid for senior adviser Elisabeth Perez to attend the 2019 South by Southwest technology conference and charged \$3,371 for three nights at Marriott’s luxury W Austin hotel.

City rules require lodging expenses to be “reasonable.” And the rules state hotel costs significantly higher than standard per diem rates must be explained.

Wheeler’s chief of staff, Kristin Dennis, said she approved the expenses and that the hotel costs were “a minor, isolated mistake” made by an aide in training.

She added that she strives to be a vigilant steward of taxpayer money and that the mayor’s office spent less than its allotted budget last year.

Albina Ministerial Alliance to Host Community Forum on Police Association Contract Aug. 26

August 23, 2019

The Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform (AMAC) will host a forum on the City’s new contract with the Portland Police Association to be held Monday, August 26 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Maranatha Church, 4222 NE 12th at Skidmore.

The event will begin with a short presentation on background on the current contract between the City of Portland and the Portland Police Association. Following this we will open the floor to the community for input. The goal is to hear the community's concerns so they can be forwarded to members of City Council before the new contract negotiations.

The Portland Police Association (PPA) contract -- a Collective Bargaining Agreement between the PPA and the City -- expires on June 30, 2020. It is meant to cover wages, benefits and working conditions for the Association's members. The City is expected to begin negotiations early this fall.

In 2016, the community was shut out of the process to the point where City Council left Council Chambers before voting, and people who were still in City Hall were pushed out violently by police.

The AMA wants to see a more inclusive process this time.

Questions to consider include:

- Why is it so difficult to fire officers?
- Why aren't officers drug tested after deadly force incidents?
- Why does Portland's civilian oversight body not have the ability to investigate use of deadly force or to compel officer testimony?

The Portland Police Association represents the rank-and-file officers as well as Sergeants, Detectives, the newly hired Public Safety Support Specialists, and, as of 2019, Emergency Communications (911) employees. The current contract can be found [here](#).

This forum is hosted by the AMAC and is being cosponsored by Portland Jobs with Justice, Portland Copwatch, Portland Forward, Portland Metro People's Coalition, and As the Spirit Moves Us.

For more information or if your group would like to be listed as a cosponsor contact the AMA Coalition at (503) 288-7242.

Additional Reading (Linked Below)

[The Police Photoshopped His Mug Shot for a Lineup. He's Not the Only One.](#)