

## **The Oregonian**

### **Portland water plant threatens neighbors' rural lifestyle, they say**

*By Everton Bailey Jr.  
November 13, 2019*

Pat and Dean Walter didn't know the loud noises coming from their neighbor's property in May would have an impact on their drinking water supply.

That neighbor is the city of Portland, which own 95 acres that sit next to the couple's nine-acre property near the Multnomah and Clackamas county line. The city's water bureau was drilling on the property to test the soil in anticipation of its plans to build a new water filtration plant there.

"It shook the earth," said Pat Walter, who has lived in the area with her husband for 24 years. "That's why we lost our water, because it loosened the soil down there at the bottom of our well."

The couple, who live in unincorporated Clackamas County, get their drinking water from a well on their property. They said the city drilled about 85 feet from their water source and they believe the resulting vibration led to them getting less water than normal. Testing found that their well now pumps 1.5 to 2 gallons per minute, whereas it previously delivered 9 to 10, they said.

They fear the well could go dry if things don't change by the summer, when the flow from their well typically decreases.

Bureau officials have told them they'll ask the city council in late winter or early spring to give the Walters funds for repairs.

"They say we'll be compensated and we believe we will," Pat Walter said. Still, she said, "We can't help but feel like this is a steam roller and we're collateral damage. We all sort of do out here."

City of Portland officials, for their part, say they've made an effort to be good neighbors to the 24 property owners who live around the large acreage the city has owned for more than 40 years. They note they're under a federal mandate and a tight timeline to build a new treatment plant to deliver safe water to nearly 1 million Portland-area customers.

"For the long term, providing water for all the people who are coming to Portland over the next 40, 50, 60 or 70 years, it makes sense to do this, and that's what we have to look out for," said Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees Portland's Water Bureau. "There's a huge impact to a small number of people here, but we're talking about providing safe and abundant water for a million people for generations to come."

Many residents in the quiet rural area near the Sandy River east of Gresham where the plant will be built worry the construction and future operation of the industrial plant will negatively affect the community, their homes and property values. Some privately owned properties may have large pipes installed under them to carry treated water from the new plant.

Many area homeowners say they've been frustrated with the process thus far, feeling they were notified too late — well after the city decided to build there.

Because most plans for the facility have yet to be finalized, including land use changes, the plant's design and the routes pipes will take, some residents said they've been left with more questions than answers and want the project delayed.

The plant is now projected to cost up to \$850 million, up dramatically from a 2017 water bureau estimate of around \$500 million, a 70% increase.

City officials say the site on Southeast Carpenter Road is the city's best option. The new plant and pipes will remove contaminants from the city's drinking water supply and replace some aging infrastructure.

City officials say they began reaching out to and meeting with the future plant's neighbors in 2018 to hear their concerns and solicit input on the plant's design.

Water bureau officials have also held meetings with area residents to develop a so-called "good neighbor agreement" and plan to take residents of tours of other water treatment plants in Wilsonville and Tacoma to give them an idea of how they fit within communities.

On Wednesday, the Portland City Council will consider a potential 10-year, \$51 million contract with Stantec Consulting Services to design the water filtration plant and provide related services. The city also may vote on whether to sign off on the water bureau's recommended version of the plant, an \$850 million option that would include two pipelines being connected to the facility.

### **New mandate**

For years, Portland didn't have to filter the water from the Bull Run watershed that it delivers to more than 950,000 customers in the metro area, even after the 2006 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency order that major water utilities treat drinking water for cryptosporidium. That's because repeated testing of Bull Run water found no trace of cryptosporidium.

That parasite can be found in human and animal waste and can spread to recreational and drinking water. Drinking water tainted with crypto can cause diarrhea, vomiting and dehydration in healthy people that usually lasts for a week or two. The symptoms can be more severe for people with weakened immune systems.

The water bureau treats its water with chlorine and ammonia, but neither gets rid of cryptosporidium. City officials believed that their near-complete limitations on access to the Bull Run watershed meant the most common sources of cryptosporidium — human sewage and livestock— were eliminated.

The Portland City Council in 2009 told the water bureau to try to get an exemption to avoid having to construct a treatment plant. The Oregon Health Authority in 2012 gave Portland a 10-year exemption from treating its Bull Run drinking water for cryptosporidium.

Then, in 2017, Portland's track record for cryptosporidium-free water samples changed after the water bureau found traces of parasite in Bull Run samples. The amount found were above the allowable threshold and led to the city's exemption from treating for cryptosporidium being revoked later that year.

The city decided to build a plant to comply with federal requirements and worked out an agreement with the Oregon Health Authority to have it up and running by September 2027

The city council considered a less expensive ultraviolet treatment plant that would kill cryptosporidium but not filter out sediment, as well as a water filtration facility that would remove such materials. They went with the latter option, estimated at the time to cost up to \$500 million.

The city council opted for a filtration plant in part because the city projected an ultraviolet plant would need to be upgraded or replaced after 25 years.

Last December, the city approved building a filtration plant with a capacity range of 145 to 160 million gallons per day that filters water with a mix of gravel and sand on the Carpenter Lane property. City officials were told at the time that the plant would take up at least 35 acres.

It was one of at least six locations they considered. City officials said they picked it because of its large size, the city's existing ownership, the potential for wide buffers between nearby residents and the plant, an elevation that allows water in parts of the system to be moved via gravity rather than pumping and zoning that allows construction of a plant.

The city bought the 95 acres in 1975 for \$315,000. It is currently leased to a tree nursery

"I would certainly be very upset and concerned if I lived on Carpenter Lane or anywhere near there because my idyllic, rural lifestyle is about to have some significant changes," Fritz said. "But we bought that property knowing eventually something was likely to happen there, and unfortunately now is the time."

Fritz said in the past, she was in favor of an ultraviolet plant, partly due to the cost. She said the Eagle Creek Fire in 2017 changed her mind.

"That fire came really close to the Bull Run watershed and if another happens in the future, a filtration plant takes care of sediment, ash and a lot of things other than chrypto."

The city council voted last month to buy a \$800,000 house on about two acres across the street from the plant site. Officials hope the home's large yard can be used as a pipeline route from the facility toward Portland. It's not yet clear if that will work.

### **End to rural lifestyle?**

From the second floor of their home office, Mike and Carol Kost can see just about all of Portland's 95 acres, the nursery trees growing on them, and, on a clear day, Mount Wilson.

The couple live on the dead end of Carpenter Lane sandwiched between the 95-acre Portland property and the \$800,000 house the city is buying. The couple said a free-standing box holding flyers about the water treatment project sits about 15 feet from their property, a reminder of what they could be losing.

"We've seen elk, cows, cougars, bears and coyotes on that grass and ours," said Mike Kost, who owns a construction company. "All that goes away when you have a billion dollar plant and hundreds of trucks coming up and down the road" per day at the height of construction.

According to a 2018 city consultant's report, a plant at the capacity Portland plans to build could cause 116,000 to 123,000 truck trips in the area during construction. Construction of the plant is currently scheduled to start in 2022.

The Kostos are among residents in the area who've formed organized opposition to the proposed plant.

Collectively known as "Citizens for Peaceful Rural Living," they say the project hasn't gotten enough scrutiny. They say they are consulting with a lawyer about their legal options and plan to try to delay the project during the land use permitting process.

Several residents said they didn't learn about the project until March, either from notices in their mailbox from the city or from their neighbors. When they asked why they weren't notified,

residents said they were told by water bureau officials that the city was only required to notify residents within 750 feet of the plant.

“We weren’t notified and it’s right across the street from us,” said Carol Bartha, who lives with her husband on about six acres on Dodge Park Boulevard. The street lies one block north of Carpenter Lane and she said they anticipate pipes will be run through their property, which she said is a designated wildlife habitat by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“People out here have acreage,” Bartha said. “You can do 750 feet in Portland and reach a lot of people. But here, the neighbors who were originally notified have been educating the rest of us.”

She and other residents said they received door hangers in September notifying them that Portland potentially plans to run pipe through their property.

Katrina Dawson, a neighbor of the Barthas, said her family’s property has a city of Portland easement that runs across the front of her house, encompassing their well, water pipes, electricity and phone line.

She said when her family moved from Gresham six years ago, they were told by the real estate agent that Portland wasn’t expected to access the easement in the next 50 years. She said they also didn’t know at the time that the easement started “steps from the front porch.”

“We’ve been told the Portland Water Bureau will leave everything in a condition as good or better than how they found it. But I have a hard time believing they’re going to dig a well for me and not try and coerce me into being on city water,” Dawson said. “It’s going to change our environment completely from what we bought.”

Pat Meyer, another Carpenter Lane resident, said among her concerns is that Portland is choosing to build a plant that does much more than treat water for cryptosporidium at high cost to their community and ratepayers.

She said people intentionally move to the community to escape Portland. And some, like her husband, have lived on their property for generations and plan to die there, she said.

“Most people in the area are either self-employed or they’ve retired here,” Meyer said. “They’ve either grown up in the area or they’ve come here to escape Portland for a rural peaceful lifestyle. It’s very intentional to be out here and a big city 30 miles away is threatening that.”

“If this is necessary, then it’s necessary,” Meyer said. “But the feds don’t tell you how to get rid of crypto, they just tell you to do it. They don’t tell you to build a billion-dollar plant in a rural, agricultural community.

“It’s like saying I have to move a small rock, so I’m going to use a giant bulldozer to do it.”

### **Wait and see on well**

The Walters said they share the community’s concerns about the water plant and are taking a wait and see approach to the project and their well

Jaymee Cuti, a water bureau spokesperson, said the bureau drilled on the city property in May to learn more about the soil conditions where they plan to build the plant, but didn’t enter the couple’s property.

“The Water Bureau’s position is that our actions did not damage their well or aquifer,” said Jaymee Cuti, a water bureau spokesperson. “However, in the future, when we start construction and excavate our site, we will need to dewater it, which will likely have some type of impact on their shallow well.”

She said the bureau plans to ask the city council to authorize paying for that potential mitigation to the Walters' water supply "or any other similar mitigation that may occur for this project." She said cost estimates for the Walters' mitigation have ranged between \$30,000 to \$35,000. None of it has been in writing because the bureau doesn't have the authority to spend water plant project funds on mitigation, Cuti said.

She said other examples of needed fixes could be repairing a driveway or fence.

The Walters said they are still in talks with the water bureau about their well and declined to directly respond to Cuti's comments other than to confirm that they only have a verbal agreement with the city.

"At this point, our anxiety level is zero because we have enough water," Dean Walter said. "I have faith in the people we're dealing with and I think things will be taken care of. But if not, things will change."

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Sources: Road projects become issue in Metro measure**

*By Jim Redden*

*November 13, 2019*

Plus, Wheeler won't take taxpayer funds for reelection and Eudaly confirms she's running again

As the Metro Council is preparing to finalize the project list for its November 2020 regional transportation ballot measure, it is being pressured by alternative transportation activists to make it harder to pass.

Public opinion polls have consistently shown that most voters believe such a measure should include a mix of road, transit, bike and pedestrian projects. Metro staff has prepared a preliminary list of projects totaling \$3.1 billion that is heavy on transit but includes some road improvement projects. But a coalition called Getting There Together is threatening to oppose the measure if it has any projects that improve roads for drivers.

"The coalition will continue to advocate for a multimodal transportation system that makes our streets safe and accessible for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, and we will only support projects that do not add additional roadways or widen existing roadways for increased vehicle capacity," the group said in response to the release of the preliminary list.

#### **Wheeler won't take taxpayer campaign funds**

Mayor Ted Wheeler's campaign has announced that he will not attempt to qualify for the city's taxpayer-supported public campaign finance system to fund his reelection campaign.

He now must decide whether to restrict contributions to the \$500 limit approved by Portland voters, even though a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge has struck down the limit for violating the First Amendment free speech rights in the Oregon Constitution.

Portland voters approved the limit and other campaign reforms at the November 2018 general election. The court upheld some of the reforms, but struck down the limit in June. The court also has struck down similar Multnomah County limits. The issue is headed to the Oregon Supreme Court, where campaign finance reform supporters hope the limits will be upheld.

Wheeler's campaign has \$35,000 in the bank after donating \$16,000 in previous contributions from Portland hotel owner and European Union ambassador Gordon Sondland to eight local nonprofits and MoveOn.org, which is supporting the impeachment of President Donald Trump. Sondland recently recanted his testimony regarding Trump and communications with Ukrainian officials.

### **Eudaly says she's running**

Portland City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly has confirmed to Willamette Week that she will run for reelection, although she has not yet taken the necessary official steps.

Eudaly's political action committee is still registered for the 2016 elections. It has not received any contributions this year and is more than \$2,000 in debt, including loans yet to be repaid.

In the meantime, four candidates have registered committees with state elections officials for the May 2020 primary election. Two of them, former city employee Mingas Mapps and elections reform advocate Seth Wooley, have applied to qualify for city public campaign funding.

## **City, county leaders say more funds needed to help homeless**

*By KOIN 6 News  
November 13, 2019*

### **The Portland City Council and the Multnomah County Commissioner held a joint meeting on the homelessness crisis on Nov. 12**

Portland and Multnomah County leaders held a public meeting on Tuesday night to talk about their work in fighting homelessness and some of the biggest needs that still need to be met.

Members of the City Council and County Commission suggested they will ask voters to approve more funding for homeless services next year.

"I hear daily from people who really want to do something, they don't know what to do," Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury said at the Nov. 12 meeting. "People want us to solve the issue now and the best way we can do that is to ask the voters for additional resources."

City Commissioner Nick Fish said the majority of voters have made it clear that homelessness is their top concern but the financial resources just aren't available to support homelessness services.

"This huge opportunity that is in front of us is to go back to the voters and say help us with these services," said Fish. "I think that's the key to making another big move in our progress."

No specific tax measure or 2020 election date was discussed, however.

The county recently revealed data that showed an increase over the past two years of people living on the streets. During that time, those considered "chronically homeless" jumped by nearly 500 people.

"The data makes clear that there is a spike in chronic homelessness," said Fish.

Joint Office of Homeless Services Director Marc Jolin said that while the number of homeless on Portland streets has remained fairly consistent, more and more are being helped in shelters and permanent housing.

"Prevention is often the most cost-effective intervention we can make," he said.

Jolin said the situation on public streets would be "substantially worse" if it wasn't for investments in things like new shelters — including places for families — and transitional resources. There are also hundreds of new permanent supportive housing options which are part of the city and county's commitment to create 2,000 by 2028. Services like the Street Response Team are also helping to improve interactions with the chronically homeless.

But there are still major concerns.

"There are more people sleeping on our streets and those folks are older and sicker than they have been in the past," said Kafoury.

The county hopes a new behavioral health resource center which was only recently approved for downtown can help fill a key role.

"There is not a place for people who are homeless who have severe substance use or mental health issues to go," said District 1 Commissioner Sharon Meieran.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said Oregon "has a long history of ignoring mental health and addiction services."

Leaders agreed that they need to ask voters for help, saying they aren't getting enough from the federal or state government. But Wheeler wanted more information.

"The elephant in the room is are you paying for this out of the joint office budget? Is the county paying for this? Or is there a new ask: Are we going to the voters with that ask?" said Wheeler. "I feel like we need to be stronger and clearer about what is the plan, what is the gap. What's it gonna take to fill the gap and how do we create a plan and what do we do every single year to fulfill that gap?"

## **Willamette Week**

### **Portland Has Broken Its Promise to Keep Neighborhoods Safe From Demolition Contaminants**

*By Daniel Forbes  
November 12, 2019*

**The city has failed to analyze how often an inspector was on site when a building was ripped apart.**

In 2018, the city of Portland passed a landmark ordinance to protect people living in its residential neighborhoods from exposure to lead when old houses were ripped apart.

The ordinance, the most comprehensive in the U.S., required the city bureau in charge of building inspections to "conduct an inspection during demolition activities."

That mandate—designed to prevent lead dust from floating into neighborhoods—made Portland a national leader.

And yet in the 15 months since the ordinance went into effect in July 2018, the Bureau of Development Services has failed to analyze how many times inspectors were onsite for the nearly 400 times when the excavator started whacking a building to smithereens.

A senior inspector, Jeremy Russell, tells WW that the number of demolitions in which a city inspector was actually onsite at the time demolition machinery was operating may have been as few as 20 percent.

A BDS manager, Mike Liefeld, confirms Russell provided the number, but says the bureau does not track the data in any systematic way, and that the 1-in-5 figure does not account for the fact that multiple inspections are carried out at each demolition site.

The city's deputy ombudsman, who has watchdogged the city's failure to protect against lead dust, says that's not what the Portland City Council promised when it passed the ordinance.

"A key portion of city code is not being enforced. It's unacceptable," Tony Green tells WW.

"Code unambiguously requires inspectors onsite during demolitions. Otherwise, there's no way to hold builders accountable to protect public health. The city is failing in its obligation to protect children from exposure to life-altering, toxic lead dust."

The ordinance requires contractors to remove siding, trim, porches and doors and the wetting down of homes before demolition—all to prevent the hazardous metal from spreading in a cloud of dust.

Inspectors fail to actually witness the moment demolitions occur, Bureau of Development Services officials say, because the law was written loosely enough to allow them wide latitude in what is meant by the words "during demolition activities."

Liefeld says they are in fact following the ordinance. But he admits BDS does not have a system in place to get inspectors to demolition sites when equipment is active—and the city neither required nor created one.

"BDS is not ignoring the law," says Tim Becker, a spokesman for Mayor Ted Wheeler, who oversees the bureau. "Both the BDS and legal counsel inform us that the bureau is in compliance with the code as it is written."

Becker says the "during demolition" inspection is "meant to be a point-in-time spot check rather than constant monitoring of the demolition process from start to finish."

A BDS official gave a different explanation at a September update for a panel of experts assembled from around the state.

"Interim [during-demolition] inspections are really hard for us to hit," said BDS senior site development inspector Jeremy Russell, who has daily oversight of the city's demolition inspection program, during a Sept. 9 lead-based paint stakeholder meeting hosted by the Oregon Health Authority. "The demolitions move fast. They can say, 'Yup, come back tomorrow to do your during-demolition inspections.' But they're already done by the time we get there. We can't ask people to slow it down just for us to come out there."

Russell added that a lot of demolitions occur on Saturdays, when BDS inspectors don't work.

A bureau spokesman later expanded on Russell's comments. The "during-demolition" inspection "is based on the contractor's estimated demolition schedule, which is actually a sequence of activities that take place over a span of time, not a single moment in time," says spokesman Alex Cousins.

"The real story here to be told is that the city of Portland has the most comprehensive program for addressing asbestos and lead-based paint in the country," he adds.

Cousins says the bureau is working with an advisory committee to update the policy and address concerns based on the first year of work.

The demolition of homes, particularly older ones, presents real public health risks.

Portland homes can contain a lot of lead. The paint on a house from the 1920s or 1930s that's been repainted about once a decade may contain 50 or 60 pounds of pure lead, says Ron Peik, president of Alpine Environmental in Chelmsford, Mass., which has been doing lead and asbestos abatement for 28 years.

National Center for Healthy Housing researchers found that unless demolition contractors take precautions, much of the lead from a tear-down can spread the length of a football field in all directions.

Lead neither decays, degrades nor washes away. Lead dust is a potent neurotoxin that may cling to the fingers of a toddler crawling around the backyard and then get into her mouth and eventually to her brain, causing permanent damage.

The American Academy of Pediatrics declares there's "no safe level of lead in blood." Even low levels of lead have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. And the damage done cannot be corrected.

The health effects fall hardest on the most vulnerable children. In the 15 years before Portland passed its 2018 ordinance, there were an estimated 1,300 demolitions, a lot of them in "traditionally...minority or lower-income neighborhoods," BDS's Nancy Thorington told a tutorial for builders and contractors in March 2018. "And there have been no protections. And so the only people who have really been able to get protections against asbestos and lead-based paint have been people who have enough money to test."

Only industrial-strength home cleaning, plus soil remediation, can remove the lead. And soil remediation might cost \$15,000 for each affected property. The BDS inspections are supposed to eliminate health risks and costs to neighbors

"The during-demolition inspection is the one with the best chance of successfully ensuring that public health rules are being followed," says Perry Cabot, a senior program specialist with the Multnomah County Health Department and an expert on curtailing lead exposure.

That's easier said than done.

"Unfortunately, we live in a world where some individuals may cut corners if there isn't someone looking over their shoulder," Oregon Health Authority spokesman Jonathan Modie tells WW.

A key requirement of the 2018 law tells contractors to remove the siding and other painted features by hand prior to letting an excavator smash the house down.

Taking off exterior elements of the house by hand, including the siding—that is, the structure's oft-repainted outer walls—is known as partial deconstruction.

But there are financial incentives to skip it.

It's time-consuming and labor-intensive compared with letting a machine just crush the house. For demo contractors used to letting fly with an excavator, it's a new, painstaking task, requiring an additional crew of laborers to pry material off by hand and wrap debris in heavy plastic for disposal.

And it costs around \$5,000 or \$6,000, according to Shawn Wood, who oversees the city's deconstruction program for the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

The city has repeatedly caught builders leaving the siding on. Of 29 enforcement actions over the first 12 months, the siding was still on in 26 of them while the excavator rampaged, BDS says.

It's not clear how fast the bureau can or will make a fix. Wheeler's office shows no urgency.

"We all recognize that improvements to the existing rules need to be made, and the program was set up to accommodate that," says Becker. That will take months—starting with monthly meetings of a reconvened demolition subcommittee.

In fact, it's going to take a while to change the industry's thinking.

Green, the deputy ombudsman, points to a \$4 million project in the Overlook neighborhood. The contractor failed to remove the siding before demolition took place. The penalty? Just \$876 in administrative fees due to the stop-work order. (BDS does not issue fines for first-time violations.)

"Why follow the rules if the fine totals \$876 and you've saved \$5,000 on removing the siding by hand?" Green asks. "Human nature is not on the side of doing right."

## **Most Portlanders Want a Limit on Campaign Donations. Will Mayor Ted Wheeler Set One for Himself?**

*By Nigel Jaquiss*  
*November 13, 2019*

### **He hasn't said.**

In 2018, 87.38 percent of Portland voters said political contributions to city candidates should be subject to limits.

Those voters approved a ballot measure requiring that such contributions come only from individuals and PACs—not corporations—and that they be limited to \$500. The measure is currently halted by court challenges to its constitutionality.

And that raises an interesting test for Mayor Ted Wheeler.

His re-election campaign is not accepting public financing, which comes with contribution limits. In the past, Wheeler has funded his campaigns with a relatively small number of high-dollar contributions.

He has not yet announced whether he will voluntarily honor the will of voters.

## **Pine State Biscuits Is the Latest Portland Eatery With Labor Strife**

*By Elise Herron*  
*November 13, 2019*

### **Employees who make the Reggie Deluxe are seeking help from city commissioners.**

A labor dispute at popular Portland breakfast chain Pine State Biscuits has made its way to City Hall.

Documents obtained by WW show Pine State workers emailed City Commissioner Amanda Fritz on Oct. 9 to allege that their boss, co-owner Brian Snyder, broke promises he made to the city in

2013 regarding wages and health care benefits. Snyder disagrees, telling WW he "absolutely contests the claim."

On Oct. 11, Fritz agreed to meet with Pine State workers to "discuss [their] concerns." This month, employees took those concerns to Snyder and the public: They are now gathering signatures outside stores for a petition to increase wages and implement comprehensive health care benefits.

"We plan to add 12 to 15 more jobs in Portland this year, opening another location," Snyder said. "And they are going to be living wage jobs with health care benefits."

What workers say now

In the six years following Snyder's testimony, Pine State has opened two more locations in Portland and one in Reno, Nev. But workers want a guaranteed \$15-an-hour wage and comprehensive health insurance. They say Pine State refuses to give them that—and Snyder broke his pledge.

In a letter to management last week, workers wrote, "While Pine State is a popular Portland restaurant, many PSB employees struggle to pay costs of living and many are forced to avoid seeking medical care."

Employees had already taken their complaint to City Hall, writing letters to Fritz and Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty. The City Council has no control over Pine State's wages—but employees are seeking a public show of support. "If our employer refuses to make good on his promise to the city of Portland," the letter to Fritz says, "will you join the workers of the Pine State and support us publicly?"

What Pine State says now

Snyder contests the allegations that he hasn't kept the promises he made in 2013. He concedes Pine State employees, depending on experience, start at minimum wage but that those wages can rise.

He says the company offers two health care plans for employees, one that meets the minimum requirements for coverage for an individual under the Affordable Care Act and a more comprehensive plan through Kaiser. He says the company subsidizes 50 percent of the premiums of both plans.

"Our position has always been to try to provide a living wage for staff through not just their paycheck but a total compensation package," Snyder says. "My concern is, there is misinformation in the minds of employees."

### **Why it matters**

The dispute at Pine State is the latest high-profile labor strife at a Portland counter-service eatery.

At Burgerville, the first fast-food restaurant in the nation to unionize, employees recently went on strike following failed wage negotiations. In July, after contentious votes, workers rejected a union drive at Little Big Burger. And quietly, in September, the small workforce at Scottie's Pizza Parlor unionized and was voluntarily recognized by the pizzeria's owner. (Scottie's plans to host and supply free pizza for Pine State workers' upcoming "No Bosses Allowed" party.)

## OPB

# Multnomah County Seeing Spike In People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

*By Rebecca Ellis  
November 13, 2019*

Multnomah County is experiencing a spike in chronic homelessness, according to figures presented to local elected officials Tuesday.

As part of his annual presentation to commissioners from Portland and Multnomah County, Marc Jolin, the director of the Joint Office of Homeless Services, warned that the number of people who report being homeless for more than a year has grown — even as the county’s overall homeless population continues to hover around 4,000.

The most recent point in time count showed 1,770 people were chronically homeless, a 37% increase from two years ago.

Half reported having a mental illness. Half reported a substance abuse disorder. A little less than one-third reported both.

Jolin said the office already knows what the solution is. “The fact that we don’t have supporting housing is why we’re seeing a persistent increase in the chronically homeless over time,” he said.

The office defines supportive housing as housing that is affordable to those with “very limited to almost no income” and is equipped with onsite mental health treatment and other support services, according to the office’s spokesperson, Denis Theriault.

Jolin told the board he believed building more of this type of housing was the only way to get the chronically homeless into a permanent living situation.

“It is a population of folks who have very little if any income. They may be living on a [Social Security] check of less than \$800 a month and many don’t even have that. They are struggling with some kind of significant disability that requires support services for some longer period of time,” he said. “We have to be able to provide deeply affordable housing that is coupled with those support services.”

Last year, the county made a pledge to create 2,000 units of supportive housing within the decades. Approximately 790 units are in operation or planned, according to the office’s presentation.

Jolin said the lack of currently available supportive housing is causing a “bottleneck” in the shelters, where people with nowhere else to go are taking up beds for long periods of time.

“We can’t change the fact that absent a supportive housing unit on the other side, they’re going to be in our shelters,” he said.

This, in turn, has hampered the office’s ability to serve others in need. The office placed 6,200 people in emergency shelter this fiscal year, down from 8,310 the year before. Jolin attributed the decrease to the fact that the office’s budget was limited and those already in their care were requiring “more assistance for longer.”

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish agreed that supportive housing was the best means to help the chronically homeless, but noted there is not currently available funding for the associated

wraparound services. He estimated these could cost anywhere between \$8,000 and \$15,000 per person.

To find funding, Fish said the best bet might be to go to the voters, who often cite homelessness as the biggest issue facing the region.

“This huge opportunity that is in front of us is to go back to the voters and say, “Help us with these supportive services,”” he said. “It’s what chronically homeless people desperately need. And with 80-90% of the public saying this is their No. 1 concern, we have their attention.”