

City of St. Helens

CITY COUNCIL

Public Forum Minutes

November 4, 2015

Members Present: Randy Peterson, Mayor
Doug Morten, Council President
Susan Conn, Councilor
Ginny Carlson, Councilor

Members Absent: Keith Locke, Councilor

Staff Present: John Walsh, City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Margaret Jeffries, Library Director
Terry Moss, Police Chief
Sue Nelson, Public Works Engineering Director

Others:	Steve Topaz	Gary Miller	Sally Gump
	Howard Blumenthal	Kay Covell	Bob Covell
	Keith Bunn	Sam Bake	Alissa Sediver Munro
	Jan Zuccarini	Bryce Bumgardner	Heather Bumgardner
	Dan Goodnight	Bonnie F.	David Barker
	Laura Byrd	C. Chabala	Peter Chabala
	Joy B.	Megan Evans	Alec Martinson
	Riley B.	Alex Lokum	



Public Forum

Proposed 2016 Utility Rates

Staff Report

City Administrator Walsh presented a PowerPoint presentation which is included in the archive packet for this meeting.

Public Comment

◆ Steve Topaz. He has seen large mistakes that cost the City a lot of money. He is here to talk about the mistakes as a result of the I&I project. When he arrived in 2002, his water bill was \$21.70. The last bill was \$210. No one seems to be in charge of what is going on with the I&I project. Prior to the I&I project, he was pumping 33,000 gallons of water out of his sump pumps every 24 hours with a half inch rain. Now he pumps 88,000 gallons of water. The water level used to be a foot below his basement level and now it's 20 inches above. That is against City code. He talked about improper engineering documentation causing problems with current and future projects. Some of Steve's suggestions to help with cost are: 1) Since the Clean Water Act loans come from the State and are mandated by the Federal Government, the City should ask the Federal Government to relieve us or abandon the loans and give us the money. 2) We need a management system to know who is in charge. He suggested each Council position be assigned a department. That way when a person is running for a position the citizens will know what department they will oversee. 3) He has heard rumors that administrative staff is getting 20-25% raises. The union workers say they are limited to two-

three percent per their contract. He suggests adjusting the administrative staff's salaries to 2010 rates and pro-rate at 5%. 4) The facilities department has shown that they are not adequate for the job. They should be replaced. He has received duplicate inspection reports for the same project. 5) He also has questions he would ask CDC and the Federal Government.

◆Gary Miller. He lives on Nob Hill. He feels bad that people cannot even afford to water their lawns. In 2013, the monthly billing rate was \$9.95. In 2014, it was \$10.40. It continues to increase. He talked about the tree farm on the Salmonberry property. The website says the trees are harvested to subsidize water rates. What happened with that? He looked at the other cities that are comparable in size. Our rates are higher than all of those cities.

Mayor Peterson reported that we have been harvesting trees. We have had a lull over the last few years. The money is used for capital projects.

Gary would like the Council to look at alternative funding sources, rather than raising rates. Council President Morten talked about all the review and discussions they have had. The bills include water, sewer and stormwater. A significant increase has been because of the sewer rates. The Clean Water Act has had a huge impact on the city. It has been a costly project. We will be fined daily if we don't do the improvements. Boise Cascade had helped subsidize our rates and they are no longer here.

◆Daniel Goodnight. Monthly billing costs more. Why are we looking at doing it?

Council President Morten said it based mostly on citizen requests. Daniel would like people to be aware that it will cost them more. Morten explained that it would be extremely costly right now. They are continuing to install radio read meters to make it an easier process.

Daniel suggested having a program that would help subsidize low income families. He lives outside City limits. His rates are twice the amount as inside. He doesn't understand that. Council President Morten asked for his contact information and they will look into it.

◆Laura Byrd. She asked if the slide show was made available for the public review.

Council confirmed that it is on the City's website.

Laura repeated an earlier comment that the website states that trees are harvested to subsidize water rates. An earlier statement by Council was made that it is not. Mayor Peterson explained that the revenue from harvesting trees is not figured into the rate structure. It is used for capital improvements.

Laura explained that last October she reduced from two people to one person living in a three bedroom home. Her amount of usage almost doubled. How is that possible? Why have our rates continued to climb? What happened to the timberland that was earmarked for the water? When was it last logged? How much was the gross of that logging? How much actually went to keep our rates lower? How much went to other projects or general fund?

Mayor Peterson responded that none of it goes to other projects or general fund. It stays within the water department. Council President Morten explained that capital projects can include reservoir acquisition of land, building and infrastructure.

Laura understands that Boise Cascade had a contract with the City. What happened with that contract? Were they let out of the contract? Mayor Peterson explained that Boise paid for what

they used. At the time they were running, it was about 98% of the secondary lagoon costs. When they stopped using the secondary lagoon for their effluent they didn't have to pay anymore. There was a sewer and use agreement. Laura state that it was the City's fault for letting them walk away from it. She has heard from people that have \$300-600 utility bills. That's unreasonable. Are the proposed rates in addition to what we already pay? Peterson confirmed it is.

Laura referenced Resolution No. 1647. Commercial and industrial businesses pay the same fixed rate for storm water as residential. She does not understand that. Public Works Engineering Director Nelson explained that commercial and industrial businesses pay the set amount for one house, per 2,500 sq. ft. If a business is 25,000 sq. ft., they will pay 100 times what you pay. It is based on square footage of impervious surface.

Laura said that water is 20% of her income. She is on disability and makes less than \$1,500 a month. That's the difference between having food and water. This is ridiculous. Mayor Peterson told Laura that there is a low income subsidy available. She needs to come talk to the Finance Department.

◆Keith Bunn. He lives outside City limits. Will the increase for him be double the amount for users inside the City? He talked about the bill increase when he let his grandkids play in the sprinkler or someone comes over to use his washer. Is Cascade using the lagoon?

Mayor Peterson confirmed that they are. They have taken on their share of the rates.

◆Dave Baxter. He is a property and home owner in St. Helens. It's wonderful that we can come talk to you. The rates will be raised whether we like it or not. Government has to go forward. His water bill has doubled over the last three-four years. He would like the Council to understand that you don't receive an raise when you're retired and on a fixed income.

◆Howard Blumenthal. He has been coming in here for years and talking about the water rates. This is the biggest turnout he has ever seen. It's very important to say involved. We all need to conserve. He believes the monthly billing would create a havoc at this time. Howard reminded everyone that their sewer rates are based on a two-billing cycle during the winter. That will set your sewer rate for the rest of year. If you heavily conserve during that time, your bill will be less.


Deliberations will be held during the regular session.

CLOSE PUBLIC FORUM – 7:28 p.m.



ATTEST:


Kathy Payne, City Recorder


Randy Peterson, Mayor