

## PORTLAND, OREGON

## Amanda Fritz, Commissioner

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Commissioner Fritz Responds to Proposed Public Utility District Ballot Initiative

As the member of the Portland City Council who voted against the Portland Water Bureau (PWB) rate increases the past three years, and who opposed the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) budget this year, some Portlanders may assume I'd favor the proposed Utility District. Nothing could be further from the truth. I do not support the creation of a new experimental body which would take control of our precious Bull Run watershed, and of our water and environmental management systems that are the envy of the nation. A Utility District would disconnect vital public services from other interconnected functions of the City, such as Parks management, Urban Forestry, assistance to struggling residents, regulatory compliance, and making sure taxes and fees for businesses and homeowners are apportioned appropriately.

Commissioner Fish is the first member of Council for many years to be assigned to be in charge of both utilities. He deserves a fair opportunity to improve transparency and accountability, and stabilize rates. As the Commissioner-in-Charge of Parks and also of Development Services, I will be working with him on issues such as the ongoing protection of the Bull Run watershed, and of the historic reservoirs. We will work with Portland residents and ratepayers to discuss the future of programs such as Friends of Trees plantings, Community Watershed Stewardship Projects, and management of natural areas protected for stormwater storage and fish/wildlife habitat, such as Forest Park. He and I have already discussed system improvements such as hiring utility experts assigned to the City Budget Office to monitor PWB and BES year-round, and also a potential Charter referral enshrining the adopted Binding City Policy that the Bull Run system never be privatized. Collaboration is necessary and possible in our Commission form of government, established by the City Charter. Neighborhood Involvement and Equity are core responsibilities of the City Council, along with provision of safe drinking water and management of environmental protection. A stand-alone Utility District would sever those connections, separating ratepayers from improvements in community engagement and empowerment of underserved neighborhoods that the City has made over the past four years.

Portland's residents and businesses already battle the challenges of being under multiple different local jurisdictions – the City of Portland, Multnomah County, Metro, five different school districts, two Soil and Water Conservation Districts, dozens of political precincts, and more. Slicing off the utilities to be ruled by yet another independent government is unlikely to improve efficiency, or the long term public good. Adding another bureaucracy would be costly and inefficient. Portland's water supply, rivers, and waste management systems have been entrusted to elected officials on the City Council for over 100 years. While many of us sometimes disagreed with choices made by the Council over the past decade, there is a new Commissioner-in-Charge of Water and Environmental Services. Now is the time to discuss new directions under new leadership, rather than hoping for different decisions to be made by unknown, untested future Utility District politicians promoting their own particular agendas. Be careful what you wish for: creation of a Public Utility District could very well be more costly, less equitable, and less responsive to Portland's needs. ####