

All things are possible in Leonardville

By [Anna Griffin, The Oregonian](#)

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Suggestions that [Randy Leonard](#) will run for mayor someday seem overblown.

Why bother? He's already built a city-within-a-city inside the [Portland Water Bureau](#). Call it Randywood. Leonardville. It's a place where every problem can be solved, even ones with nothing to do with water.

City Hall was abuzz last week with news that Leonard wants to arm reservoir security guards. There he goes again, the thinking went, overreaching his authority on the public dime. First duct tape, now this.

The truth of the matter is that Leonard's proposal – to give guards the power to issue citations and make arrests – has little to do with carrying guns. Right now, if security catches someone skinny-dipping in the Washington Park reservoir or dropping cyanide into Mount Tabor, they must hold the suspects until the real police show up. That's no big deal within city limits, but it can mean a lot of awkward waiting around at Bull Run, 147 square miles of wilderness.

Still, this is a chance for Leonard's City Council colleagues – and his constituents, the 800,000 people who drink Portland water – to connect the dots. Since taking over the bureau in 2005, Leonard has expanded its role far beyond simply delivering clean water. Armed guards are merely the latest, most obvious step.

Forget the fact that the city already has a massive parks department. Leonard created six "hydroparks," atop existing bureau infrastructure in Portland. He's pushed renovations at Dodge Park, a 14-acre picnic spot at the confluence of the Bull Run and Sandy rivers in Clackamas County, and hopes to offer campsites soon. And, eager to help his friends at the Portland Rose Festival, he traded a piece of Water Bureau land at Mount Tabor for the old McCall's Restaurant site. Bureau engineers helped restore the building, which the festival now leases for \$1 a year.

Leonard has also put the bureau to work cleaning up our streets: Although the city has an entire agency devoted to sewers, his engineers helped design the "Portland Loo," a futuristic solar-powered public toilet based on similar models Leonard saw in Europe. The first sits in Old Town. Bureau managers plan to install more and perhaps sell the idea to other cities down the line.

Toilets, parks, police. The only people who seem to be paying attention are the volunteers on the Portland Utility Review Board, a watchdog group that monitors water and sewer rates.

On Tuesday, members met with the City Council to present their annual report – which decries the Water Bureau's budget as "excessive and inappropriate" and the council's apparent lack of interest in their work. Leonard, a former firefighter and union negotiator, responded to their seemingly reasonable complaints the way he usually does: By turning pink and acting like they'd accused him of kicking his dog. Deeply, morally offended, in other words.

Portland's average water rate rose 17.9 percent this year. Leonard's side interests represent a comparatively tiny portion of the bureau budget. It's still sort of galling, though, this expansion of the Water Bureau's responsibilities at a time when rates are skyrocketing and most Oregonians aren't exactly swimming in extra dough.

And yet, I love having Leonard in City Hall and not simply for the sheer entertainment value of trying to guess what he'll say next or how red his face will flush when someone disagrees. He leaps before he looks. He picks the wrong fights. His priorities are sometimes completely whacked. He sees a problem, and he tells his people to fix it. It may not be the right problem, given his job description. It may not be the most appropriate, cost-effective fix.

But in Randywood, stuff gets done. That's more than you can say for the rest of Portland these days.

--[Anna Griffin](#)