



Rioting Over Rising Rates

Tacy Steele, AWWA Conference 2024



City of Hillsboro



Water Department

- Utilities Commission
- ~ \$50/6000 gallons
- Owns Water Supply
- Long History of Stable Water Rates – with small, incremental increases
- Community-Driven (18 in 85 years)



Winter Is Coming!

- New Water System (Willamette River)
- Rates Increasing
- Drawing Attention so needed to “Up Game.”



Rise to Challenge

- Switch to Evening Hearings
- Presentations to Stakeholder Groups
- Public Comment Period (Month of September)
- Community Conversations (English and Spanish)
- Expanded Affordability Program



2022: There Were Signs of Trouble...

- Student Letters
- Media Campaign
- Activist Newspaper
- Postcards
- Campaigning around Town (Churches, etc.)
- Attempted Engagement Refuted



Then There Were Actual Signs



Lessons Learned: Proactive is Key

Hope for Best - BUT Prepare for Worst!

- Protect and Prepare Your Commission (Mentally and Physically)
- Set Boundaries
- Listen – No need for immediate response
- Sign-In: Address or Map
- Okay to Separate – Overflow Room
- Enforce Testimony Rules for All (3 Min/6 Min)
- Interpreter and Translated Materials as needed

Focus on What Matters

- Find way to speak directly to people
- Work with authentic community partners who are truly invested in the community
- Work towards positive outcomes



Governing Body Response

THE DIRECTIVES

- 1 Assistance for Low-Income Customers**

Work with other City departments, City administration, and Clean Water Services (CWS) on additional options to further assist customers who have lower income, which may include low-income families, senior citizens, and customers with medical hardships. Since the City is transitioning to a biennium budget, the UC would be open to allocating \$150,000 towards additional affordability program development and implementation.
- 2 Evaluate Residential Water Rates**

Analyze customer categories in the rate study to verify that residents (both single-family and multi-family) are not subsidizing business and industry and also analyze options related to (1) an additional block rate for single family residents with low water usage and (2) multi-family tiered rates, volume charges, and peaking costs.
- 3 Flexible Payment Options**

Work with other City departments to verify that flexible payment options exist for low-income customers and that these options are easily accessible, especially to marginalized community members, to avoid shut-offs.
- 4 Advocacy for Low-Income Household Water Assistance Funding**

Advocate for a statewide low-income water and wastewater utilities assistance program, in partnership with the League of Oregon Cities and Clean Water Services, similar to Oregon's Low-Income Household Water Assistance (LIHWA) Program that was established from recent federal funding.

- 5 Promote existing utility assistance programs**

Conduct outreach in the community on the availability of the current utilities' assistance program and support City administration on any initiatives to improve the program.
- 6 Increase Utility Charge Awareness through Utilities Rates Streamlining Initiatives**

Improve community awareness of all the different utility charges on the bill through Utilities Rates Streamlining initiatives. This includes: who is responsible for each charge and how the community benefits from the services associated with all the fees on the bill. It's not a "water" bill — it's a "utility" bill.
- 7 Educate the Public on Local Water Provider Service Areas**

Staff should continue to educate the public on water provider service areas and provide an easy reference with this information, in partnership with the Regional Water Providers Consortium.



Thank You!

Questions?



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