

Ways and Means Testimony 5/10/25

I am a lifelong Oregonian. I have lived in the small town of Harrisburg for 11 years, though I have been a part of the community for 20 years. Recently I was elected to the City Council, and one issue I ran on was to see our Water Bond project come to completion. It is common knowledge in our town that no one drinks the water. Though it is sourced from wells, it is very hard water. It meets all requirements and is deemed “safe”, however it is discolored and tastes bad. Most people either subscribe to a delivery service for their drinking water, or go to a grocery store in one of the nearby towns to buy water. The closest neighboring town for buying water is a 10-minute drive, the next is a 22-minute drive, one way. However, sometimes upon making the drive, it is discovered the store has run out of the gallon jugs, or their filtered water dispenser is broken down. The other option to get drinkable water that is a privilege only some have, is to install a reverse osmosis system. This has ongoing costs related to periodically replacing spendy filters, but allows the city water to be drinkable. Those who do not spend the time, money, and effort on an additional water softener for their house must prematurely also replace their appliances that use hot water, including their dishwasher and water heater.

Harrisburg is a poor town, with many people renting. A reverse osmosis and water softener are expenses many cannot afford. Those who rent do not have the option of installing a reverse osmosis or water softener. Many who own their home cannot afford the extra expense related to installing and maintaining these systems. We also have a fair percentage of people who do not drive. I am one of the fortunate ones that was able to install a water softener at the time we purchased our home 11 years ago, back when prices were not so high. This alone helped improve the water, but we still did not drink it. We instead refilled jugs every time we went to the grocery store. The filtered water stations being shut down during COVID finally forced us to take the leap and install a reverse osmosis. Having both systems in place, my family can now drink the water and can't tell the difference in taste or appearance between tap and bottled water. I am glad for me, but greatly sympathize with my neighbors and those in the community who still have to purchase water. A couple doors down from mine live 3 elderly women. Unfortunately, the 5-gallon water jugs have gotten too heavy for them to put in their car after they have filled them, or lift onto the dispenser once they get home. They are forced to only fill them halfway. They have called and asked my husband for help refilling or replacing their water jugs on multiple occasions.

As you can see, water is a problem for the citizens of Harrisburg. Back in 2017 a \$7.5 million water bond was passed, with the intention of finally fixing our water by drilling a new well, as well as increasing our water storage capacity to better meet demand. The planning, design, and engineering was completed, and many pipes under the roads were replaced. Unfortunately, the

main part of the project (drilling the well and replacing the storage tanks) was not able to be started before COVID hit. The project came to a halt as supply chain issues were rampant and prices started to sky-rocket. Suddenly the project was \$2+ million over budget with the updated quotes, and everything was at a standstill while the city tried to figure out how to come up with more money. The citizens were mad that they weren't getting the clean water that was promised in a timely manner, and were forced to continue to buy water or install water systems in their homes. Now 5 years later, prices have continued to climb, and is now \$4 million over the original bond, but the project has resumed and there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Unfortunately, the city has been forced to look for loans. However, this cost all gets passed on to the citizens, some of which are already struggling to pay the cost of basic necessities including rent, water, and electricity as it is, even without the rate increases that are inherent with such an expensive project.

Harrisburg has a population of 3,700. As a small town that means it also has an associated small budget. Unfortunately, projects like the water system upgrade aren't cheaper just because you're small. Equipment, materials, and labor are just as expensive for a small town as for a big one. For comparisons sake, the updated bid of \$9 million for work still to be done after the COVID stall is equivalent to an entire year's operating budget for the city. The \$2.3 million that the city is requesting in order to finish this project may not seem like much to a large city. However, for the small town of Harrisburg it feels weighty and even insurmountable. As an elected official, I worry about how the citizens will pay for this additional burden on their monthly bill. Will they have to choose to forfeit extras like sports for their kids, or struggle to pay their rent or put food on their table? With recent inflation as it is, prices of everything have gone up, and it's just one more thing that adds to the overall burden. We ask that you would join us in prioritizing a small poor community, allowing them to finally have drinkable tap water while also ensuring it is affordable. We thank you for considering Harrisburg in your distribution of funds.