For immediate release

For more information, contact Water Bureau Public Information at 503-823-8064.

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**City of Portland Utilities Pledge $1 Million for Small Businesses Impacted by COVID-19**

PORTLAND, OR – Mayor Ted Wheeler and Commissioner Amanda Fritz are taking additional steps to help City of Portland sewer, stormwater, and water small business customers with their utility bills during the ongoing public health and economic crisis with the **Small Business Program for Utility Relief (SPUR)**. The Portland Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services have pledged $1 million in financial support for small businesses impacted by the pandemic. Credits for City of Portland utility bills are expected to assist between approximately 200 and 300 small businesses and will range between $1,000 and $10,000. The City of Portland utility bureaus are partnering with Prosper Portland, the city’s economic development agency, to develop criteria for providing relief to impacted businesses.

“Today’s actions build upon our continued efforts to help each other weather the COVID storm,” said Mayor Ted Wheeler. “Portland is a small business town. Our small businesses are employers, neighbors, and mainstays of our neighborhoods. By helping small businesses, especially Black, indigenous, people of color, and women-owned businesses, we are contributing to the City’s resilience and recovery.”

More information is available at the Water Bureau’s website, [**portlandoregon.gov/water/smallbiz**](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/80822). Business owners can sign up now to get an announcement when the application opens. Applications will be open for two weeks beginning July 8, and will be evaluated using a racial equity and vulnerability lens. Applications will not be evaluated on a first come-first served basis.

“Small businesses give Portland its unique character and add to its vibrant economic fabric. This funding is designed to help our most vulnerable businesses weather the storm of the pandemic. We know that a racial wealth gap and barriers to capital exist,” Commissioner Amanda Fritz said. “We are designing a program that prioritizes assistance on utility bills for businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, and all People of Color (BIPOC) and women.”

“Many local businesses are facing significant hardships,” said Prosper Portland Executive Director Kimberly Branam. “We look forward to collaborating with the Water Bureau and the

Bureau of Environment Services to create a program that provides equitable access to crucial utility payment assistance for small businesses in this challenging time.”

In addition to this support for small businesses, the bureaus have expanded the financial assistance program for residential customers. Portland City Council recently approved an expansion of the Water Leak Repair Assistance Program, which more than doubles funding to help income-qualified homeowners make necessary water leak repairs to their homes.

“We continue to look for ways to reduce barriers and get financial assistance to those in need,” Water Bureau Director of Customer Service Kathy Koch said. “We have **temporarily relaxed eligibility requirements for our bill discount program, including the** proof-of-income documentation requirement. We are seeing more people signing up for these programs and we are ready to help.”

The City of Portland utility bureaus continue to offer all customers no-interest flexible payment schedules. In response to the crisis, the utility bureaus have temporarily suspended late fees, collections and water shut-offs on accounts with past-due balances. Financial assistance may not cover an entire bill, so bureaus recommend that customers continue to make payments that are manageable to them to avoid a potentially larger balance in the future.

The financial assistance programs serve thousands of Portlanders and offer a menu of options for reducing or waiving portions of the utility bills. These include:

**Services for residential customers:**

* Utility [Safety Net Program](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/565244) and crisis assistance provides flexible, long-term interest-free payment arrangements for those with employment, medical, or other personal emergencies.
* [Bill discounts](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/565238) and crisis assistance are available for income-qualified customers.
* [Assistance for renters in multi-family properties](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/689542) in the amount of up to $500 is available through a partnership with Home Forward for renters at risk of eviction. Contact 211 for assistance.
* [Water leak repair assistance](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/29334)  funds repairs of water leaks for income-qualified homeowners.

**Services for all customers:**

* [Monthly statements](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/64398) offer the option of paying each month to avoid a quarterly bill that includes three months of sewer/stormwater/water charges.
* [Clean River Rewards](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/41976) provide savings for those who manage stormwater on their property.
* [Water Efficiency](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/index.cfm?&c=29334) offers free water-saving devices and rebates for toilet and irrigation upgrades.

To learn more about how the City can help, or to view the detailed information about these programs, please start [here.](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/index.cfm?&c=69504) If you still have questions, email [PWBCustomerService@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:PWBCustomerService@portlandoregon.gov) or contact City Customer Service staff at 503-823-7770. Limited staffing may result in longer response time.

**ABOUT THE PORTLAND WATER BUREAU**

*The Portland Water Bureau serves water to almost a million people in the Portland area. Portland’s water system includes two great water sources, 53 tanks and reservoirs, and 2,200 miles of pipes. With 600 employees working on everything from water treatment to customer service, the Water Bureau is committed to serving excellent water every minute of every day.* Find us on Twitter @PortlandWater and visit us at [portlandoregon.gov/water](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/index.cfm?).

**About the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services**

*The City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services - your sewer and stormwater utility - provides Portland residents with programs to protect water quality and public health, including wastewater collection and treatment, sewer construction and maintenance, stormwater management, and stream and watershed restoration. Follow on Twitter - @BESPortland. On the web:* [*portlandoregon.gov/bes/news*](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/46634)*.*

**About PROSPER PORTLAND**

*Prosper Portland creates economic growth and opportunity for Portland. Our vision is to make Portland one of the most globally competitive, healthy, and equitable cities in the world by investing in job creation, encouraging broad economic prosperity, and fostering great places throughout the city. We aspire to be a workplace of choice with passionate staff excelling in an open and empowering environment and sharing a commitment to our collective success. Follow us on Twitter @prosperportland or visit us at* [*prosperportland.us*](https://prosperportland.us/)*.*