

Salem Report

By Representative Brad Witt



As you know by now, the 79th Legislative Assembly adjourned on March 3, a full week ahead of schedule. I'm happy to

say that most of the bills I sponsored negotiated the process well, and I am especially happy with one bill dealing with toxic air emissions and the tools in place to manage them. The bill, SB 1541A, known as "Cleaner Air Oregon," sets health-based standards for reducing air toxics.

For more than 30 years Oregon's air quality rules have helped lower air toxics and other pollutants that industrial facilities emit. However, Oregon's current rules have gaps and limits because they are based on federal regulations. As a result, industrial plants can operate legally but still emit pollutants at levels that could harm people's health. Over the years, I have heard from constituents about Esco Corporation in NW Portland, and more recently, Dyno Nobel in Columbia City. Cleaner Air Oregon sets science-based standards that protect the health of our citizens while allowing our community to

create predictable, consistent air quality rules that allow business entities to stay competitive in a global economy. My leadership helped bring the key parties together to negotiate an acceptable settlement, including who pays for the program and how much.

SB 1541A charges the Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Health Authority with developing a health risk-based air toxics permitting program. Up until now permits have been issued based on the volume of emissions generated rather than their effects on people. Now the goal will be to evaluate potential health risks to people near commercial and industrial facilities that emit regulated air toxics, and when a company exceeds the Risk Action Level (RAL), it must meet with neighbors and explain plans to reduce risk and consider their input. Best of all, this new approach was reached with the cooperation of these industries and the program will be entirely funded by fees imposed on the emitters. There will be little to no general fund dollars spent to collect pollutant data, review risks, and work with the companies to reduce emissions if needed. Oregon now joins Washington, California and 22 other

states that have adopted health-based air toxics regulations.

Here are several other bills of interest, especially to fishers, hunters, and everyone who enjoys the fruits of our natural resources:

- SB 1550A – Authorizes the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to adopt record keeping requirements for persons who engage in commercial fisheries in order to trace the chain of possession of food fish. You may now be able to ascertain where that halibut or salmon came from when dining at your favorite restaurant.
- HB 4030A – Builds on a bill regarding poaching offenses passed in 2016. Following a court decision denying the state's request for restitution, this bill allows the court to impose fines payable to the Commission for offenses involving the poaching of wildlife.
- HB 5201 – Part of this bill designates \$350,000 for the purchase of the Leaburg Fish Hatchery. Some of these funds will come from the Columbia River endorsement on fishing licenses. This hatchery provides mostly spring chinook to the McKenzie, Santiam and upper Willamette Rivers.

City Council Receives Utility Rate Review Report *continued from front page*

customers who have a larger service meter, including businesses and customers like the School District and Cedar Ridge Resort and Conference Center.

Water and sewer loans are charged equally across customers as a flat fee, the same as the base rate, based on the meter multiplier.

The water consumption rate is billed per 1,000 gallons metered and currently includes a 2,000 gallon allowance per meter multiplier; customers are not charged for consumption until they have used more than their allowance. Sewer consumption rates are based on the average amount of water a customer uses during winter months (November-February). The current consumption rate for water is \$3.00/1,000 gallons and for sewer it is \$2.31/1,000 gallons.

Current trends show there was a 1.5% increase in capacity from 2016 to 2017 which is equivalent to 20 new residential homes. That trend is expected to continue in the near future with expected new home construction and a strong housing market. Water usage also continues to increase with a 5.5% increase in water registered through billable meters from 2016 to 2017.

The City shows a 22% loss of produced water through leaks and loss at the meter. A meter replacement program has recently been implemented to upgrade aging meters throughout the system. Industry standards show old meters do not register correct use and lose accuracy as they age. Fousek told the Council that early data shows an increase in con-

sumption for meters which have been replaced.

Currently the average monthly bill for the average residential customer, based on 4,600 gallons of use, totals \$138.45 per month.

The changes proposed in the report would increase the monthly Water Base Rate, reduce the consumption rate, reduce the allowance for water from 2,000 gallons to 500 gallons, and would not change the Water Loan. It would increase the Sewer Base Rate, increase the Sewer Consumption, and reduce the Sewer Loan by about \$10. With those changes the monthly bill for an average customer using 4,600 gallons would be reduced by about \$8.

A reduction in rates is not a done deal at this point. Council will discuss recommendations from the Utility Rate Review Committee and any decisions on adjustments to utility rates will then be discussed by the Budget Committee before the adoption of a final budget before the new fiscal year. Council could choose to use the excess funds from the closed sewer loans to pay off another sewer loan early that is due to expire in 2020.

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reflecting the spirit of our community

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