

WATER, from page 5

water.

Out of that, we quickly learned how big and massive this city is; it's over 139 square miles, the transportation being very compromised. We figured out that we not only needed to make sure we were creating water spaces for people to pick up water but then recognize the aging population and some of the transportation challenges. We then created what we call "water droppers." These were people that delivered water to persons that are homebound, sick, or people that may not have transportation or may have several children and find it difficult to get to a water station.

Out of that work, we recognized people were questioning the quality of the water, so then we partnered with Michigan State University and did a project that we just finished the second leg of in November to test the quality of water in Detroit because we'd been told by the EPA that water could be tested anywhere in the state of Michigan but Detroit. That sends a message to grass roots that there definitely has to be something wrong if you can test water anywhere in the state of Michigan *but* Detroit, being that that's the largest city in Michigan.

The third thing that we found was, we convened our own table of community-based researchers, and we had some of the top experts across the country, 67 of them in total; they represented all kinds of institutions of higher learning that are convened under our jurisdiction, so anything created in collaboration with them is already controlled by the community and, of course, We The People of Detroit. We hold this data on behalf of the community.

There's been over 100,000 persons shut off from water. We have litigated against the city eight times now, and we have won each of those pieces of litigation. The water department continues to redact information, which causes us to have to continue to pursue more litigation. We were involved in another action where there's been over 100,000 households illegally foreclosed on, which is another tactic to force people out of the city. Many of these persons are low-income persons, but they are paying as much as 80 to 90 percent above the market rate for what they should be paying for their taxes.

It's these kind of measures along with the fact the high rate of water has been used as another weapon to place that debt on top of the tax laws, which creates a situation for low-income people that makes it unbearable because it makes it where their taxes are not affordable, and then on top of that, the unaffordability of water, which is causing

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PORTLAND'S PROPOSED WATER ASSISTANCE EXPANSION

"We know that Portland is in an affordability crisis," Portland Water Bureau spokesperson Jaymee Cuti told Street Roots. "We also know that a sudden emergency hits lower-income customers much harder."

Her bureau, along with the Bureau of Environmental Services, whose charges piggyback on the same bill to ratepayers, have requested funding in the 2018 city budget to offer larger discounts to low-income households. Street Roots wrote about this proposal in February (news.streetroots.org/waterassistance), finding that while in 1995, Portland's water bureau became one of the first in the nation to offer a low-income discount program to residents, it never met its goal of reaching 10,000 customers.

Portland Water Bureau provided the following information about what the proposed expansion of its assistance program to low-income households would do:

Establish a dedicated low-income services team to provide customer service, data gathering and analysis.

them to be indebted, which then causes them to lose their property. As many of the households that we analyzed in 2015 that went into foreclosure, the majority of those owed approximately \$1,900 in debt, and many of their homes sold for \$16,000 to \$18,000 per household, but dollars that were intended through the stimulus package to keep Detroiters in their homes should've paid back-water bills and back-taxes. It is now being levied to entice a younger, whiter population to move into the city. You won't give me, a resident, who has stayed and paid in this city assistance to stay in the city, many times needing less than \$2,000, but then you'll provide \$20,000 to \$80,000 for another person to move into the city that is actually coming in as a new resident.

E.G.: You're coming to Portland to talk about the situation in Detroit. Why should what is happening in Michigan matter to Portlanders? What can we learn from your experiences?

M.L.P.: Hopefully what Portland will learn is that we're sort of the canary in the mine for other communities that we believe are going to fall prey to this kind of austerity. We actually knew in 2013 that Puerto Rico

Increase the total utility crisis voucher from \$150 to \$500. The purpose of crisis vouchers is to help a household get through an unexpected life event.

Expand income requirements to better align with Portland incomes.

Increase the current 50 percent discount to 80 percent for households in poverty. For example, a four-person family earning below \$22,000 annually would pay approximately \$25 a month for water, sewer and stormwater services.

Provide up to \$500 assistance annually to low-income customers living in multi-family dwellings. Utility assistance would be administered through Home Forward's rental assistance program because utility bills are already included in rent. This partnership with Home Forward and the community groups that administer the rental assistance program would cut down on administrative costs and eliminate the need for the Water Bureau to create a new program.

Portland City Council and Mayor Ted Wheeler are currently considering these expansions through the budget process.

was going to be next.

Many of the same players that are a part of what happened in Detroit – everybody from the DeVos family, who is deeply benefiting from the charterizing of public education – they're a part of privatizing water, also privatizing transportation, large airports; they're also a part of privatizing trash collection. We believe these players need to be called out and identified. The second-largest law firm in the world has been a major actor in representing the banks that are benefiting from this austerity. There is an article called "The New Water Barons" (globalresearch.ca), and what you'll find in that article is many of the banks that were protected during the bankrupting of Detroit are the same banks that are buying up the aqua fillers around the globe.

What I am hoping we can show is that not only some of the information and the wisdom we've learned over the course of this struggle but also that we can begin to look for solutions in terms of how to unite our struggles so we are not continuing to fall prey to these kind of austerity measures so we are beginning to build collective power across the nation and hopefully eventually around the world.

We believe that people should come first. We know that water is a human right. We also know people must fight for that right.

Kaitlyn Dey, Street Roots social work intern, provided the transcription of this interview.

RECODE, from page 5

disposal or dishwasher.

Recode immediately initiated a campaign to legalize greywater reuse in Oregon after its establishment in 2007. Two years later, Oregon Legislature approved a program that allows Oregonians to set up residential and commercial systems for reusing their greywater for irrigation, as long as they obtain the proper permits.

Cahill said Portland's primary water source, Bull Run Watershed, has suffered environmental impacts from being used as a reservoir.

According to Cuti, the Portland Water Bureau has "49 specific mitigation measures the city will undertake over a 50-year period to address flow, temperature and habitat impacts" in the Bull Run Watershed. But, she added, "because the watershed is used for drinking water, a 147-square mile area is protected from human entry, thus creating one of the most protected natural areas in the state."

Cahill also pointed out that Portland's back-up source, the Columbia South Shore Well Field aquifer, could one day be contaminated by the radioactive plume moving slowly through the region's groundwater from the Hanford Site.

In response to this concern, Cuti stated, "Portland's aquifers are separated from the groundwater at Hanford by hundreds of miles and the Cascade Range. The Columbia River could potentially be affected by groundwater contamination at Hanford, but the river is not the primary source of recharge to the aquifers Portland uses for drinking water. Those two factors effectively prevent groundwater at Hanford from impacting Portland's aquifers."

Cahill said her organization is not suggesting that Portland will ever stop using water from Bull Run or the Columbia wells, but, she argues, "we should be making a plan for resiliency that diversifies our water sources and greywater and blackwater reuse is one of those sources in cities that should be seriously considered. San Francisco is now requiring water reuse in all buildings over 250,000 square feet. Portland should do the same or better."

She said there are already some exceptional examples of buildings that utilize greywater in Portland, such as Hassalo on Eighth. This grouping of three luxury apartment buildings has a system that treats and recycles 100 percent of its greywater and blackwater, which is reused for toilet flushing, irrigation and cooling. It's estimated this prevents up to 45,000 gallons of water per day from entering the city's sewage system, making it the largest community water processing system in the nation.

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