

# news Briefs

## MANAGER HITS TAXPAYERS WITH BIG HIDDEN FEE

Eugene City Manager Jon Ruiz has imposed a large, but largely unnoticed tax increase that will take effect June 5 unless the Eugene City Council objects.

Homeowners will pay an average of \$61 per year more on their EWEB water bills to cover up to 24 percent increases in stormwater and wastewater fees tacked on by the city. Ruiz signed an administrative order May 1 that will impose the fees in July unless the City Council votes to overrule him.

The increase comes at a time of record unemployment and furloughs and cutbacks of other government employees to meet deepening deficits.

The fee increases include about \$5 a year for local stormwater fees (5 percent increase), \$20 a year for local wastewater fees (24 percent increase) and \$36 for regional wastewater fees (18 percent increase).

Ruiz and other city and wastewater staff argue the fee increases are needed to improve facilities and cover rising costs and declining revenues.

Compared to other revenue measures that have been referred to a public vote, the taxpayer impact is high. For example, a \$61 tax per year on the average homeowner would be equivalent to about a \$22 million five-year property tax levy.

— Alan Pittman

## COUNCILORS BALK AT RAPID TRANSIT

In a radical shift away from controlling global warming and urban sprawl and preserving livability, a majority of the Eugene City Council now appears opposed to an EmX bus rapid transit line in west Eugene.

At a May 13 meeting Councilors George Brown, George Poling and Mike Clark appeared opposed to the effort to reduce traffic snarl and pollution with public transit. Councilors Betty Taylor, Andrea Ortiz, Jennifer Solomon and Chris Pryor appeared to be leaning against BRT. Only Councilor Alan Zelenka and Mayor Kitty Piercy appeared supportive in their statements.

Based on the council discussion, it appeared that a majority coalition of progressives and conservatives has allied against BRT. Progressives have criticized LTD for neighborhood impacts such as cutting down large trees; and conservatives oppose public transportation in general.

Poling said he favors an outcome for the west Eugene BRT study similar to what happened when business groups killed a proposal for BRT on Coburg Road. "At the end of those 18 months the stakeholder group says no build," Poling said. "That worked really well."

The no build alternative "is a very promising idea," Brown said. "A lot of people are questioning is this even necessary."

Brown said Seattle and San Francisco don't have BRT. Actually, Seattle spent a half billion on a downtown bus tunnel and is moving to light rail, and San Francisco has one of the largest subway systems in the nation.

Councilors Taylor, Clark, and Ortiz said the views of opponent homeowners and businesses along the route should decide whether BRT gets built. Those stakeholders should be considered "first and foremost,"

Clark said.

Mayor Piercy appeared supportive of BRT's environmental benefits. "I only wish we could get it up and running faster." But the mayor said that LTD should follow the Coburg process which resulted in a killed route. "We'll work toward a stakeholders meeting."

The Coburg group was dominated by businesses opposed to losing driveway access to BRT, while a large number of environmentalists and transit riders supported the project.

Conservatives have questioned BRT's cost, but the project is funded almost entirely by state and federal funds and will be a big boost to the local economy.

Councilor Zelenka appeared to be the only elected official clearly supportive of BRT. "I'm a great supporter of EmX," he said, using LTD's name for BRT.

Zelenka said the dedicated BRT line is needed to secure right of way for a future light rail system to reduce global warming and sprawl and increase livability, as in Portland. "To me EmX is really about right-of-way, right-of-way, right-of-way," he said. — Alan Pittman

## EMAIL DOCS FOLLOW-UP

Last week's cover story on email use by doctors and medical offices has inspired a few responses.

William Balsom, M.D., of Oregon Medical Group, likes the efficiencies of email and websites for routine patient-office communication, "but anything that involves medical inquiry, problem solving, diagnostic issues and treatment recommendations seems unfit for a non-real-time for-



mat such as e-mail. ... In medicine, body language, speech pattern and inflection, nature of inquiry and visual cues count for a lot (not to mention an actual exam)."

Regarding the payment quandary, Balsom says, "When Regence says 'We don't have a policy for e-visits' they really mean, 'We don't pay for that because we have no way of determining the value of this doctor-patient interaction since it isn't in the usual documentation format.'"

Corvallis engineer Thomas Kraemer says, "The reason doctors are resisting electronic communications is because of the high cost of using multiple and incompatible electronic health record systems. Health records software companies have intentionally designed proprietary systems under the guise of 'security' while secretly hoping they will become the next Microsoft-like monopoly."

Looking ahead, Kraemer says he envisions "an open standards medical records

## SLANT

• Climate expert **Bob Doppelt's message** is clear: Climate change will have a huge impact on our planet and on our community in the next few decades, and to deal with it effectively we need to invent new ways of providing for our needs. Tweaking our existing systems will not do nearly enough to offset increasing forest fires, more insects, worse air pollution, hotter summers and lower river flows, said Doppelt in his talk to City Club May 15. Doppelt is director of resource innovations and the Climate Leadership Initiative at the UO's Institute for a Sustainable Environment.

Doppelt was cautious in talking about specifics, such as moving the police across the river from downtown, tearing down City Hall, or allowing Seneca's cogeneration plant. But all these things have potential negative impacts on our city's carbon footprint: more driving miles, more energy-intensive concrete, more CO2 in the air. Doppelt lauds some of the city's sustainability efforts, but are our elected officials and city staff really making substantive changes to head off disaster? We see improvement in policies and procedures, but when it comes to the big, high-impact decisions, it's business as usual.

Watch Doppelt's talk at [www.youtube.com/user/CityClubEugene](http://www.youtube.com/user/CityClubEugene)

• Two top **environmental jobs** are open in Oregon right now. Bob Stacey is leaving his executive director slot at 1000 Friends of Oregon this fall, and Jonathan Poisner has given notice as ED of Oregon League of Conservation Voters. Both jobs are based in Portland with plenty of travel around the state, especially to Salem.

Neither Stacey nor Poisner is announcing his next gig, but replacement will be tough. Their organizations deserve plenty of credit for moving the Oregon Legislature toward greater support of the livability of this state. Both Stacey and Poisner should be knighted for the jobs they have done, if we did such things. What's more important than the leadership of the Oregon environmental nonprofits?

• **Tiny turds on campus?** Two weeks ago in this column (5/7) we wrote about the UO faculty blog <http://uomatters.com> and now a look-alike parody has appeared at <http://uomatters.blogspot.com> commenting on everything from the new president to sports scandals to the questionable sources of dorm food. Here's a sample: "University Counsel Melinda Grier STILL refuses to comment on the rumors that physical plant workers are asked to regularly remove small brown turds from campus. Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Diversity Charles Martinez STILL has failed to deny claims that goats are an underrepresented class on the UO campus." Our favorite headline on the blog: "Eugene Weekly is run by morons."

• Early in the **basketball arena** siting saga, a neighborhood group, chaired by a small business owner, asked the UO to answer questions about traffic, parking, noise and garbage on the streets. The neighbors were quite moderate, not opposing the elephant ahead, but only raising valid questions. To its credit, the UO responded to the concerns and has worked to ameliorate them. But, when this story hit the mainstream press and the chairman's name was printed, he received enough threatening calls and comments about boycotting his business that he resigned from the chairmanship. Same scene when a woman who lives in sight of Autzen Stadium questioned the permitting for the monster "O." She was threatened, vilified and ridiculed until she withdrew with concern for the safety of her family.

The UO and local sports media have skillfully created the Ducks sports fans and their carnival, and while only a few fans are idiotic in their obsession, it's time for a teaching moment from the academic institution. Someone suggested that every ticket buyer receive a copy of a "code of ethics for a Duck." Someone else suggested that the same public relations machine that created the sports giant be put to use civilizing it.