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Leaf Drop Brings Fees

For the first time, residents will be billed

BY MELISSA CHAVEZ
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In the summer, you love them. But, come fall, Portlanders' feelings toward the city's spectacular tree-lined streets turn to annoyance.

Fallen leaves clog stormwater drains causing flooding, pile up blocking residential streets, and make roads slippery in the rainy season.

"Whether you're driving, riding a bicycle, or walking, street leaves create a road hazard," said Cheryl Kuck, public information officer with the Portland Bureau of Transportation.

To combat this problem, the city of Portland has been sending out crews to remove curbside leaves from streets for the past 20 years. But this year marks the first time that residents will be charged a fee for this service.

Residents in areas with one scheduled cleaning will be charged \$15; those with two, \$30. Small commercial properties will pay the same rates, but commercial properties with more than 76 linear feet of street frontage will be charged \$65.

The city's 28 designated leaf-districts include some of the most affluent neighborhoods in Portland—Alameda, Eastmoreland, Laurelhurst—and some of the poorest pockets of Boise, Humboldt and St. Johns.

According to the Portland Bureau of



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Leaves are plowed into piles in northeast Portland's King Neighborhood by the city's transportation crews before they are hauled away. For the first time, local residents in 28 districts will be billed for the leaf pickups which keep streets clear from hazards and blocked storm water drains.

Transportation, the agency responsible for the leaf removal service, approximately 30,000 residents and property managers will receive a bill for the service on the Monday after their only or final scheduled street cleaning.

Kuck said that, though the city has been offering this service for free, a proposed fee has been in the works for years.

The decision to bill residents and business was not been sudden, she said. On May 26, the Portland City Council approved the leaf removal fee. And it had been a part of the proposed budget for two years prior to its approval.

"We'll continue to provide the service, but the difference is — because this is only provided on only 25 percent of streets — we're charging addresses in all of the leaf districts where the removal service is provided," Kuck said.

News of the fee, however, has been lacking. Residents in the leaf districts usually receive notice about collection times in mid-October. This happened on schedule, but the plan for residents who wanted to opt-out of the now fee-based service was not yet ready.

The cost of the service — \$800,000 — has been paid out of the city's percentage of the state gas tax. City officials say that this new fee to residents and businesses that receive the service is a more fair financial breakdown.

"We pay for this out of our share of the state gas tax — so that's every resident purchasing gas at the pump," said Kuck. "We're now charging a fee to individuals and businesses on those streets (citywide) that get the direct service."

Beaumont/Rose City resident Rebecca Conant expressed concerns about the lack of

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Remodels of Portland Schools Proposed

Jeff, Roosevelt make list for first upgrades

Superintendent Carolé Smith presented the Portland School Board with a proposal Monday to modernize school buildings so that its students have the same equipment,

technology and updated learning environments as students in newer buildings in neighboring school districts.

"I am excited to present a proposal to deliver modern learning environments for all of our students, well-equipped, well-designed schools with the technology and spaces to support great teaching in every

neighborhood," Smith said.

Over a cycle of bond measures in the next 20 to 30 years, the school district plans to fully modernize every school building. Superintendent Smith proposes to fund the first phase of the rebuilding work through a bond measure on the May 2011 election ballot.

The six-year, \$548 million bond measure would cost the median homeowner about \$25 a month, and would pay for major one-time safety and structural updates to school building systems and rebuilding eight schools.

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