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PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A three-barrel transformer-mounted pole was installed just steps in front of Mary Batson's northeast Portland home without her notification, which caused a water main break. Pacific Power accepted responsibility but may also have to move it because it was installed improperly.

## Homeowner Fights Back

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Pacific Power acknowledged the broken main was their fault and paid for the damages, which included reimbursing her for the over \$1,600 water bill that ensued, plumbing costs, and other expenses, she said.

Batson also complained of a humming noise coming from the transformers, but the company has said they haven't been activated yet, so the noise couldn't be from them.

"While we appreciate her concerns about the placement of the transformers, when operating correctly they should not be a noise problem. Should noise become a concern after the transformers are in service, which will be a few months, we can look at the issues that may be causing them to be too loud and work from there," Pacific Power stated Monday.

Batson lives with her 68-year-old sister Virgie Ruiz, though Ruiz also owns a home elsewhere in the neighborhood. Batson's residence is two doors down from a new upscale, 6 story, 70-unit apartment and business complex being built called The Canyons and slated for opening in summer 2020.

The pole had been installed on the extended property line in front of her house, i.e. the strip of grass in between the sidewalk and the street.

Another three-barrel transformer bank was placed on an existing pole near her neighbor's house, adjacent to the construction site.

Unsatisfied with the placement of the pole, Batson contacted the power company to see what could

be done. At first they said they would investigate the matter but soon her calls went unreturned, she said. Batson then reached out to the city's ombudsman office, who told her that the power company did not have a permit for the pole and that its placement was temporary, she said.

Batson then contacted the Oregon Public Utility Commission which found the opposite: Pacific Power did have a permit and the pole was permanent. In documents from the commission, the utility maintained the pole's placement was "within our right of way and standards, to support the construction of a new development in the area."

The utility also told the commission it would charge the homeowner "in excess of \$20,000" to have it moved somewhere else on the block.

Batson rejected the offer.

"I don't have \$20,000 to pay them," Batson said.

Representing the city's transportation agency, Brady said the pole's placement didn't do enough to avoid being a nuisance.

"[P]oles should be placed on the property line between buildings to avoid having a pole in front of someone's house, so you don't have as many issues with vision obstruction...that's the sort of standard practice, is to put it on the property line between buildings."

Pacific Power has acknowledged working with Batson on the issue for several months. They cited city zoning ordinances

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