

BUSINESS MEETING NOTE

seattle city council meeting on water rates and charges adjustment

Location: seattlecitycouncil_05042015_cb 118369

Date: may 4, 2015

ATTENDEES:

- councilmember bagshaw
- councilmember so on
- councilmember okamoto
- council president burgess
- speaker 7
- meg moorhead from gunnison central staff
- members of the seattle public utilities and neighborhood committee

Agenda Items:

- utilities relating to the rates and charges for water services of seattle
- authorizing withdrawals from the water fund, revenue stabilization subfund
- revising water rates and charges and credits to low
- income customers
- amending the seattle municipal code sections: 21.04.430, 21.04.440, and 21.76.00
- endorsement of water rates for 2016 and 2017
- review of the seattle times article regarding seattle's water bills
- proposal for a smaller rate increase than initially projected in the spu strategic business plan
- discussion on the tax structure implications of rate increases on residential customers

Summary:

in this gathering of the seattle city council, the primary focus was on adjusting the rates and charges for water services provided by seattle public utilities. initial remarks addressed corrections to a recent seattle times article, stressing that despite the article's claim, seattle does not have the highest water bills in the nation. this clarification set the stage for a broader debate on the adequacy and fairness of the proposed rate adjustments for 2016 and 2017. councilmembers detailed the effort to keep water rates low, highlighting that the newly proposed rates represent a smaller increase than originally projected by the spu strategic business plan. despite the general consensus on the necessity of the rate adjustments, concerns were voiced about the broader implications of such increases, especially in light of seattle and washington state's regressive tax structure. the discussion critiqued how the burden of utility costs might disproportionately impact lower-income residents, suggesting that alternate strategies, such as varying cost allocation formulas used for corporate users, should be considered to offset such disparities. the council ultimately voted in favor of the adjustments, with a single opposition, underscoring a collective recognition of the need for infrastructural support through rate revisions but also a keen awareness of the socio-economic dynamics at play.

Notes:

- the reassurance was provided that the misrepresentation by the seattle times about water bills was clarified.
- the water rates approved reflect meticulous planning, aiming to balance necessary utility support with the city's commitment to keeping living costs manageable for its residents.
- the meeting underscored ongoing concerns about the regressive nature of tax and rate structures and their impact on less affluent residents.
- the discussion briefly touched upon the strategic use of cash reserves and on-hand cash to alleviate the need for steep rate hikes, citing fiscal prudence as a guiding principle.
- a call for reevaluation of the utility cost distribution and the exploration of more equitable formulas mirrored broader discussions on tax reform and social equity.
- the proceedings concluded with the passage of the bill, signifying a cautious but necessary step forward in addressing the city's utility and infrastructure needs amid a complex socio-economic backdrop.