

PANIL Meeting, March 8, 2023

## EBMUD talks Water

In this record-setting winter of precipitation, the East Bay Municipal Utility District took the time to present and answer questions at the March 8 General PANIL meeting.

While we initially expected to have just a single spokesperson for the agency, Christine Wong, but Utility Director Marguerite Young and Budget Director Sam Feldman also joined.

Before the presentation, host Bill Manley made a few announcements.

### Announcements

Mosswood Park will hold a big spring cleanup event on Earth Day, April 22 and neighborhood participation is urged. It's a fun event with circus performers and free refreshments. So come out and meet your neighbors and support this great effort.

The Oakland City General Plan, which sets development policies for the next two decades is currently being written. The Housing Element, just approved by the state, will definitely promote and require more dense development in North Oakland, changing what can be built down the street or next door to your residence. PANIL will attempt to schedule a Zoom call to discuss the plan and determine if we want to weigh-in as an organization on the proposed policies.

East Bay Community Energy, which supplies electric power to PG&E for this area, is promoting the switch to electricity from natural gas use in the home. Our Neighborhood Services Coordinator has asked us to consider having a PANIL meeting on the topic.

Our NSC also forwarded a very short one-page survey to give residents the opportunity to comment on priorities for the City's budget. You can participate via this link [bit.ly/3Yp5oxZ](https://bit.ly/3Yp5oxZ).

### Your Water Supplier – EBMUD

The drought is over? Well, said Director Young not officially according to the state of California, which can only make that declaration come June 1. But it's not in doubt, especially with the arrival of the early-March "atmospheric river" that brought heavy, warm rains to most of the state. And for



*a Pardee Dam on the Mokelumne River*

our water district, the drought is over as our main reservoir, Pardee, in the Sierra foothills is approaching capacity even without the heavy snowmelt into the Mokelumne River. Reservoirs on the west side of the Valley, San Pablo and San Leandro, required early spillage measures to reduce potential for flooding. The rains have allowed EBMUD to remove the 8% drought surcharge, so customers can expect to see a slight reduction in their bills.

Budget Director Feldman took the audience on a deep dive into EBMUDs budget priorities. The new budget draft is scheduled for June 23, and will be available for public comment shortly thereafter. Inflation has hit the utility especially hard. Chemical cost have shot up 90% in the last two years, software costs have gone up by 43% and energy rose by 48%. Rates were also kept artificially low during the pandemic to cushion the economic hardship on many.

At this time, the new budget allocates over 50% for capital improvements. The utility replaces about 25 miles of supply piping annually. We'd like to get it to 30 or 40 miles, said Director Young. But at 2.1 million dollars per mile, "we have to be judicious." EBMUD maintains over 4100 miles of pipeline, and with an expected life of 80 years, pipe replacement a never-ending demand. Valerie Winemiller recalled a pipe break that ran in front of her house several years ago that took three hours to fix and lost tens of thousand of gallons. "Why do I bother to conserve?" She asked herself. Some pipes age, some pipes are just not healthy. During WWII, when the war effort demanded iron and copper, utilities resorted to lead, and it found its way to the fast growing cities of Richmond and San Leandro. While it's virtually gone in the District, some small pockets are still occasionally found. If you want to test your water at any time EBMUD will provide a water test kit free. A few years ago, the District made the switch to chloramine from chlorine as a disinfectant. While chloramine can stay in the water longer than chlorine and pose risk to aquariums, it is a more effective disinfectant. The district is also using ozone and UV radiation on a more limited basis.

The fight for pure healthy water is constantly challenged by new pathogens and chemicals. One growing concern are PFA (perflouralkyl) substances that were widely used in packaging and fire-retarding, and appear to have deleterious effect on child development. Many water systems in the country have unacceptable levels, but EBMUD concentrations are low. EBMUD uses the most advanced technology to test for 18 different PFA's.

EBMUD is also a leader in the testing of wastewater. This was necessitated early in the COVID pandemic when an infected cruise ship was forced to anchor in Oakland and EBMUD handled the wastewater from the ship. This has become one of the earliest and most reliable means of detecting outbreaks in a community.

EBMUD supplies water to 1.4 million customers handles the wastewater for about 740,000 customers. Wastewater treatment can be a challenge. Global warming and pollution have contributed to events like the large algae bloom last summer that cause fish die-offs and swimming prohibitions. Since 2011, cities in the District began requiring inspection and repair of sewer laterals with property sales, to reduce the infiltration of rainwater into sewage systems, effectively overwhelming them. With the storms like we recently experienced, the volume of water coming into the sewers can increase five-fold over normal levels.

Asked about the value for the service and how we compare to other districts in the Bay Area, EBMUD pricing is in about the middle of the pack. San Francisco users pay about 50% more per gallon. Mr. Feldman noted that we pay about 1 cent per gallon for water of comparable quality to a jug that goes for over \$2.00 in stores.



*b Lake Temescal in the Afternoon*

EBMUD as a publicly owned utility, wants to support the community. This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the utility and it is planning a big public party at Lake Temescal on April 22 to celebrate. [After Earth Day activity in the morning at Mosswood, you can come picnic at the lake in the afternoon!]

Christine Wong, the EBMUD Community Affairs representative brought attention to the numerous educational opportunities. Tours of the watersheds can be arranged for schools. And a

newer offering is Water Wednesdays, a series of talks online with industry experts, on topics like conservation, desalinization, watersmart gardens and more, See [www.ebmud.com/waterwednesday](http://www.ebmud.com/waterwednesday).

### Closing Announcements

A new pottery studio is opening on Piedmont. Gina Johnson-Geiger, the owner, described Kollektiv Clay Studio, at 3911 Piedmont, and invited all to check out their classes on the [website](#).

Be on the lookout for an email announcement of a PANIL meeting to discuss the Housing Element of the General Plan.