

Stakeholder Update

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Operating with Two Commissioners at the PUC

A Message from the Chief Administrative Law Judge, Nolan Moser

We wanted to provide information on how the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) will continue to operate during a time when we have two sitting commissioners. It's important to note that the agency has operated with two commissioners in the past, and in some cases, for quite some time. The PUC is dedicated to continue our important work and stand ready to assist Governor Kotek in the appointment of a new commissioner.

A Quorum

Under statute – a quorum is a majority of commissioners. When we have three appointed commissioners, a quorum is two, which hasn't changed with the departure of Commissioner Thompson. A quorum of Commissioners now is a meeting at which both Chair Decker and Commissioner Tawney are in attendance.

Including "all" Commissioners in a decision

Our rules do provide specific guidance with regard to a quorum of commissioners when considering a major rate change. OAR 860-001-560 states that "Except in cases of emergency, all commissioners" must participate in decisions on a major rate change proposal, defined as an increase of two percent or more for any customer class—at a public meeting. Thus, all commissioners, not just a majority, must participate in major rate change decisions at a public meeting.

However, Order No. 03-238 of AR 453, which first adopted this rule, explains that "an emergency exist[s]" in certain circumstances including "illness, unavoidable commitments, *or an unfilled vacancy on the Commission*" (*emphasis added*).

So, while all commissioners must typically be present for major rate cases in public meetings, only two Commissioners are needed when an emergency exists, which under our rule is the current situation. Accordingly, Chair Decker and Commissioner Tawney can decide major rate change issues at a public meeting during this interim two-commissioner period.

Appointment and Confirmation Process

The commissioners are all appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of the governor, with the advice and consent of the state Senate, as provided by Article III, Section 4 of the Oregon Constitution. ORS Chapter 756 states that any vacancy in the office of Commissioner shall be filled by gubernatorial appointment with the appointee serving the remainder of the unexpired term. No more than two of such members shall be of the same political party, requiring the new commissioner to be a Republican.

The Senate Rules Committee generally holds confirmation hearings for any executive appointment that is subject to confirmation of the Senate, and an affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the Senate is necessary for confirmation. If an appointment is not confirmed by the Senate, the Governor must make another appointment, subject to confirmation by the Senate.

The Governor's office has indicated that it is actively soliciting candidates to fill Commissioner Thompson's position and is working toward nominating a new commissioner to be confirmed this February when the legislature convenes for its 2024 Legislative Short Session.

Summary

In short, the Commission will continue to operate as it has in the past. If you have any questions about this situation, please feel free to reach out to me.

Best,

Nolan Moser

Commissioner Thompson's Impact on the PUC

The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) recently announced that Commissioner Mark Thompson accepted a leadership position with Form Energy as Senior Director of State Affairs and left the agency at the end of September.



Commissioner Thompson was appointed by Governor Kate Brown in late 2019, for a four-year term ending in November of this year. During his tenure, Commissioner Thompson helped the PUC reach milestone decisions on early implementation questions around Oregon's energy decarbonization laws, the state's involvement in resource adequacy, and reworking the rules and customer protections for low-income customers. Thompson also helped lead the agency's response to utility regulation during the pandemic and has been heavily involved in efforts to expand engagement with new stakeholder and customer groups.

During his four years with the PUC, Commissioner Thompson – or Mark, as he's known in the office – had a positive impact on the work that we do and on the staff he worked with daily.



Mark Thompson (right) with Garrett Martin (left) on a tour of a Community Solar facility.

We contacted various members of our team to learn more about how they were impacted by Mark to celebrate his accomplishments and recognize his many positive contributions.

Letha Tawney -- "I have always appreciated Mark's insightful questions, passion for service and focus on making principled decisions. Oregon customers were fortunate to have him – as were we!"

Caroline Moore – "I couldn't imagine a more thoughtful Commissioner! Working with Mark has been a joy due to his deep expertise and his ability to cut to the most important piece of a complex discussion. It's been wonderful to work with someone as kind as Mark."

Diane Davis – "Working in the same office space with Commissioner Thompson was delightful. His thoughtful, considerate, and open nature shown in public meetings was also present in one-to-one "water cooler" conversations. I'm going to miss his smile and genuine greetings."

Kandi Young – "Mark is known for his kindness, extensive knowledge, and approachable demeanor. I appreciated Mark's ability to connect with the residents of Eastern Oregon during an event in La Grande to hear comments from residents about the proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line. The community there found comfort in knowing Mark, who grew up in Eastern Oregon, recognized the importance of their concerns on this important issue."

Kristi Collins – "Mark made it easy to work for him. He was very pleasant to work with, he was very self-sufficient, easygoing, and thoughtful. I appreciate his work ethic and kind demeanor. I highly respect Mark for his work and as a person."

Sarah Hall – "On countless occasions Commissioner Thompson asked insightful questions of me and my team, eliciting and clarifying (sometimes tough) questions of balance. We improved our analysis and recommendations as a result...whether understanding the right balance of customer protection and program flexibility in the Community Solar Program, to balancing costs and acceleration in Transportation Electrification rulemaking. Thank you so much Mark! We will miss you."

Heide Caswell – "I had the opportunity to see Mark's leadership and team membership on the development of the agency's DEI plan. He demonstrated compassion, concern and space for each of us to internalize various learnings the team had as we considered the needed items for this plan. He certainly shared his skills in clear communication taking the pen and helping to provide content that was a vision but supported with substance to provide clarity to that vision. The plan development also allowed each of us to shine in our own ways, and he honored the contributions each person made, which I see as a solid demonstration of a leader. His impact on me was a personal validation from someone who I respect; his contribution to the outcome was to set the agency on a path with achievable and measurable steps to enhancing our understanding of inclusion and respect for the agency's mission to support our communities as they also grow capacity in this area."

The PUC is grateful for Mark's service and wishes him the best as he embarks on the next chapter of his career. The work of the PUC will continue, and we stand ready to assist the Governor in the appointment of a new Commissioner.

Welcoming the PUC’s New COO

We are thrilled to introduce the latest addition to our leadership team – Mandy Standiford, our new Chief Operating Officer (COO). With a wealth of experience and a proven track record in driving operational excellence, Mandy brings state enterprise expertise and positive energy to our organization.



Mandy Standiford
COO

Mandy has had a unique and impressive career journey. Before joining the PUC, she held several key leadership, regulatory, and compliance positions at other state agencies, including the Oregon Department of Human Services, the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission, and most recently at the Psychiatric Security Review Board. Mandy is a strong advocate for collaboration and communication, and her commitment to innovation and delivering exceptional results is what makes her the perfect fit for our agency as we continue our important work while meeting growing expectations from the Governor, the legislature, and stakeholders.

As our COO, Mandy is responsible for overseeing our day-to-day operations, optimizing processes, and enhancing the efficiency of the agency. She is responsible for strategic financial planning and decision-making for agency budget and oversees all operational management functions of the agency, including the internal policies and key progress metrics. Her leadership will be instrumental in achieving our strategic goals and maintaining the high standard of excellence the PUC is known for.

Mandy is a graduate of Oregon State University – Go Beavs! – where she met her husband. They have a three-year old son Beckett and live in northeast Portland near Troutdale.

When asked about working for the PUC, Mandy replied, “The scope of what the PUC does is so vast, which affords me the opportunity to work on a variety of projects with an amazing team of people, which is exciting to me. I like policy work and enjoy working with other state agencies and the legislature to push large-scale projects across the finish line. I look forward to helping ensure we meet the governor’s expectations and working to bridge the gap between agencies and divisions.”

As a former member of the U.S. Coast Guard for eight years, Mandy is also excited about our connection to the Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots. She added, “Life really does go full circle.”

Please extend a warm welcome to Mandy as she embarks on this exciting journey with us. We look forward to working together to achieve our collective success.

New Tool to Submit Public Comments

The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) has developed a new online tool, making it easier for members of the public, commenters, and utility customers to submit written comments on a specific docket of interest. This tool will also make it easier for PUC staff and the Consumer Services team to track and consolidate public comments received. It’s important to note, this web portal is not intended to serve as the method for stakeholders to comment who typically submit lengthy comments, attached documents, and other more technical materials.

The online portal allows the public comments submitted to automatically appear in eDockets under the “Public Comments” tab. The comments will be downloadable in Excel format, and the downloaded comments will be text searchable for added convenience.

[View the new comment form online.](#) Also, take the time to view submitted comments in dockets under the “Public Comment” tab within each docket.

If you have questions about this online portal, [send an email.](#)

Docket Number	Docket Name	Company
UE 416	PGE REQUEST FOR A GENERAL RATE REVISION	PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC

Comment Number	Created Date	Email Received Date	Company Name	Comment Type	Source	First Name	Last Name	Nearest City	Comment
UE 416-1	10/31/2023 11:55:42 AM		PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC	General Comment	Web	Astralena	Sharp	SALEM	As a residential customer, I cannot afford another rate hike, especially in the coldest times of the year.
UE 416-2	11/1/2023 12:50:13 PM		PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC	General Comment	Web	Rockne	Stites	DAMASCUS	Well hopefully this is the correct docket, but here goes...17 percent increase, really? Makes me jump to the awful thought that someone is getting something. My SSA increase for 2024 is 3.5 percent...inflation gets worse by the day. If seems...and for a monopoly to get an increase without providing anything better for the captive consumers is next to usury and you are as complicit in what can best be described as thievery, plain and simple. The infrastructure is old and has been in

Staff and Stakeholders Participate in Poverty Simulation

A number of PUC employees and stakeholders participated in recent poverty simulation events coordinated by the PUC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. The purpose of these simulations was to better understand poverty to ensure our decisions and actions reflect the needs of those families' experiencing poverty.

According to a report compiled by United Ways of the Pacific Northwest, about 44 percent of Oregon's more than 1.6 million households struggled to make ends meet in 2021. A closer look shows that 12 percent of these households are below the Federal Poverty Level. Unless you've personally experience poverty in your life, it's hard to truly understand.

This was a role playing, highly interactive experience with some participants assigned to work for various businesses and social service agencies, such as a grocery, bank, utilities, social services, school, medical facility, jail/juvenile hall, pawn shop, and church, among others. There was also a shady character assigned to encourage unsavory behaviors in the role-playing experience. Other participants were assigned to a 'family' and were required to work or attend school while also needing to pay bills and access important resources for their 'family' unit. One family during the first simulation event was creative and took a weapon from the shady character when they were encouraged to rob other 'families' and instead pawned the weapon to pay their rent.

Chair Megan Decker kicked off the event by saying, "Today's event sits in larger context of our work on energy burden. In that work we are on a journey that starts by recognizing the energy system impacts people differently and inequitably. Our hope is that participating in this exercise helps you approach the PUC's work on energy burden with more empathy and dedication."

Below are some comments made by PUC staff about their experience in the first simulation held in late October. The photos are also from the staff simulation.

Deanna Rios, Consumer Services – *"Our 'family' was juggling a lot of things, it was chaotic, and we found there was not enough time to obtain the various resources available to us. Everyone should attend a session—great simulation of issues people face in the real world!"*

Megan Decker, Commissioner – *"What hit home was that the combined hoops and hurdles can make well-intended financial support miss the mark, and that supporting the capacity of organizations that can bundle opportunities may be necessary for dollars to land with real people."*

Carissa Spent, Consumer Services – *"This is important. People experiencing poverty aren't faceless nameless numbers in a spreadsheet, or the homeless guy pushing a shopping cart down the street. They're your neighbors, your friends, family even your coworkers."*



Derek Crewdson, Pipeline Safety Analyst – *"The experience for me was quite eye opening. The simulation portion was stressful, overwhelming, and at times very frustrating. How one small, unexpected expense could completely derail your entire monthly budget and all you had worked for the previous week. In the end I think the simulation and discussion created an additional awareness and empathy towards people that are experiencing extreme poverty and the trials and tribulations that they deal with daily. I would like to thank Ezell and the team for all their effort in putting on this event and feel that this would be beneficial to all PUC staff."*

Robin Freeman, Policy Director – *"Participating in the Poverty Simulator exercise*

brought a new awareness to me of how people in poverty struggle on so many levels to take care of their basic needs, and how totally overwhelming that can be on a daily basis.”

Robert Frederick, Budget Analyst – *“My experience of the event is that it really solidified how poverty impacts a person’s ability to live a fulfilling life. It really drove home that being a public servant means taking extra steps to protect those most vulnerable in our communities and make efforts to improve their lives.”*

Letha Tawney, Commissioner – *“It was such an illustration how stressful and exhausting it is to be just getting by. You can’t optimize or plan - you can’t prioritize. All you can do is react in the moment - even when that means you only have bad options.”*

We encourage stakeholders to provide your thoughts on the experience as well. Please email your comments to kandi.young@puc.oregon.gov.



Big Changes with the Activities & Discovery Project

For the past 20 years, the PUC has utilized a custom built and maintained software program called ‘BizApps’ to handle docketing internally and externally. After an extensive solicitation process and discovery phase to determine stakeholder needs, the PUC selected a vendor to replace this system. Staff worked closely with this vendor to develop our new system, which we are calling “Activities and Discovery” or ADS for short.

In our last project update, we noted that there were two issues that needed to be resolved to implement the system – large file management and security. Over the intervening months, we have worked through both these issues, but unfortunately came to an impasse and determined that the contract with the selected vendor had to be concluded and a new procurement started.

The PUC has been working closely with the Oregon Department of Administrative Services (DAS) on this new procurement. Recent DAS policy changes will hopefully make this new procurement faster and more cost effective than our previous procurement. Specifically, we are working to convince the State that we must procure this product on a fast timetable, as our docketing system is critical to our business operations, and we cannot endure a multi-year process to replace the current system. Second, the State has communicated that we now may utilize “Software as a Service” or SAS solutions. This is a positive development, because it means we can solicit for our solution to developers that have offered docketing system software to other public utility commissions across the country. With this option, we avoid the need to build a custom solution from scratch, which is costly and time consuming.

We will keep you updated on the progress of this important project.



Security and large file management remain a top priority in the ADS project.

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Our mission is to ensure Oregonians have access to safe, reliable and fairly priced utility services that advance state policy and promote the public interest. We use an inclusive process to evaluate differing viewpoints and visions of the public interest and arrive at balanced, well-reasoned, independent decisions supported by fact and law. [Visit our website for more information.](#)