

Introduction and Goals for the Day

- Outline roles and responsibilities of the Commission
- Review how the PUC makes decisions in the context of a specific issue
- Provide resources and information to advocates
- Hear from advocates on best practices for engagement with the Commission



PUC Roles and Responsibilities

Background on the Form and Function of the Commission



Nolan Moser
March 30, 2022

Who is the Commission?

- The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC or Commission)
- Three Commissioners, appointed by the Governor to four-year terms
- No more than two members may be of the same political party

Our Mission:

To ensure Oregon utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and high-quality utility services at just and reasonable rates. This is done through robust analysis and independent decision-making conducted in an open and fair process.



Why is the Commission important?

- Utilities are regulated differently than other businesses.
- When “rate regulated” these companies, because they are largely monopolies, can’t charge rates or include costs in rates that have not been approved by the Commission.
- Because utilities are major businesses, with important environmental and social impacts, the legislature has also tasked the PUC with other responsibilities to create policy change.
- The Commission listens to stakeholders, then makes a decision about these issues, which is eventually reflected in consumer rates.



Our Responsibilities Delegated by the Legislature

- The PUC is governed by Oregon Revised Statutes and the Oregon Administrative Rules. These laws give the Commission authority to perform several functions. The main purpose of the Commission is to represent utility customers in all controversies respecting rates, valuations, and service, as well as other items that are important to the public regarding utilities.
- The Commission balances the interests of utilities and customers in reviewing rates.
- **For more information see: ORS 756.040**



Who does the PUC regulate?

- Electric, Natural Gas, Water, and Telecommunications utilities that are investor owned, for rate regulated services.
- PUC does not regulate rates of municipal utilities, and of non-rate regulated services, such as cell phone plans, etc.
 - Rates of municipal or co-op utilities regulated by elected officials or elected board members



Additional Directives from the Legislature

- As the legislature has sought to implement policy changes that affect utilities regarding the environment, equity, and other issues, the PUC has become the vehicle for utility change. Recent examples:
 - Provide for increased deployment of renewable energy and exit coal (SB 1547)
 - Create differential rates that support equity and disadvantaged communities (HB 2475)
 - Reduce utility sector emissions and move towards a cleaner, more climate friendly generation system (HB 2021)
 - Allow the PUC to offer Telephone Assistance Programing apart from funding from the Federal Communications Commission (HB 2507)



Additional Directives from the Legislature

- Safety Standards
 - The PUC also regulates safety standards of the regulated utilities. This authority comes from its rate and rulemaking functions. The Commission makes sure utilities receive enough revenue to ensure their infrastructure is safe and maintained.
- For more information see:
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/safety/Pages/SafetyHome.aspx>
 - ORS 757.035



Commissioner

Megan Decker, Chair

Megan Decker has served two terms as a Commissioner and currently holds the role of Chair. Chair Decker is an attorney, formerly Assistant General Counsel for the Port of Portland, and the Chief Counsel for Renewable Northwest. She has a background in land use and has expertise in energy policy, regulation, and litigation.



Commissioner

Letha Tawney

Letha Tawney has also served two terms with the Commission. She has an expert background in electric utility business models, state regulation, and clean energy development. Commissioner Tawney holds a Master of Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.



Commissioner

Mark Thompson

Mark Thompson is in his first term with the Commission, which began in 2019. Commissioner Thompson is an attorney and his background is in energy and administrative law. He was the Senior Director of Rates and Regulatory Affairs at NW Natural, and he represented consumer-owned utilities before various bodies.



Commission Support

- **Utility Program: Commission Staff**
 - Make recommendations, work with utilities and stakeholders
 - Provide analysis of utility proposals and filing
- **Administrative hearings Division**
 - Support for the decision making process



Key Terms You'll Hear Today – Process Terms

- **Rate Regulated** – Company that must clear rate changes with the PUC
- **Public Meeting** – Open noticed meeting of the Commission
- **Docket** – Tracked 'matter' at the PUC – forum for activity
- **Contested Case** – Trial-like proceeding
- **Advice Filing** – Request to change a tariff from a utility, make a program change
- **Rulemaking** – Create a new or amended rule that is binding on utilities/others
- **Workshop** – Collaborative meeting to provide feedback to utilities, PUC Staff, or Commissioners



Key Terms You'll Hear Today – Process Terms

- **Filing** – Submitted document sent to the Commission
- **Ex Parte Communication** – Communication outside the record in a contested case



Key Terms You'll Hear Today – Technical Terms

- **Intervenor Funding** -- Money, provided by utilities but authorized through the PUC, for advocacy at the Commission
- **Differential Rates** -- Rates that consider energy burden on low-income customers and other factors
- **Arrearage Management Plan** -- Supports a customer in dealing with amounts on past bills owed
- **Bill Assistance** -- Support for classes of customers for bill payment
- **Disconnection** – Utility process to remove the customer from the utility resource due to non-payment of bills
- **Levelized Payments** – Payments designed to overall recover a specific amount from a customer at a manageable rate over time



TRAINING ON BREAK

Questions?

Send them to: puc.hearings@puc.oregon.gov

Future Trainings

4/28 – Wildfire & Public Safety

6/3 – Climate Change and Utility Investment

View Training Recordings

<https://www.oregon.gov/puc/news-events/Pages/Trainings.aspx>

