

TSCC Comments from concerned citizens in East Columbia Neighborhood

Emma Pletz
1629 NE Blue Heron Dr

Sandra Hawley
9433 NE Blue Heron Ct

Joseph Robinson
2028 NE Blue Heron Dr

We cannot attend the meeting on June 5th and asked Maryhelen Kincaid to submit or read this testimony for us.

We live in the East Columbia neighborhood in PEN2. Sandra and Emma live bordering the Blue Heron and Flyway Wetlands, Joseph lives across the street from the Blue Heron Wetlands.

Sandra and Emma were former board members of East Columbia for 9 years serving as Treasurer (Sandra) and Emma (Secretary). Joseph has volunteered for many neighborhood events. We try to keep informed about issues that affect our neighborhood and have occasionally attended PEN2 meetings and annual PEN2 landowners meeting at the Portland Yacht Club.

In the past few months, we have tried to understand the tax measure on the ballot and how it would affect our taxes and our lives. It has been difficult to get information about the budget, about why the money is being taken from PEN2 in July and how it will be spent. We find the budget to be extremely high and salaries for staff and contractors very high. We have met with Maryhelen on occasion and asked her questions which she has presented on our behalf at PEN2 meetings when they are held. At Maryhelen's direction we have called the MCDD office asking questions and have been told the info is on the website and to listen to the recordings of the meetings. In the "old days" whenever there was a problem Dave Hendricks would regularly attend our monthly neighborhood meetings. Jim

Middaugh did attend our November 2023 annual neighborhood meeting when about 10 people attended either in person or on Zoom. He made a general presentation on the new district and upcoming dissolution of the 4 districts. We don't know of any other community meeting attended specifically to discuss and explain the impacts of the tax measure.

We are concerned by the reliability and stability of funding stated by the MCDD staff on their website and recent publicity about the tax measure about the revenue sources stated in the budget document posted online. Most of the revenue seems to be from loans with interest creating debt. The mention of the federal funds available for our projects to make repairs required by FEMA is favorable to all but the funds are not certain, and the Federal budget has not been adopted yet. The Federal house and senate disagree over the budget. Nothing is certain. MCDD staff told us that each year there would have to be a request for a certain amount, so annual funding is dependent on the political will of whoever the Federal legislators are with many competing for the same money. That is not stable. We very much support flood safety and want to pay our fair share, but are concerned that if funding other than loans and the possibility of federal and state funds not being available or do will not exist, we as private landowners will be taxed at the maximum rate allowable thus increasing our tax burden greatly.

We all carry private flood insurance because our mortgages require it. We get a reduced rate because of the certification of the levee. FEMA does not replace homes and only gives grants. According to their website the average FEMA grant is \$3,000-\$12,000. Private flood insurance covers home replacement and yes, it is more expensive but it insures a home to live in if our homes are destroyed or extremely damaged

We asked MCDD staff about the new Flood Safety Fee and were told it would be charged to cities and the county for services provided by MCDD. There are IGAs in place to do that now. That extra charge for the same maintenance will undoubtedly be added to our utility bills, increasing our burden even more. We were told that each city would have to decide how to charge the citizens. Our family members and their neighbors who live in other parts of Portland will now pay for something (the levee) that most of them never knew existed.

Will the rates that are charged to cities, the county, and Port of Portland for the Flood Safety Fee increase as much as ours? Or will they pay a smaller percentage per acre? Right now, each district has a different methodology depending on usage of the land. We were told the UFSWQD board adopted a common methodology, but we weren't told how or if it would differ in our tax.

Not providing information except for the mailed flyers and social media was not adequate or fair to our neighborhood. The cost increases to businesses may cause them to move out of Multnomah County. News reports say that Portland's population has decreased for the first time in many years mainly to the high cost of living and taxes. Two of our neighbors have moved to Vancouver because of the burden of taxes. In your mission statement it says "protects and represents the public interest" and that you promote economy and efficiency and provide advice and assistance to do that. We hope you can do that in this case where the citizens are concerned about the increase in budgets, the amount being used for administrative costs and contractors, how these increases will affect our low and fixed income neighbors and used for things that are not as necessary as improvements to capital improvements that will provide safety for us in case of a flood.

Thank you for providing your services to help tax dollars be spent wisely.

TSCC comments for June 5, 2024

Gyrid Hyde Towle
544 NE South Shore Road
Portland OR 97211

I have asked Maryhelen Kincaid to type my comments and read my testimony to you. I am 91 years old and do not use e-mail or use a laptop.

I have lived in the East Columbia neighborhood since 1975. My husband, Dick Towle, served on the PEN2 board for over 10 years. When he passed away in 2012, I was elected to replace him as a board supervisor. Throughout our time on the PEN2 board Dick and I worked very closely with previous Executive Directors Bob Eaton and Dave Hendricks. Reed Wagner had a memorial bench installed in our Columbia Children's Arboretum to honor our work in the Arboretum which was always assisted by staff and resources from MCDD.

I was the neighborhood chair for many years and organized large neighborhood picnics. MCDD/PEN2 was a major supporter of those events.

In recent years I have had health issues that have curtailed my work in the Arboretum and neighborhood issues. I agreed to have Shayla Garcia represent me on the PEN2 board. Maryhelen and Shayla have kept me informed of PEN2's meeting agenda items, most recently about the discussions around the formation of the new flood district and the dissolution of the 4 drainage districts. I do visit regularly with my neighbors about a variety of things including PEN2 and Parks and they often have questions or concerns to tell me because they know of my long-time community involvement. They share many of the concerns I am stating in this testimony to you.

I am very disappointed that the wording in the information about the ballot measure said, "not much has been done in 100 years" and that MCDD still continues to say that. I do not know what the other districts have accomplished but in our years of work in PEN2 we have accomplished quite a lot. One large project my husband and I worked with Bob Eaton and Dave Hendricks on was to raise over \$169,000 in funds to improve a drainage ditch on the west side of the arboretum to provide water runoff during heavy rains that would always flood the west end of the park. A recycled railroad bridge was crafted to be used as a bridge to provide ADA access. Many of the drainage ways around the park have been widened and cleared of weeds and invasive plants and replaced with native plants. For 12 years my husband Dick, and other neighbors, held monthly work parties to do this work which helped improve water runoff after heavy rains and avoid flooding in neighboring homes surrounding the park. All of the work was supported by MCDD, and neighbors were kept informed of their activities and the improvements. Not recognizing the work and improvements that our millions of tax dollars have paid for to provide flood safety shows the current staff don't know or recognize the history or acknowledge the work. I think it means they don't know how to track money that is spent on improvements. As a taxpayer I want to know how my money was spent

and how it will be spent. I read a report about future projects some of which have been postponed until after the dissolution. It seems to me the new flood district is just taking our money and not following the intent of the PEN2 board adopted budget allocated for projects and the new flood district will fund what they choose. Because of that I have several concerns about how the funds and information regarding the new tax will be handled, how our PEN2 reserve funds will be used, and how the proposed work will be paid for. It has not been clearly explained to landowners in any public meeting. For that reason, I voted “no” on the ballot measure because no attempt to offer information was given to affected residents beside the mailings. Also, it seems to me that the new flood district is currently operating on money borrowed from various sources as well as the City and Port of Portland. Cost of that debt is very high.

My experience with PEN2 was always to provide open dialogue with our landowners and not burden them with increased taxation amounts unless necessary.

The passage of the tax to create a bond to pay for construction used words like “expected” and mentioned a \$100 million in federal funds. In talking with my neighbors who are knowledgeable about federal budgets I am encouraged that we have support from our federal delegation and have been included in the President’s budget. But nothing is for certain, and that budget has not been approved. No one is against flood safety, and prevention is important given all the recent disasters due to hurricanes and flooding. It was explained to me that this new district would have to reapply each year for federal funding. With politics like they are currently and with newly elected federal representatives and senators there is nothing certain. If we don’t get those federal funds each year, I fear that I, and my neighbors as landowners, will be burdened with higher taxes if the yearly requests are not granted. I have known people who survived the 1948 flood which destroyed Vanport. Much has been done to address flooding on the Columbia River since then. I have read reports about the Columbia River Treaty and its work to control water. The City has created 3 wetlands in my neighborhood to accommodate stormwater runoff. All that was done in the period that MCDD said, “not much was done.”

My husband managed a large carpet distribution and sales company spanning 4 states. I was a violinist for the Oregon Symphony for 48 years and also taught violin lessons to students. I provided catering services for governments, businesses, schools, and private individuals.

We both understood the importance of good business plans and how to generate funds without burdening our customers.

I think a more stable form of revenue must be identified and the administrative costs reduced for the new flood district.

Administrative costs for salaries and the cost for Materials and Services in the budget document I read with the help of my neighbor are extremely high compared to other businesses.

I also learned that there would be a fee that will be assessed to public lands like our Arboretum and the three wetlands owned by the city and managed by BES and wonder how that will affect Parks and BES ability to maintain those areas without additional costs being assessed to landowner taxes or utility bills.

Will the Port of Portland and other public landowners pay the same proportion of a tax increase that I will?

Will I as a taxpayer be informed of the true costs of the expenses in the proposed budget and not just the "expected" cost to landowners?

Have businesses, small and large, been told of potential cost increases? 60% of East Columbia is zoned Commercial and Industrial. Part of the Columbia Corrido business Assn members are in PEN2. How will they be affected? Will these tax increases cause businesses to move out of Multnomah County?

Renters in my neighborhood will most probably be affected by landowners raising rent because of the combined bond tax and stormwater fees assessed by the city. This could have adverse effects for low-income renters many of them are my neighbors.

I think there are too many uncertainties in this budget that have not been explained to the landowners, costs seem too high and I fear our taxes will not be used wisely.

Thank you for allowing me to state my concerns.

re: Urban Flood Public Hearing on Budget 6/5/2024 1pm

Heather Haindel EMAIL REDACTED

Wed, Jun 5, 2024 at 2:38 PM

To: allegra.willhite@multco.us

External Sender - Be Suspicious of Attachments, Links, and Requests for Payment or Login Information.

I joined the meeting online, and was hoping to share some public input. But given the audio issues during the meeting, I wasn't able to hear what was going on and realized too late that public comment had closed. Then towards the end someone was reading more public comment, which I didn't realize was an option. Again, it was too late to join in and I wasn't sure if additional comments were allowed.

So please consider adding my comments to the public record for this meeting.

I live in East Columbia (PEN2) and have for over 24 years. I voted no on the bond measure, primarily due to uncertainty and a lack of clarity about the funding. I'm concerned that other sources may not have been exhausted before asking taxpayers to shoulder these costs.

I agree with my other neighbors who have voiced their concerns about the costs of debt funding, and the high budgeted administration costs for the flood district. I, too, am concerned about the increased burden for lower income neighbors (homeowners and renters). I'm also concerned about the distribution of the bond assessments plus any upcoming additional fees on homeowners and renters vs the costs that businesses (especially Amazon and Prologis who have giant footprints of impervious surface which increases our flood risk) and the Port of Portland are covering.

I think Multnomah County residents deserve clear communication about who is responsible for paying which pieces of the flood district funding, which land is included within the district, which flood areas will have the flood risk reduced due to this funding, and how the money is spent.

Heather Haindel
