



OFFICE OF  
**Community  
& Civic Life**

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[portlandoregon.gov/civic/noise](http://portlandoregon.gov/civic/noise)

To: East Portland neighborhood and community members

From: Dianne Riley, Supervisor, East & North District Coalition Offices

Date: March 15, 2021

**RE: East Portland Community Office Explores New Location**

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**Dear members of East Portland neighborhoods and communities,**

On behalf of the Office of Community & Civic Life (Civic Life) and our tenant partners, East Portland Action Plan (EPAP) and East Portland Neighbors (EPN), we wish to share that after decades of operating out of 1017 NE 117th Avenue, our lease with the Portland Water Bureau is ending. This is bittersweet news to share because the building and space has been home to many community-led projects, a place for neighbors to gather, and served the community in so many ways.

**Background**

In December 2017, East Portland Neighbors received an update from Portland Water Bureau that their \$1/month lease would be increased to \$27,000 per year starting January 2018. The Water Bureau had little choice but to do this as it was a necessary action resulting from the [Anderson et al v. City of Portland](#) settlement:

“In December 2011, three ratepayers and a ratepayer organization sued the City of Portland claiming that City Council had improperly spent water and sewer funds on 26 programs or activities that Plaintiffs alleged were “unrelated” to the provision of water and sewer services....Between 2014 and 2016, the court issued numerous opinions regarding the challenged expenditures...Ultimately, the court ruled in the City’s favor on all but seven challenged expenditures.” *One of these prohibited expenditures is Hydro Parks.*

The EPN, EPAP and EPCO offices are housed at the Hazelwood Hydro Park, in the building owned by Portland Water Bureau. The lawsuit was a catalyst for increasing the rent to stay within the spirit of the settlement. East Portland Neighbors was unable and



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unwilling to pay the increased rent of \$27,000/year, and so Civic Life assumed the lease with Water and negotiated an extension until Dec 2018 so that we could conduct a facilities search. By the end of that year, Civic Life had conducted a space study (with EPN and EPAP) and initiated a facility search but an affordable alternative site had not been located. Beginning Jan 1, 2019, the lease was raised to \$805/month to reflect Water bureau expenses for the building and with the intention for a final, 18-month lease ending June 2020.

We all know what happened in early 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency. In addition, another affordable site had still not been located. The Water Bureau graciously extended our lease for FY 2020-21, and despite the City's freeze on facility searches, Civic Life requested that the search be renewed last summer. For FY 2020-21 (ending June 30, 2021), the lease rate is \$1,152/month. EPCO and EPAP pay a proportionate share of this below-market rent.

Over the past three years, additional issues were identified including the need for significant maintenance (roof) and the need to make long-term use decisions about the site. While the facility is safe for staff and community at the moment, a bad weather event (like the recent ice storms) could change that quickly. The Water Bureau has been an understanding and patient partner and after three and ½ years' extension, the lease is ending for these important reasons.

### **New Opportunities**

We are thankful and appreciative of our long and happy tenure with the Portland Water Bureau, but much-needed building maintenance and improvements are required to ensure the safety and security of our employees and community partners who dedicatedly serve there. The Water Bureau has been generous with extending the lease three additional years while we searched for a more central and affordable location.

In addition to the need for building improvements, we collectively realized that other spaces in the East Portland area may offer options that would include new communal amenities such as more gathering spaces for public meetings, flexible work spaces appropriate for joint partnership work, and better accessibility through public transit.

*"The current building needs significant work if we are going to be housed together. We, each of us separately and all of us together, need not only have more space, but the right mix of space. The water bureau is not in the business of providing that expanded capacity and configuration since being a landlord is not their core mission, which is to deliver reliable water services to ratepayers." ~ Arlene Kimura, EPN*

*“Our organizations have worked together for so long it only makes sense for us to continue together. Together we can leverage our resources together and get a better space. Our missions and values are so similar it works to our advantage to stay close together. This is an opportunity for us to reengage the community on how we can best meet the needs of the community. Change can be a catalyst for engagement.” ~ JR Lilly, EPAP*

We are looking for options to co-locate with EPN and EPAP, and are currently exploring an office relocation to Plaza 122<sup>nd</sup>, an innovative [Community Investment Trust launched and developed by Mercy Corps](#)). Plaza 122<sup>nd</sup> is located just north of the corner of SE 122nd and Market Street, two blocks south of the Multnomah County Midland Library and across the street from the Mill Park Fire Station. The lease with the Portland Water Bureau building ends on June 30, 2021.

*“The Portland Water Bureau remains committed to actively working and engaging with EPAP and EPN to better center the needs of East Portland communities to achieve our mission of serving excellent water every minute of every day to all Portlanders,” Erich J Pacheco, Portland Water Bureau’s Equity and Policy Manager. “Over the coming years, we will expand partnerships with trusted community institutions and leaders so they can help inform our programs, services, and projects.”*

In preparation for this move, Civic Life has requested funding in our [proposed FY 2021-22 budget](#) on January 29. Authorization and funding to sign a lease at any location will be decided by City Council pending finalization of lease and funding requirements.

### **Stay Informed**

In the coming weeks, more information and details will be shared as they become available. We will be communicating updates through the [East Portland Community Office](#) and [East Portland Action Plan](#) e-news. We are excited about this opportunity to grow and evolve within the East Portland community. This is an exciting time for all of us and we know that a new community and office space will provide even more opportunities for us to work together to promote the common good.

Sincerely,

Dianne Riley

East & North District Coalition Offices

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