

## Commissioner Message

### 2021 Recap: Reinventing and Adapting to the New Normal

By: Russell E. Olsen, Thurston PUD Commissioner, District 2

Although Thurston PUD was officially formed in 1938 by a vote of the people, it only became a fully operational utility in 2005 when the Commissioners at the time made a decision to hire staff, acquire additional water systems and operate and manage the Tanglewilde-Thompson Place water system. This is the District's largest water system serving a population of approximately 4,500. It had been operated and maintained by the City of Olympia since the early 1960's. Since becoming an operational utility, the District has seen its fair share of obstacles and challenges, but none like the COVID-19 pandemic which forced us to realize, reinvent and marshal our own strength and resilience.

We didn't just survive the crises, we emerged adaptive and redefined which has given us a chance to do more than just return to normal operations. During 2021, we were able to make significant changes that not only aligned with our vision, mission, and goals, but opened opportunities for a strengthened, more adaptable future.

Early in 2021, we acquired and welcomed the Pattison water system and our new customers, and hired one of the Pattison water systems employees, David Gruver, a talented senior Field Technician. Later in the year, we welcomed the acquisition of the Coppermill, Country Club Estates and Glen Alder water systems. Staff worked hard to seamlessly transition ownership and the customer experience. We were able to acquire these systems primarily through virtual meetings and with limited in-person contact which is a huge shift for a small water utility like ours.

PUD staff also worked tirelessly to secure CARES Act funding for customers experiencing financial hardships from the pandemic. We strengthened our presence and our relationships with local, state, and federal agencies to get customers the help they needed. Through persistent advocating and representation, PUD staff secured a highly competitive \$150,000 grant to directly pay the utility bills of PUD customers adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our team also secured infrastructure grants and loans, with loan forgiveness, that will provide much-needed improvements to water systems. Funding will go to projects like installing water meters, a new well and reservoir at one system; water main and treatment installation, consolidating four



Russell E. Olsen,  
Commissioner - District 1

## Thurston PUD Commissioners

### District 1

Linda Oosterman





### District 2

Russell E. Olsen

### District 3

Chris Stearns

## Important Messages

-  PUD offices remain closed until further notice.
-  The holidays are coming. Find out which days we will be closed. Page 2
-  Are you prepared for Fall and Winter Storms? Page 3
-  Want to help others? Do you need help? Find out how to help or get help. Page 4

**Thurston PUD**  
1230 Ruddell Road SE  
Lacey, Washington 98503  
(360) 357-8783  
Toll Free: (866) 357-8783  
Fax: (360) 357-1172  
[www.ThurstonPUD.org](http://www.ThurstonPUD.org)

## 2021 Recap: Reinventing and Adapting to the New Normal (continued from page 1)

neighboring water systems, and repairing major leaks and a pump house and installing meters at another water system.

We've created and put into effect programs and committees like the Utility Relief Assistance Program which paves a way for customers to apply for critical funding, and the Consolidation Project Advisory Committee which gives customers a voice during major projects at their systems.

Other examples of times customers were given a voice was through our open and transparent budget and rate hearings process, as well as our grant-funded Broadband Survey. The survey gave PUD customers and all Thurston County residents an opportunity to voice their thoughts on Internet services. The survey opened in June and closed at the end of November. As we compile all the data we gathered, we will better understand the state of high-speed Internet access for underserved and unserved regions of Thurston County.

Our Utility Rate Advisory Committee continues to advise and help us with the difficult challenges of creating a fair and equitable rate, fee, and surcharge structure to effectively and efficiently fund the PUD's 279 water systems. We grew and learned a lot about our organization, our team, our customers and our work in 2021. This year we became more streamlined, adaptable, and determined to maintain our established track record of providing safe, clean, reliable water. As the year comes to a close, on behalf of the Commissioners of Thurston PUD, I want to thank you for allowing us to serve you and your community.

## What's Happening at the PUD?

### Upcoming Office Closures

The PUD will be closed on the following days:

- Friday, December 24, 2021 - Christmas Day (observed)
- Friday, December 31, 2021 - New Year's Day (observed)
- Monday, January 17, 2022 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Monday, February 21, 2022 - Presidents' Day



The PUD is closed for major holidays, but we are always committed to our customers. Staff is available 24/7 for water emergencies. **If you experience a water emergency, please call us at (360) 357-8783 or toll-free at (866) 357-8783 to connect with our answering service and on-call staff.**

### That's a Wrap on 2021!

2021 is coming to a close, and it's been quite a year! While we close out the year, below is a list of items and tasks our teams within the PUD are currently working on:

**Accounting and Finance:** The annual financial audit has begun! Every year, the PUD is audited by the Washington State Auditor's Office as part of normal operating procedure. This is a major occurrence each year, and audit results will be published in the newsletter and online at the beginning of 2022.

**Customer Service:** Customer Service has been busy with a large amount of Utility Relief Assistance Program applications recently received from PUD customers.

**Field Operations:** Winter is a less hectic time for Field Operations than summer due to higher usage and consumption, but this team is still busy with meter reading, infrastructure/equipment replacement, and necessary repairs to provide customers with safe and reliable drinking water.

**Planning and Compliance:** The Planning and Compliance Team has accomplished a few milestones for the PUD's Cross-Connection Control Program, including using the PUD's software to catalog customer accounts with applicable backflow devices. Keep an eye out for future articles on this program!

## Preparing for Fall and Winter Storms

For Fall 2021, the Office of the Washington State Climatologist (OWSC) predicts a higher chance of above normal precipitation for western Washington. With the start of the stormy season, here are a few important recommendations for the upcoming months.

### Recommendations for Outside Your Home

- Keep your gutters clean and clear from debris. Clogged gutters can lead to costly roof damage.
- Rake leaves and debris away from storm drains. Help prevent flooded streets and damage to personal property by keeping storm drains clear.
- Keep your vehicle fueled. Fuel may not be available in a dire emergency, ensure your vehicle is topped off during bad weather.
- Test and/or service your generator. If you have a generator for your home, test it annually during non-emergency situations to ensure it can perform during emergency situations.
- Install faucet covers. For any outdoor faucets, install insulated covers to prevent frozen pipes or burst pipes.



### Recommendations for Inside Your Home

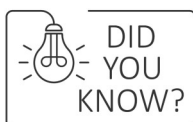
- Ensure fire and carbon-monoxide alarms are in working order. Regularly test your fire and carbon monoxide alarms.
- Insulate exposed pipes. To prevent possible freezing inside your home in colder areas like a basement, attic or garage, insulate exposed pipes and other plumbing fixtures.
- Don't forget the flashlights. In the case of a power outage, keep flashlights, batteries, candles, or any other kind of illumination handy. If you're using flashlights, keep batteries in stock.
- Most importantly – keep drinking water on hand! Keep bottled water on hand or fill buckets with water prior to an expected storm in case you experience a water outage.



### Recommendations for You and Your Family

- Prepare an emergency kit. Visit [www.ready.gov/kit](http://www.ready.gov/kit) for a list of basic disaster kit supplies. Be sure to have an emergency kit prepared for your vehicle as well; a list of emergency supplies for your car kit is located here: [www.ready.gov/car](http://www.ready.gov/car).
- Check with your veterinarian for animal care instructions in an emergency situation. If you have a pet, be sure to include needed pet supplies as part of your emergency kit.
- Know what emergency plans are in place at your workplace, school, or daycare center. Create an emergency/communication plan for your family.
- Check your homeowners or renters insurance policy to review your coverage amounts and limits before you experience any property damage or loss.

If you experience a water outage, call us immediately at (360) 357-8783 to report your location. Our Field Operations staff is on-call 24/7 to respond to water emergencies.



According to the City of Seattle Office of Emergency Management, structural damage is the costliest consequence of windstorms in our area, and much of this damage comes from falling trees.

## It's Not Too Late to Apply for Grant Funding!



The Utility Relief Assistance Program (URAP) was created in August thanks to a grant secured from the Department of Commerce of up to \$153,029 to help customers effected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the grant requirements, funding goes directly to customer accounts, but customers must first apply using our simple application process. Funding is limited and applications are reviewed in the order they are received.

All Thurston PUD customers with a past due balance are eligible for this program and funding covers unpaid balances from the March 2020 bill statement onward. **Because funding is limited and applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, we encourage any customer who thinks they may qualify for this program to apply at their earliest convenience.**

To apply, visit [www.thurstonpud.org](http://www.thurstonpud.org). If you have any questions about the URAP, please contact our Customer Service Team by phone at (360) 357-8783 or via email at [PUDCustomerService@thurstonpud.org](mailto:PUDCustomerService@thurstonpud.org).

## Project Help - Customer Support Program

Do you qualify as income-eligible and need assistance with paying your water bill? Have you and your family been affected financially by the COVID-19 pandemic? You may qualify to receive a credit towards your utility bill through our Project Help Program. For other available resources, please visit our website at [www.thurstonpud.org/customer-support.htm](http://www.thurstonpud.org/customer-support.htm).

To be eligible for assistance you must: (1) be a customer with the PUD, with an active account in your name, (2) have received a past due notice for your water service, and (3) provide documentation that household income is \$40,000 or less **or** have been financially impacted by COVID-19 and can provide documentation of your employment status. If you are a customer in need, we encourage you to reapply yearly. Contact our Customer Service Team with any questions or concerns about the program's requirements.

To apply, visit our website at [www.ThurstonPUD.org](http://www.ThurstonPUD.org) to complete the Project Help application (found on the front page of our website). If you'd like to request a paper copy of the application, please call us at (866) 357-8783 to speak with our Customer Service Team.

If you're interested in making a one-time or monthly donation, please call us at (866) 357-8783, email [PUDCustomerService@thurstonpud.org](mailto:PUDCustomerService@thurstonpud.org), or return the form below with any payments mailed to our office at Thurston PUD, 1230 Ruddell Road SE, Lacey, WA 98503.

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I authorize Thurston PUD to bill my account \$ \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Check one)       One-time only  
                          Each month

This authorization shall remain in effect until the PUD receives written notification from me to terminate this agreement. I understand that if my account becomes past due, this authorization becomes invalid.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Account No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Service Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_