



Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget Message

The permit that established the Corbett Water District is dated September 2nd, 1932 and signed by district commissioners A.G. Salzman and Frank G. Bell. The official water rights for our District were designated on July 5th, 1933. Since that time, the District has seen many changes, though not as many as one might think, considering we are nearing the milestone of providing 100 years of safe, clean drinking water.

The system was originally designed to route water from the North Fork of Gordon Creek into a nearby Treatment Plant that filtered and purified the creek water. The sources of our water are now both the North and South Forks of Gordon Creek. Water is transported roughly two miles to our Treatment Plant, which was built in the 1980s, and consists of three filter ponds, a clear well, and a one-million-gallon reservoir. The District has four other reservoirs located throughout the system, with a storage capacity of 1.95 million gallons. All of our customers live below our Treatment Plant, and gravity is still the prevailing law of nature that we depend on. The energy efficient, gravity fed pipes fill with the pressure of built-up water, which pushes the water down Larch Mountain, and then up and over hills and into roughly 1080 businesses and homes.

The Corbett Water District filters our water using a slow sand filtration process. The water is added to a filter pond that has a drain at the bottom, with layers of sand and gravel that filter debris and even organisms from the water. The water is then disinfected with sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) at a rate of one milligram per liter of water. This ensures that harmful bacteria and organisms have been eliminated, and the water is safe to drink. Because of the acidic nature of our surface water, soda ash is also added to raise the pH, and adjust alkalinity level. This reduces the amount of corrosion in plumbing and metal surfaces of the reservoirs. Both processes meet State and Federal drinking water standards.

At the Treatment Plant we use a computer to monitor the Temperature, Turbidity, Chlorine, and PH in the water, and maintain levels based on State and Federal regulations. We also monitor flow in and out of the Treatment Plant. The computers are set to specific limits which alert our staff (both day and night) to any number of potential issues.

In November of 2021, I was hired as District Clerk, and as I worked for the Board and the District, we attempted to find a qualified District Manager. I watched the Board offer the position to two separate individuals who ended up turning it down. When I applied to be District Manager, I promised the Board that I would make every attempt to educate myself, and gain certification in Treatment and Distribution as soon as possible. In early September of 2022, they promoted me to District Manager. They maintained David Jacob as both DRC (Directly Responsible and in Charge) and mentor, and contracted him to write our Master Plan. Utilizing my history as Clerk, my experience as Manager, and working one-on-one with David as he compiles information and completes our Master Plan, I have formulated this budget.

Infrastructure continues to be a relevant topic, and as I attend classes in water management, I've learned more and more about how the problem is systemic. We've all heard about the aging infrastructure of our nation, how the Federal government of the 1930s built dams, bridges, and roads to pull us out of the Great Depression. All of these works are reaching the end of their lifespan – and water appurtenances are no different. Most of the water systems of our nation are underground and out of sight. I heard it put best that those currently in power were handed a system built by the previous generation, and we need to care for it now in order to pay it forward for future generations. Many of our pipes have been replaced over the years. However, about 7 years ago, much of the system maintenance either stopped or was not recorded, and nearly all capital improvements were halted.

Furthermore, in 2017 the Columbia Gorge forest fires highlighted the fact that an alternative source of water would be very prudent for our District. The board and leadership of the time tried to find an alternative source by drilling a well. Unfortunately, the effort and funds used by the District were not fruitful, and to this day we do not have a secondary source of safe, clean drinking water.

As the new Manager I could stay focused on the mistakes of the past – however I believe we should do the best we can with what we have, and move forward. Doing so, I'm very grateful for the tremendously generous spirit of our many volunteers, community members, customers, and contractors who live in Corbett and want to see the Water District succeed. We are all striving for the same result: sustainable, affordable, safe, clean drinking water – from a system that is owned and operated by the citizens of Corbett.

My plan for this District is to get everything in order, moving towards the goal of laying pipe again. And I believe that if you want something new, you must be able to take care of what you have. We at the District are re-investing in our staff, in both equipment and manpower (trained manpower).

Our pipes wouldn't be so brittle and prone to massive line breaks if we had better control over our Pressure Reducing Valve stations. According to the Master Plan, we have two more PRV stations to build. The cost of the valves and vaults will be close to the budgeted amount of \$100,000, therefore I have put an extra \$3000 into training and education for our staff to learn how to manage them.

The other capital improvement project is for a new sampling station. The main reason for this is that the amount of chlorine we must put into our drinking water is based on a calculation called CT, which takes into consideration how long the chlorine has to "work" on the water and to disable potentially harmful pathogens. The longer time before our first customer – the better. But we can't "take credit" for all of the pipe between the reservoir and our first customer because we do not have a way to sample the water as it enters the distribution system (except at Reservoir 6 at the Treatment Plant). The Master Plan has identified the need for an additional sampling station as of the utmost importance. The desired location would be near the ASR test well site – closer to where a potential new site would be.

We are also continuing to improve the office building and shop. This goes hand-in-hand with providing quality work and attracting quality staff. Maintenance of our building was not prioritized by past staff, board, or budget committees – with very little of the entire budget being spent on it. This year we have been able to repair our roof, and have installed an HVAC system that will allow the staff to work during extreme weather and smoke events. The entire goal with the building is to create a space for our workers to be able to focus on their specialized tasks, rather than leaking roofs, air quality issues, or pests and vermin. We want our staff and customers to be able to observe and enjoy the pride we take in maintaining a clean, aesthetically pleasing environment. We also want to make plans for every emergency, understanding that some situations may call for many days in a row of around the clock staffing. This year we would like to finish the remodel of the shop, lunch room, and front desk area. With the help of volunteers, we are well on our way to making this a reality, and expect that the project will be completed in 2 – 5 years.

Our largest ticket item in the budget is for filter pond sand. We have three filter ponds at the Treatment Plant. When the current sand was put in place, we used local sand that no longer fits within the regulatory parameters. Our options are to clean what we have, or buy new sand that is already cleaned

and meets specifications (diameter, uniformity, fines, and acid solubility). David and I talked about this several times over the last two weeks. In an ideal world we could do half a pond a year and spread the enormous cost of the sand over six years, instead of three. However, after some research, we decided that the most cost effective and long-lasting way to move forward is to replace the sand in one pond per year, over three years, and bring the sand in from the closest sand supplier. The line item in this budget for “filter pond repair” is for one pond. The sand will cost \$200,000 to purchase or to clean what we have.

You may have noticed the large amount of legal fees appropriated in this budget. The District is currently pursuing legal action for the ill-handled ASR well project of 2020-2021. The details of this case are not publicly available, but will be shared with the public as soon as possible.

During these budget committee meetings you will hear words like “PRV – pressure reducing valves”, “Slow Sand filtration”, “pH”, “Master Plan” and “Net Working Capital.” If you have any questions at all – please feel free to ask! We can all learn from each other, and there’s nothing worse than trying to digest and decide based on partial information. Thank you in advance for reading through this materiel, for discussing and deliberating the budget, and for making wise and prudent decisions.

Yours,

Ana Linden
District Manager/ Budget Officer