



# Celebrating Toby Bigger’s 15 Years with North City Water District

Since joining the District in 2010, Toby’s dedication, expertise, and always-cheerful spirit have been a great asset to our staff as well as our customers. Here are a few of his reflections about his career and some perspectives about the rapid pace of change in the clean water industry.

## What is the biggest change you’ve seen in the industry over the past 15 years?

Technology advancements—in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, record keeping tools, automated meter reading, and even project management and design software. These tools may not always be easier, but once learned they have definitely made our operations more efficient.

## What do you feel is the biggest challenge that water districts currently face?

The ongoing Lead Service Line inspection efforts is an unfunded mandate required by the US EPA. We have to fit this work in, which takes us away from other maintenance activities. After completing the initial testing required by the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Health in 2024, we are continuing to collect data in order to develop a plan of action for the next phase of the project, involving galvanized services.

## What’s one of the most surprising “wow I had no idea” discoveries you’ve made while working in the water industry?

How cost effective, safe and reliable our local tap water is.

## What was one of your most memorable moments on the job?

Probably any time we have had an emergency in the middle of the night or on a weekend or holiday. I love being the one called out to “save the day” for our customers. Even if it’s 2:00 am on a weekday morning, and the surrounding neighborhood hasn’t slept because our equipment has been running in front of their home all night, I’m always humbled by how often we get praise, thanks, and/or treats from the neighbors. They understand that our crews are working as hard as we can, as quickly as we can, to restore their drinking water.

## If you met someone looking for a job, would you tell them to consider a career in the water industry? What should they expect if they were working for a Water District?

It’s not just a job, it’s a career. It’s extremely rewarding to know what you’re doing really matters, that you’re providing a critical service to your community. And it can take you to the farthest reaches of the globe, or you can just keep your head down and work for 35 years. It is what you make it.



# Is Your Irrigation System Turned Off?

The #1 cause of a high water bill any time of year: a leaky toilet.

The #1 cause of a REALLY high water bill in winter: your irrigation system.

1. Locate and test your master water shut-off valve. If you can’t find it, call us BEFORE there’s a problem: we’ll meet you on site to show you how to shut it off. This is critical to know in an emergency, since it can take us longer to respond if multiple customers have frozen pipes or burst irrigation heads!
2. Turn off the water to your irrigation (and drip irrigation) system.
3. Disconnect and drain your irrigation system, irrigation timers, and/or garden hoses. Get commercial irrigation systems professionally blown out.
4. Insulate exposed faucets, pipes, and backflow devices.
5. Insulate interior pipes and faucets in unheated areas (outdoor sheds, utility rooms, basements, attics, garages, and crawl spaces).

If a pipe or irrigation head breaks, IMMEDIATELY turn off the main water shut-off valve to minimize flooding, damage, and high water bills. If you have problems shutting off your water, please contact us right away at 206.362.8100 so we can have someone shut your water off at the meter.

# North City WATER DISTRICT

## NORTH CITY WAVES

Issue 4: October • November • December 2025

Serving the communities of Shoreline and Lake Forest Park since 1931

A newsletter for water-related issues and info

## From Our Board...

Patricia Hale, Board President

Looking back on this year, a theme has clearly emerged: infrastructure Improvements! The United States and Canada experience 260,000 water main breaks annually, due to widespread corrosion of aging metal pipeline systems. Not so at North City Water District. Our approach to maintaining infrastructure is based on an ongoing, proactive system plan: we are, quite literally, continually addressing your water system infrastructure. This year was particularly busy in that regard, as we’ve detailed in previous newsletters. In addition to numerous developer-funded projects described in the last issue, and two new water mains in our south end that we described in the Summer issue, we’ve had two projects in the Sheridan Beach neighborhood of Lake Forest Park, one of which used an innovative approach to protect the habitat around a salmon-bearing stream. Another project involving 140 feet of new water main took over a year to get permits to cross the Burke Gilman trail, yet we finished it in less than 10 days, without having to close the trail. We’re proud of our infrastructure accomplishments this year, and ready for more in 2026!

## FREE GARDENING CLASSES IN 2026

Watch our website for details!



North City Waves Newsletter ~ a publication by North City Water District

- 1) Email [customerservice@northcitywater.org](mailto:customerservice@northcitywater.org) to have your email address added to your account for alerts, news, free classes and more
- 2) NextDoor: <https://nextdoor.com/agency-detail/wa/shoreline/north-city-water-district/>
- 3) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NorthCityWaterDistrict](https://www.facebook.com/NorthCityWaterDistrict)

## Three Ways to Stay in Touch:

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The North City Waves Newsletter is brought to you by North City Water District, and its Board of Commissioners:

Patricia Hale (President), Ron Ricker (Vice President), and Charlotte Haines (Secretary).

Feel free to contact us at PO Box 55367, or 1519 NE 177th Street, Shoreline, WA 98155.

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# Another “Boring” Project by Your Water District 😊

McAleer Creek is a six mile long salmon-bearing stream in the Sheridan Beach neighborhood of Lake Forest Park. When it became necessary to connect a water main across its path, we needed a method that would ensure its critical habitat remained undisturbed. This is one of three “boring” projects that we have done in the past 15 years.

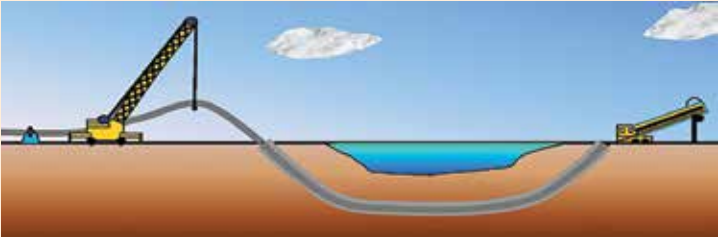
The story began in 1972, when a water pipe servicing the Sheridan Beach neighborhood broke under McAleer creek. To restore service quickly, our crews capped it off on either side of the creek to isolate the broken section.

In 2018, while testing the accuracy of our computer hydraulic model (as part of our Water System Plan update), we noticed the hydraulic modeling numbers for water flow and pressures didn’t match our field readings in that area.

Further investigation identified the culprit: that capped off water pipe. To provide consistent water pressure and flow to this neighborhood, we needed to reconnect the pipes.

*A “closed loop” system not only supports better water pressure and flow, it creates resilience that helps our water system adapt to unforeseen situations, such as natural disasters or underground soil movement.*

We worked with engineers from Psomas and the City of Lake Forest Park to explore various options, finally settling on a “boring” approach to get 540 feet of water pipe under the bridge and creek, as shown in the below illustration:



After Multiple State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) tasks and a Critical Areas report, we hired Ryatt Construction to install 600 feet of water pipe under Beach Drive NE, with subcontractor LineScape using horizontal directional drilling or “boring” to install another 540 feet of pipe under McAleer Creek.



On day one, they placed multiple sections of the new water pipe along Beach Drive, fused the sections together, and positioned them on rollers, ready to be pulled through the bore hole the next day. “Very similar to a needle pulling thread,” said engineering subcontractor Michelle Macauley in our YouTube video.\*

They also excavated two pits, 275 feet away from either side of the creek to prevent habitat disruption, through which the boring would take place.

On September 16, the boring effort began with a “pilot bore” from one side of the creek to the other; followed by several “ream passes” through the pilot hole to enlarge it to roughly one and a half times the size of the water pipe, as explained in our second YouTube video.\*

On September 17, once the pilot hole was drilled and enlarged, LineScape crews attached the new water pipe and began pulling it through, as seen in our third video.\*

Once the pipe reached the second bore hole on September 18, the connection was cleaned, the pulling equipment was disassembled, the pipe was pressure tested and chlorinated, and then connected to the existing water pipe on the other side of the creek.

The final steps of this project included new services, a new fire hydrant, storm drain work, and street improvements including ADA accessible ramps, curbs, and paving overlays.

North City Water District is so grateful to the residents of Sheridan Beach neighborhood for their patience, and to the staff of Psomas, Ryatt, LineScape, Cascade Trenchless Consulting, Macauley Expert Services, and our own crews for accomplishing this project in a way that protected McAleer Creek and its native salmon!



**\*Visit our YouTube:**  
[www.youtube.com/northcitywaterdistrict7417](https://www.youtube.com/northcitywaterdistrict7417)



District employee Christian Eley working after hours to repair a broken water main

## Please Slow Down at Night

*“I found water pooling across the street from my house. After clearing the storm drains we quickly realized that the water main must be broken because water was coming out of the concrete/street in multiple places. I went to the North City Water District website and called the emergency number posted. I left a voicemail and received a phone call back 5 minutes later from their staff. I relayed the info and he was onsite shortly after to get eyes on it. Sure enough he returned with a crew and they repaired the water line right then. I was very impressed with how quickly they responded after hours and took immediate action to get it fixed. I wanted to reach out and say thank you to the staff at North City Water District. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.”*

– Victoria in North City

Water main breaks don’t always occur during normal work hours (nor do they take holidays off), and when they happen at night, they pose extra danger to our crews.

Sometimes we have flaggers stationed before and after the affected area, which are fairly easy to see during daylight hours. However as soon as night falls, particularly in rainy weather, you may not notice flaggers, equipment or staff working on the problem until you come around a corner and notice that work is underway.

**Please plan ahead on dark and/or rainy nights to allow some extra time to get to your destination. Those bright lights you see up ahead could be our crews—including fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters who are working after hours to keep your water running.**

## Modest Rate Increase in 2026

*In addition to annual financial audits and a two year accountability audit every other year, North City Water District’s Finance Director develops and monitors our budget all throughout the year to ensure we have a well-informed budget for the upcoming year.*

Monitoring our budget closely and making necessary adjustments has become increasingly important over the past decade, given that over 95% of the our revenue comes from water use, and water conservation is at an all-time high across the region. Thankfully our 90+ year history of proactive,

long-term planning for capital improvements helps us maintain fiscal accountability despite these and other challenges. By analyzing multiple factors over time—including the current economic climate, project phasing, low-interest financing, and innovative partnering with developers to share costs—we can identify the most cost-effective approach for smaller rate changes. Our 2025 cost of service analysis will result in small increases and decreases depending on customer class, effective January 1, 2026.

We understand that rate increases of any amount, even though necessary to maintain the health, safety, and efficiency of your water system, can be challenging in these current economic times. If you are experiencing difficulties, please visit our website for a list of customer assistance programs that may be helpful:

<https://northcitywater.org/resources/customer-assistance-programs/>

Our financial statements, audits, and budget can be found here:

<https://northcitywater.org/resources/financial-statements-and-audits/>