

## Commissioner Commitment: Low Rates, High Service



*Commissioner  
Don Ellis*

**N**orthshore Utility District offers among the lowest water and sewer rates available in the Puget Sound area. This is something we have been very proud of over the past decades. Many different factors have contributed to the District's unique combination of low rates and high quality service. I've worked to identify these and to find ways to secure this advantage for as long as possible.

The bulk of our operating costs is the same for almost all King County water and sewer utilities—we all get our water from the Seattle supply system and our collected sewage is treated by the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks. On top of these standardized operating costs, Northshore Utility District pays some of the highest wages in our industry, spending an average of \$3.7 million dollars per year on wages for system maintenance and operation. But we expect excellence from our employees and hold them accountable for the work they do.

Since the start of the recession, most local governmental agencies have been challenged with reduced revenue and tightened budgets amid the common new battle cry to “do more with less.” The District has no control over items such as the wholesale water costs, sewage treatment charges, or other governmental fees as these are set by outside agencies. But at NUD, we pride ourselves in doing everything possible to control our internal operating costs.

One of the primary factors in keeping costs low involves the substantial contributions of all the Commissioners of the District Board. They often donate their time to benefit the District. For example: due to state law limit on commissioner's

compensation, Board members sometimes serve without pay. In some cases, your elected representatives take on actual duties of the District's functions, either on their own or working alongside staff in their respective areas of interest or expertise. No, we haven't had to dig ditches—at least not yet—but I can operate a backhoe.

Between the five Commissioners, we have real-life work experiences in finance, electronics, computers, environmental science, law, management, public safety, human resources and public administration. As retirees and business owners, we have the flexibility to take on more active roles in the management of the District. The Commissioners on the Board average forty years of experience in the public sector in various capacities. On top of that, we actively take advantage of training opportunities at seminars and conferences to hone our skills in the various facets of the District's operations.

The Commissioners all contribute in different ways. Some represent the District by serving on the various regional boards or committees; others offer decades of professional experience for a specific project or a particular area. As members of the Board, we are policymakers first and must function as a body. We are careful to stay in that capacity even as we contribute additional time in our chosen manner. Final decisions on matters in which we participate as individual Commissioners are brought back before the full Board for disposition.

This group effort is one way we keep the District's internal operating costs relatively stable even as the District continues to grow. We believe this effort is one of those important factors contributing to the District's low water and sewer rates as compared to the surrounding utility districts and city utilities. As your elected officials, we are committed to continuing this work of providing both better rates and more comprehensive service to our ratepayers. 💧

# Background on Backflow Tests

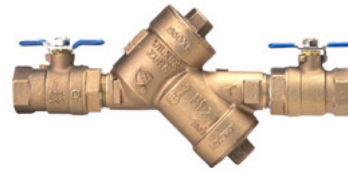
If you own one of the 3,500 homes in our District with an irrigation or fire sprinkler system, you have probably become familiar, perhaps irritated, with the terms *backflow device* and *backflow test*.

Washington State law requires a *backflow device* for every potential point in the water service lines where drinking water may be “crossed” with potentially contaminated water sources. If the devices malfunction, a contaminated source can mix with the drinking water system. Annual tests on all backflow devices are required to make sure they keep doing their job.

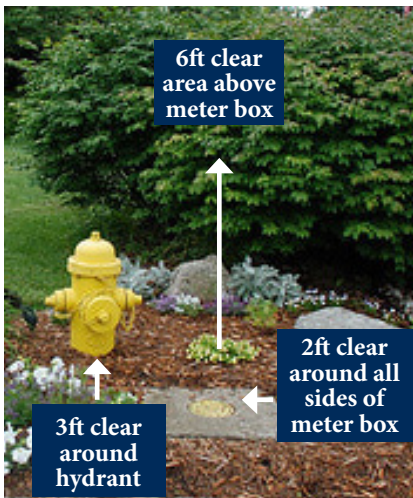
Cross connection doesn't happen often. But the potential hazards are serious enough to warrant the safeguard. In 1990, eight students at a Colorado middle school were poisoned when antifreeze from the building reservoir seeped into the drinking system. Irrigation systems open the possibility of water mixed with weed killers, fertilizers, and animal waste backflowing into a home's or neighborhood's drinking water.

NUD's most important job is to ensure your family's clean, safe water. Our Cross Connection Program generates no revenue; it exists to serve you and comply with state health laws. Thank you for your help in keeping up-to-date records on all fire and irrigation system backflow devices. More information about preventing cross connection can be found at [www.nud.net](http://www.nud.net). 💧

*A double-check valve assembly (DCVA) backflow unit protects most irrigation and fire sprinkler systems from cross-connection.*



## Meter & Hydrant Access Reminder



Have you trimmed your shrubs or groundcover lately? Please remember to keep meter boxes and hydrants clear and unobstructed. Your water meter must have at least a two-foot radius and a six-foot vertical clearance and hydrants must have a three-foot radius free of vegetation and debris.

If a meter is inaccessible due to debris, overgrown vegetation, parked vehicles located over the meter box or any other obstruction, the property owner shall be assessed a special access charge in the amount of \$30.00 for each instance that the meter is determined to be inaccessible for attempted meter reading or repair.

Please remember that we read every meter every other month. We want to keep our meter readers safe and unscathed during the performance of their duties. 💧

## Spring Gardening How-To's

**MULCH** the surface of your garden beds after your spring weeding. A blanket of compost or wood chip mulch 2-3" thick will conserve soil moisture when spring warms up, delay the need to begin watering, and feed the soil—all helping to keep plants healthy. It will also help keep weeds out and make it easier to hand-pull weeds that do take hold.

**PLANT** now to help roots grow strong before the dry season begins—otherwise, wait until fall. Selecting the right plants for your site will lead to a healthy, beautiful garden and easier maintenance, with fewer resources needed. Visit “**Lawn & Garden**” at [www.savingwater.org](http://www.savingwater.org) for guides on choosing the “Right Plant, Right Place” for natural gardens and ideas for plant picks—enjoy!

**LEARN** with our **FREE GARDENING CLASSES** scheduled throughout the region. NUD will be hosting two more this spring with landscape designer Janine Anderson:

~ 100 Best Trees & Shrubs for NW — April 29th, 6:30-8pm ~

~ The Best Southern Hemisphere Plants for NW Gardens — May 20th, 6:30-8pm ~

Contact (425) 398-4400 x113 or [jguthrie@nud.net](mailto:jguthrie@nud.net) to register. [Savingwater.org](http://Savingwater.org) has the full description of classes and locations—plus many more great sustainable gardening resources! 💧

Northshore  
Utility District  
Board of  
Commissioners:

Bruce Gardiner  
President

Margaret Wiggins  
Board Secretary

Don Ellis  
Commissioner

Trudy Rolla  
Commissioner

Robert Peterson  
Commissioner

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Board of  
Commissioner  
Meetings  
are held at the  
District Office  
on the  
first and third  
Monday of each  
month at 5:30 p.m.  
(except holidays)

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