



June 2020 Newsletter

UPDATE ON THE GRATON COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT OCCIDENTAL WASTEWATER TRANSPORT AND TREATMENT PROJECT

While this project is an opportunity to raise revenues for GCSD, thereby forestalling the need to raise sewer service rates, it has been a hard sell trying to convince potential neighbors to accept a receiving station near their homes. Cost reductions to Occidental County Sanitation District (Occidental) from a shorter distance of transporting their wastewater for treatment in addition to a reduction in global warming gases, air pollution, and truck traffic apparently do not offset the perceived risks.

About one year ago, after not reaching an agreement with the owners of a commercial location, we entered into an agreement with another property owner to exercise an option to purchase an easement subject to the project being approved by GCSD. The District contracted with a local engineering firm to complete preliminary engineering design services in support of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reviews for the project.

The consultant prepared an Administrative Draft Initial Study/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for circulation and a 30-day public review period beginning November 6, 2019. The District received public comments from nearby residents and from various government agencies. The concerns centered around five areas, public noticing, traffic and roadway safety, potential for spills and odors, air quality emissions, and noise. Despite strong opposition to the project, in our draft response to public comments we described how potential impacts can be reduced to a level less than significant.

As with any project, there have been some delays that GCSD did not anticipate. Also, the estimated construction cost and

further delays to obtain local agency approvals have led to the District abandoning the second site. That leaves us with one last attempt to find a location in which to construct the receiving station. If the remaining alternatives are not feasible, the Occidental Wastewater Transport and Treatment Project is effectively dead.

We are nearly complete with our evaluation of three alternative sites. All three require approvals from Sonoma County. If we can get the necessary approvals for the preferred location, we anticipate that operations could begin in the Spring of 2021.

Sewer Repair and Rehabilitation Project

The existing wastewater collection system for Graton is approximately 45 years old and consists of approximately 6.5 miles of 6, 8, and 12 inches asbestos cement pipelines, two lift stations, one wastewater treatment facility, and a 20-acre irrigation field used for summertime disposal of tertiary-treated effluent. Current regulations allow for the discharge of tertiary treated & disinfected water to Atascadero Creek from October 1st – May 14th each year.

In December 2014, the District completed an evaluation of their sewer network. That evaluation included assessing the wastewater infrastructure and identifying any deficiencies that should be corrected through the District's Capital Improvement Plan. Execution of that plan depended on having funds to do the work. Seven projects were identified with a probable project cost of \$2.8 million. The risk of not correcting the collection system deficiencies is that we are vulnerable to spills, environmental damage, and regulatory fines.

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To address this issue, the District submitted a planning financial assistance application to the CA State Water Resources Control Board (SWR) in 2017 to fund a study to update the costs and findings of that earlier report and to perform the planning and engineering to correct the deficiencies in the wastewater collection system. The estimated cost to conduct the study is \$500,000. Because the District's operations reserves are not sufficient to fund such a study, we first needed to establish that Graton is an economically disadvantaged community and therefore eligible for a grant as opposed to a loan that would increase our debt service obligations.

To achieve such a designation, a community must demonstrate that the median household income (MHI) is 80% or less of the statewide MHI. The MHI survey and final report was completed one year after our initial application to SWR. Survey results showed that the MHI for GCSD is \$49,200 and falls within the threshold for a designation as an economically disadvantaged community.

Based on this and other information submitted to SWR, in March 2020, the District entered into an agreement with SWR to receive financial assistance to conduct the study and system evaluation **with the expectation that the District shall repay none of the financial assistance to SWR.**

The next steps are to advertise a Request For Proposal (RFP) for this project, interview interested engineering firms, select the most qualified firm, negotiate a consultant agreement, and begin work. We anticipate that this study will take about one year to complete.

"FLUSHABLE" WIPES

The California Water Resources Control Board is advising special districts "Flushing wipes, paper towels and similar products down toilets will clog sewers and cause backups and overflows at wastewater treatment facilities, creating an additional public health risk in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic."

Flushable/disposable wipes regardless of what the label says are **NOT** flushable and need to be disposed of in your trash receptacle after use.

Wipes that get caught into the sewer system can also clog pipes in your home. This can result in expensive plumbing bills that you didn't count on. Flushable wipes don't break down like toilet paper when it is flushed.

This has become a huge problem at sewer plants across the nation. At our local sewer plant and lift stations, the operators are manually removing these wipes from clogged equipment. The continued flushing of these wipes has increased the need to replace parts that break in the sewer system.

Please pay special attention to what you are flushing. Do not flush anything other than toilet paper and human waste. Anything used for personal hygiene purposes or for wiping, disinfecting or cleaning surfaces is not flushable.

Together we can help keep sewer service costs down and reduce this problem. THANK YOU!



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Save the District and Ratepayers Money, Energy Costs, and Time. Prevent gross, costly clogs!

- Never flush anything down the toilet except human waste and toilet paper. No hair, cotton balls, wrappers, swabs, medications, or so called “flushable” wipes.
- Pour cooled fats and oils into a can with a lid, or mix with an absorbent material such as cat litter, and dispose of in the garbage.
- Wipe down greasy pots, pans, and dishes with a paper towel before washing them, and then put the paper towel in the trash.
- Don't use hot water or the garbage disposal to wash fats down the drain.
- Drop off large amounts of cooking oil, such as oil from a fryer, at cooking oil recycling locations.



Medicine Drop off Locations & What is accepted:

- +Prescription and over the counter pills/capsules
- +Liquid medications, including ointments, lotions, and creams (sealed containers)
- +Veterinary Medications
- + Vitamins, supplements, homoeopathic remedies
- +Medical patches, Inhalers

SEBASTOPOL POLICE STATION

6850 Laguna Park Way 829-4400

PETALUMA Household Toxics Facility

500 Mecham Road Thurs, Fri, Sat 7:30a-2:30p

707-795-2025; 877-747-1870



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Board of Directors Vacancies

Come serve your community and join the sewer board! Serving on the board is a great opportunity to help the town of Graton, the environment, and have a chance to make a positive impact for all!

The GCSD is governed as directed by State Law by a Board of Directors consisting of 5 members. Directors are either elected by the Graton ratepayers, or are appointed by existing Board members. Directors are elected at regularly scheduled elections to serve 4-year staggered terms. Board members must be ratepayers within the GCSD boundaries and must be registered to vote. The Board members select one person to be the President. Other positions are Vice President and Secretary. Sonoma County acts as the District Treasurer. The President may appoint other Board members to be part of ad-hoc committees, as needed. However, the Board positions are voluntary positions and Board members are free to participate to whatever extent they are comfortable with. The Board ostensibly operates under the guidelines of a Policy Handbook, a decade-old document currently undergoing updating.

Board positions are not currently paid positions, although the Policy Handbook allows for such remuneration as well as participation in a District-paid health plan. No such health plan exists at this time, and the current Board has chosen to not institute either of these benefits at this time for the benefit of the District.

The Board of Directors jointly supervise the activities of the District. The duty of a Board is to set policies and then ensure that such policies are applied. Board members may have outside affiliations. One primary duty of this Board is to hire a General Manager who is responsible for all facets of the day-to-day operation of the treatment plant. The Board regularly meets on the

third Monday of every month. Board members can also call for special meetings as the need arises.

One of the challenges that the District faces periodically is finding suitable and interested replacements for Board Directors whose terms are up or who resign for personal reasons. We face such a challenge at this very moment. There is one current vacancy that must be filled by our board as soon as possible. We anticipate that other vacancies may occur soon. We posted a notice at the Graton Post Office asking for applicants to fill the current and upcoming vacancies. Unfortunately, we did not receive any applications. We are hopeful that this month's newsletter will be a better way to get the word out to the community. We are also using social media, such as Next Door, to inform the community. All that is required in the application is a letter stating your interest in serving on the Board, affirmation that you live or own property within the District boundary, and a resume describing your work experience.

If we cannot find anyone to fill a vacancy within 60 days, as the government code stipulates, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors has the option of appointing a person to the vacant position within 90 days of when the vacancy occurred.

Graton Community Services District Email Contact List:

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