

Newsletter

Our Services

The Graton Community Services District (GCSD) provides wastewater treatment to the unincorporated Graton area, including a community of about 1,700 rural residents living in 450 homes, as well as a few businesses. The district provides recycled water to some agricultural producers in the area, in order to offset demand from groundwater and from streams in the Atascadero/Green Valley Creek watershed. GCSD is governed by a five-member Board elected by District residents.

Since 2015, when several new members joined the Board, the emphasis has been on holding wastewater rates steady and avoiding the property tax increases that characterized previous years.

Now the District is reviewing several more projects that will either cut expenses or bring in new revenue, with the prospect of avoiding any rate increases for the foreseeable future.

GCSD Embarks on Cost Saving Floating Solar Panel Array Project

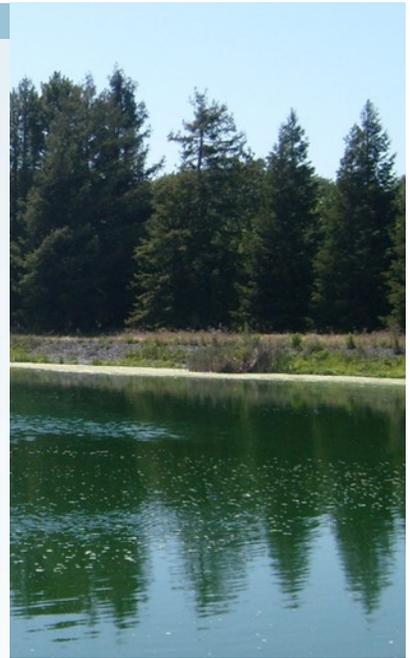
The District has contracted with North Coast Solar, a Santa Rosa company, to install floating solar panels over one of the wastewater storage ponds at the treatment plant

The solar panels are expected to save the District – and its ratepayers – about \$2.9 million in electricity costs over the next 25 years, compared to buying the electricity from PG&E. Savings would begin in the first year of operation – 2023. The installation has been financed at very favorable rates from Mission Capital Solar Finance, and will be paid off in seven years.

The solar panels are constructed on kayak-like polymer pontoons that float on top of the pond. Similar floating solar panels are already used at treatment plants in Healdsburg and Windsor.

Floating solar panels are constantly cooled by the wastewater below them, so they work more efficiently and produce more electricity. Because they shade the wastewater and block sunlight, they also reduce unwanted algae growth.

The installation will cost \$454,000. The panels will generate a projected 222,000 kWh annually, and would lower the average Pacific Gas & Electric bill from \$6,307 a month to \$107 a month. The projected \$2.9 million in savings includes the cost of installation and financing.



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Special points of interest

- See the latest changes to the District’s Board
- GCSD continues to focus on financial accountability and ways to save our ratepayers money
- You can do your part to prevent sewer problems and overflows

Board President David Clemmer Retires



Board President David Clemmer, the driving force behind the GCSD Board since 2015, has stepped down for health reasons. During his tenure, David worked tirelessly and creatively to improve plant operations and keep costs down.

A Graton residence since 2007,

David began attending GCSD public meetings in 2010, became a Board member in January 2015, and was elected Board President in August 2015.

He inherited a budget deficit of nearly \$450,000, and immediately began looking at ways to cut costs and bring in new revenue. Under his direction, the Board was able to pay off the deficit and for the past seven years has had a balanced budget of about \$1 million. Wastewater rates, which had doubled in the previous decade, have remained stable during his seven years as Board president.

David came to the Board with more than 40 years' experience as an ASE

Certified Master Heavy Equipment Mechanic and had extensive experience in assessing equipment.

Those skills served him well as Board President, said David Upchurch, the Board's vice president.

"Being a Master Mechanic involves a set of skills that served David well as President of the Board," said David Upchurch, newly elected Board President. "It requires a great deal of discipline, a strong work ethic, knowledge, and the ability to visualize how a system works, figure out what's going wrong, and the tenacity to keep after it until it's right. You push forward with a positive attitude to a positive outcome. That's what David did on the Board."

As Board president, David took the initiative to review and tour wastewater treatment plant models around the state, talking to general managers to learn what options could benefit GCSD and its ratepayers.

He also focused on rekindling relationship with neighboring districts and identifying opportunities for collaboration, always with an eye on fiscal responsibility.

"He engendered in the Board a collaborative and creative culture that gets good ideas flowing, talked out, and weighed on the merits. He was what you want a president to be," Upchurch said. "He's going to be sorely missed."

Do Your Part to Protect the System

Don't flush anything down the toilet except human waste and toilet paper. No hair, cotton balls, wrappers, swabs, medications or so called "flushable" wipes.

Don't pour cooking grease or oils down the drain. Pour fats and oils into a container, let it cool and throw it in the trash.

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 try to get grease and oil down the drain with hot water or the garbage disposal.

Don't flush medications, instead drop off unused medications, pills, lotions or liquids at the Sebastopol Police Station 6850 Laguna Park Way, Sebastopol.

Some cleaning products and other chemicals should not be poured down the drain. Dispose of all chemical and hazardous materials at the county landfill on Meacham Road, just north of Petaluma. <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/recycle-dispose/residents/household-hazardous-waste-facility>

General Manager Jose Ortiz has retired and an Interim GM hired

Jose Ortiz, the talented and knowledgeable General Manager of the treatment plant, retired on March 31. Our thanks to him for his dedication and service.

An extremely experienced Interim General Manager has been hired, to serve until a new General Manager is hired. The position is part-time.

Interim General Manager Chad Davison brings more than 30 years of organizational administration, public works and public facilities management, and water and wastewater program experience. He is currently General Manager of Ironhouse Sanitary District in Oakley, and teaches wastewater treatment and collection systems classes at the college level. He holds both a Grade V plant operator license, the highest grade, a B.A. in public administration and an M.B.A. in Management Focus.

He is tasked with oversight of the treatment plan, preparing the annual budget, assessing future needs, updating the preventive maintenance schedule, managing the current work schedule and staff, among other things.





Proposed Occidental to Graton Pipeline Route

Occidental to Graton Pipeline

A pipeline bringing wastewater from Occidental to Graton is practical and could save money for both communities, according to a feasibility study completed in early February.

The study was aired at a town hall meeting hosted by Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, who enthusiastically supported the project. She said it could lower rates for both Graton and Occidental ratepayers.

Construction, engineering and other costs would come to about \$6.2 million. The Sonoma County Water Agency, the lead agency on the project, believes the funding could come from state and federal grants, without cost to ratepayers.

Construction could begin in 2025, following completion of an Environmental Impact Report, to be prepared by the Water Agency, and project design and engineering.

Current calculations show it would cost Graton some \$200,000 to \$250,000 a year to treat Occidental's wastewater, to be paid by Occidental ratepayers. In addition, a one-time sewer connection fee will be charged to pay for aging Occidental infrastructure that will need replacement in the years to come.

The pipeline would be routed from the Occidental pumping station parallel to Bohemian Highway to Graton Road, then east along Graton Road to Ross Road, downstream of the Graton plant's lift station.

The pipeline project is practical because the Graton plant can treat far more wastewater than Graton produces. Graton produces about 86,000 gallons a day in dry weather, while the plant's capacity is 140,000 gallons a day in dry weather. Occidental wastewater would add about 17,000 gallons a day in dry weather, a total of 103,000 gallons a day in dry weather, still well below the plant's capacity.

Flows are higher in winter, and during those months Occidental would need to temporarily store wastewater in its existing storage pond and/or continue to truck some wastewater to the airport, as it does now.

Constructing the pipeline could mean that a proposed transfer station at Green Valley and Hicks Roads would not need to be built. More studies are needed before that determination can be made.

Vandalism at Ross Road Lift Station

On January 2, a person or persons unknown used a Molotov cocktail – a burning rag thrust into a can of kerosene – to vandalize the lift station on Ross Road. The resulting fire burned out the control panel and electrical cables. Without power, the station's pump stopped. A standby generator came on, but failed three days later. Without power, a high-water alarm failed to sound at the plant. As a result, wastewater overflowed onto the Purple Wine Company property.

Making matters worse, the Purple Wine Company apparently had not realized an outbuilding's check valve on the sewer pipe was stuck open. This meant wastewater also collected within the outbuilding itself. The building has now been completely cleaned and sanitized.

A rental generator was used until the lift station power was restored by PG&E and the lift station restored to normal working order. The original generator has now been repaired and the rental returned.

Improvements to the lift station are underway, including new fencing and a surveillance camera.

Graton CSD Could Get Paid for Our Treated Wastewater

In another plus for Graton ratepayers, the Board is in talks with the general manager of the Forestville Wastewater Treatment Plant to pipe some of Graton's wastewater to Forestville.

Forestville wants the highly treated wastewater because it has contracts with vineyards to use wastewater for irrigation, and can sell more wastewater than Forestville alone produces. Graton would pipe its wastewater to Forestville through an already constructed pipeline.

Currently, Graton's wastewater is discharged into the Atascadero Creek, two vineyards north of the treatment plant, and onto the District's irrigation field.

The proposed project would help Graton ratepayers, but more importantly, it relieves the strain on groundwater supplies during this drought era.

Evaluating Our Treatment System

In another step to reduce costs, the Board is looking at changing the way the plant treats wastewater. The plant currently uses pasteurization -- a good, but expensive and fickle system of disinfection. Other possible methods include ultraviolet and chlorination.

Any switchover will need approval from regulators, including the state Regional Water Control Board, and a change in the plant's permits. Unless the permit is fast tracked, this would likely entail a feasibility study and cost estimates, and could include an Environmental Impact Report.

The wastewater treatment process has a number of separate steps: 1) separating solids from liquids, 2) clarifying the wastewater, 3) preparing the solids to be used as fertilizer and/or disposed of, and 4) disinfecting the

wastewater so there is no danger of discharging harmful bacteria into creeks or rivers.



GCSD Welcomes New Director

The District welcomes a new Board Member, Lindsay Parker. At their May 21, 2022 Board meeting, the Board unanimously selected Ms. Parker to replace recently retired Board Member David Clemmer. Director Parker is an expert in Marketing and Business with a proven track record of "Getting Things Done!!". In addition to her extensive professional experience, Director Parker also has an impressive educational background, including an Master's degree in International Business from St. Mary's College, a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from UC Berkeley and she completed the Executive Women's Leadership Program from the Stanford School of Business.

She brings a talent and a unique perspective to an already diverse Board possessing a wide range of technical and management expertise. Welcome to GCSD Lindsay!

For More Info...

Board meetings are held on the third Monday of each month. If the third Monday is a holiday, the meeting will be held the following day. Occasionally, special meetings are held as needed.

To follow Board meeting on Zoom, go the GCSD website, Graton.org, and click on the upcoming agenda. The Zoom link appears in the agenda.

To receive meeting agenda by email, notify Linda Martinez, our administrative assistant: linda-martinez.gcsd@gmail.com

Go to the website to subscribe to automatically receive all Board agendas, newsletters and other pertinent information via email.

Our Mission

The Graton Community Services District is a local government agency dedicated to operating and maintaining the wastewater treatment facilities in the unincorporated Graton community.

District Board and Staff Information

Board President, David Upchurch

Board Secretary, Jennifer Butler

Board Member, Carol Benfell

Board Member, Maxwell Wilmarth

Board Member, Lindsay Parker

General Manager, Chad Davisson, (925) 727-2938, chaddavisson.gcsd@gmail.com

Chief Plant Operator, John Gibson, (707) 591-5646, john.gcsd@gmail.com

Administration, Linda Martinez, (707) 758-4580, lindamartinez.gcsd@gmail.com

GCS D Website: www.graton.org

