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## Milpitas to foot \$168 million for sewage plant upgrades

by Ian Bauer, Milpitas Post

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City of San Jose staff presented a long-term plan to the Milpitas City Council on Tuesday that looks to reshape a 2,600-acre shoreline site and rebuild the adjacent San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant.

John Stufflebean, San Jose Environmental Services Department director, presented the recommended alternative for the sewage treatment plant rehabilitation and land-use master plan that considers recreation, jobs-based development, a clean tech center, trails and natural habitat, and a retail area located near the treatment facility at 700 Los Esteros Road, close to the Milpitas-San Jose border.

The nearly 55-year-old pollution control plant is co-owned by the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara and serves approximately 1.4-million residents in the cities of Milpitas, San Jose, Santa Clara, Cupertino, Campbell, Los Gatos, and Monte Sereno and Saratoga.

The project's recommended alternative plan may take 30 years to complete.

"It is now time to replace the plant," Stufflebean said, adding its main purpose is to separate liquid waste from solid waste.

Stufflebean added City of Milpitas, which contributes

8 percent of the indoor wastewater and bio-solids the plant receives compared to the 66 percent of similar material waste coming from San Jose, will need to share the cost of the plant's rehabilitation.

City of Milpitas would pay \$168 million, or 7.65 percent, of the total \$2.2-billion rebuild.

City of San Jose reports state the master plan

project has been a three-year effort to develop a technical alternative to rebuild the aging plant and enable it to meet future regulatory requirements and population demands in sustainable and energy-efficient manners. The proposed alternative plan includes process changes meant to reduce odors and shrink the plant's footprint, enabling new land uses along the South San Francisco Bay shoreline.

This alternative envisions significant repairs and rehabilitation at the plant as well as a major change in how bio-solids are treated. The current process of using more than 700 acres of open-air lagoons and drying beds is proposed to be phased out over the next 15 years and replaced with a covered, mechanical process.

It also envisions a mix of economic development with a focus on clean tech; recreational uses including trails and parks; and habitat restoration of uplands and marshlands.

### Odor emissions

Since the disclosure of the latest plan in December, City of Milpitas has generally been supportive of this project through what the city calls "Milpitas Guiding Principles."

However, Milpitas officials have stated that the sewage treatment plant's "outdated open-air bio-solids lagoons and drying beds are public

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nuisances, inappropriate to an urban area that should be replaced in the first phase of the Master Plan work."

Last month the San Jose City Council reviewed the Milpitas Guiding Principles as part of the plant master plan agenda item and directed staff to consider these in the final development of the preferred alternative for the plant master plan.

City of Milpitas and adjacent property owners have serious concerns about the impacts of odors, some of which may be generated by plant operations.

At this week's council meeting, Stufflebean said that the project aims to reduce odor emissions as the sewage treatment plant is upgraded.

"There are multiple sources of odor in the area," Stufflebean said, noting nearby Newby Island Landfill is also a source. "We're trying to move to a future that generates less odor."

Stufflebean said moving away from the open-air lagoons and drying beds over the next 15 years, to be replaced with covered areas, would cost between \$125 million to \$135 million, with actual odor control measures costing an additional \$12 million to \$18 million.

Vice Mayor Pete McHugh said he was hoping the sewage treatment plant would "expedite" its odor control. McHugh also noted the impact to local ratepayers that the plant's rebuild would bring.

Mayor Jose Esteves said he was concerned that it would likely take nearly 15 years to address the odor emissions from the plant.

Stufflebean responded that the sewage treatment plant would need to conduct "pilot tests" on programs and technologies to reduce odor

emissions.

"It's going to take several years to design and several years to construct," Stufflebean said. "It just takes awhile to transition to an entirely new process."

In terms of paying for the project, City Manager Tom Williams suggested the city would explore ways to share the cost of the rebuild either through a "pay as you go" plan or the issuance of a bond after the project receives its final approval to proceed in April.

"It's yet to be determined," Williams added.

During public comment, resident Robert Marini was concerned City of Milpitas would "stiff" ratepayers with another tax increase to help pay for the rebuild.

"It costs us nearly a \$1,000 for our water and sewage today," Marini said, adding the city needed to rethink any plans that would impact ratepayers. "Or else we're going to be putting people out of their homes."

Joey McCarthy, representing McCarthy Ranch, suggested the sewage treatment plant's rebuild would not solve the decades-old problems of odor emissions in the area.

"We've been suffering the odor every single day since they built this plant," McCarthy said.

Moreover, McCarthy added other communities around the country that have similar sewage treatment plants don't suffer from this level of odor. He claimed the Milpitas Chamber of Commerce, the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Milpitas Unified School District as well as area businesses were opposed to the project.

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"They all suffer from the odors," McCarthy said, adding the project costs for the plant's rebuild have been "over-inflated" in the past and that local agencies like City of Milpitas were still not getting accurate information. "It doesn't make any sense, and when it doesn't make any sense somebody is not telling the truth."

Mayor Esteves said he agreed with McCarthy's comments and affirmed that the odor issue has always affected residents here. The mayor then urged residents who continue to smell strong odors to call the odor hotline number (800) 334-6367 provided by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for investigation of odor emissions.

"Everybody is negatively impacted because they are in this area," Esteves said of the sewage treatment plant. "We have listened and we share your comments."

In the end, the city council voted 4-0 to accept the report with conditions that City of San Jose expedite the process to address odor emission at the sewage plant and further urge San Jose and Santa Clara city councils to also quickly move to address odor solutions at the plant.

Councilman Armando Gomez abstained from voting on this item as he works in San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed's office.

## Meeting in Milpitas

Milpitas residents and stakeholders will have the chance to review the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant project plan during a community meeting from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 29 at the Barbara Lee Senior Center, 40 N. Milpitas Blvd. For more information, call 945-5182 or visit [rebuildtheplant.org](http://rebuildtheplant.org).

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