



# MilpitasPatch

GOVERNMENT

## A New Sewage Plant Could Control Odors

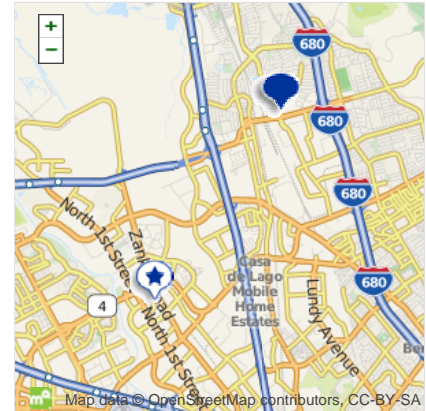
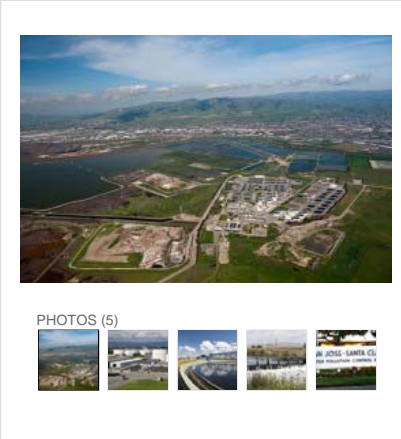
The proposed \$2.2 billion overhaul of the wastewater treatment plant in Alviso is likely to raise household rates but also reduce odors in Milpitas.

By **Adelaide Chen** January 19, 2011

*Editor's note: correction on context of plant manager Dale Ihrke's quote. It was an \$80 million project he was referring to that took seven years. His reference to light speed is about reducing the timeline to eliminate the process of open-air drying of sludge, or biosolids, from 15 years to 10.*

When a toilet flushes in Milpitas, the wastewater goes through a treatment-processing plant in Alviso where, in the end, it flows clean into the bay.

That's the job of the [San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant](http://milpitas.patch.com/listings/san-josesanta-clara-water-pollution-control-plant) (<http://milpitas.patch.com/listings/san-josesanta-clara-water-pollution-control-plant>), but it's a plant that needs to be modernized, which is no small job. Experts say a new plant will take about 30 years to complete.



The largest capital infrastructure project in the area provides an opportunity to update the plant and build indoor facilities to control odors—which is something the current open-air operations don't do.

With an indoor operation, the plant would capture and treat the air inside before it was released, John Stufflebean, director of San Jose's environmental services department, said at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Moving indoors would eliminate the need for [hundreds of acres of outdoor "sludge lagoons" and sun-drying beds](http://www.rebuildtheplant.org/go/doc/1823/253339) (<http://www.rebuildtheplant.org/go/doc/1823/253339>), he said. The alternative would be to use a more energy-intensive method—mechanical energy—to treat solid waste, referred to as biosolids.

But the price tag is a hefty one. Milpitas' share of the estimated \$2.2 billion is a little over 7½ percent of the total price tag, or \$168 million.

Milpitas City Manager Tom Williams said no one has yet determined how the city would cover the costs, through a bond, or pay-as-you-go.

"It's a work in progress," he said. The city of San Jose, co-owner of the plant, is expected to come up with a quantitative analysis in the late spring or early summer.

Vice Mayor Pete McHugh seemed slightly disappointed that the 300 acres, planned for economic development, including a 30-acre retail center at Zanker Road and Highway 237, aren't projected to bring in more money to offset costs of the sewage plant.

Even with the proposed retail center, in addition to a campus for research and development, recreation fields and more, Stufflebean said, "It helps, but not all that much." About 17,800 permanent and construction jobs are projected.

For the most part, households in Milpitas can expect an increase in their bills to help pay for the sewage project, according to Stufflebean, but no exact figure is known at this time.

During public comment, developer Joey McCarthy said McCarthy Ranch had hired its own consultants to give estimates on the costs of the project, which he said were lower than what officials estimate it to be, by millions of dollars.

Generations of his family owned land in Milpitas before the city was even formed, he said.

"We're been suffering from the odors since the '50s, when when they built the plant," he said. He urged the plant to not take years to resolve the issue.

Jennifer Garnett, communications manager for the plant, said speeding up the process of building the plant is challenging, because the plant must continue its daily operations during the rebuilding process.

Dale Ihrke, the plant's manager, who recently announced his retirement, said he remembered it took seven years from planning through final construction for an \$80 million project at the plant.

In comparison, the move away from open air drying of biosolids is projected to cost \$350 million and take 10 to 15 years. Stakeholders are suggesting the timeline be shortened.

"To us, that is light speed for a facility of this size," Ihrke said about the more complex and costly biosolids project.

*The San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (<http://milpitas.patch.com/listings/san-josesanta-clara-water-pollution-control-plant>) serves eight cities: Milpitas, Cupertino, Campbell, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno and Saratoga. It is co-owned by San Jose and Santa Clara.*

*Below is the timeline for approvals:*

Public comments on draft recommended alternative plan accepted during this period. Come in person to the senior center on Jan. 29 ( <a href="http://milpitas.patch.com/events/milpitas-plant-master-plan-workshop">http://milpitas.patch.com/events/milpitas-plant-master-plan-workshop</a> ).	now thru March
Draft recommended alternative plan goes to (plant owners) cities of San Jose and Santa Clara for approval.	April 2011
Next step: California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)	June 2011
Next step: Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)	Aug 2012
Final plan and EIR to San Jose and Santa Clara for approval	2012 or 2013

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