

CupertinoPatch

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Wastewater Plant Seeks Massive Makeover

Your input could make a difference in how Cupertino treats its wastewater

By **Ramona Giwargis** January 22, 2011

With a simple flush of our toilet, the complex--yet important--job of our wastewater treatment plant begins.

Most people know what happens next and it's a process not to be taken for granted. We simply expect our wastewater treatment plant to continue doing its job day after day--but now our aging plant may be in desperate need of a makeover.

"It's run reliably for many, many years...but now it's reached the end of its planned life," says Jennifer Garnett, a spokeswoman for the City of San Jose. "And we need it to operate effectively into the future."

Whether it's flushed down sinks, toilets or drains, 1.4 million residents send an average of 110 million gallons of wastewater to the plant every single day. But the 55-year-old plant is struggling to keep up, as many of its facilities and equipment have outlived their life expectancy.

Without rebuilding the plant, South Bay residents could face some serious consequences.

"We could be at risk of having sewage spills or not meeting water quality standards," said Garnett. "We have to pay attention to the water we feed into the Bay."

And Cupertino residents are directly affected.

Cupertino is one of eight South Bay cities that use the 2,600-acre plant, located on Los Esteros Road in San Jose.

So San Jose's Department of Environmental Services launched what it calls the Plant Master Plan in 2008; a comprehensive plan to rebuild the plant and address its aging infrastructure.

"The treatment plant is a tremendous asset to this community," Garnett explains. "And this is a critical investment for the community to have a sustainable plant into the future."

The Department says a projected \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion of upgrades and repairs are needed to keep the plant working into the future, especially as the South Bay's population grows by an estimated 500,000 more people by 2040 and stricter water quality standards are put into place.

Some of those costs may be passed on to the ratepayers.

"We agree that certain portions of the plant need to be updated or rehabilitated... we understand that there will be a cost," said Steven Machida, division manager of Cupertino Sanitary District.

"Because the improvements are occurring at the plant [we use for wastewater treatment], we share a certain amount of cost for those improvements. Our rates are based on paying for our share of those improvements... so rates may go up."

The entire rebuilding process is estimated to cost \$2.2 billion over 30 years, with the most urgent repairs being implemented first.

But Garnett says there are a few other benefits to consider with the Plant Master Plan, including new green technology that will help the plant work in a more sustainable manner.

"We take wastewater and turn it into valuable resources by recycling 10 percent of it for things like irrigation," says Garnett. "We also generate methane gas which helps power the plant. We plan to recycle even more water in the future and also take in other types of waste to generate more energy."

Following Cupertino's desire to become more environmentally friendly, it's an opportunity officials would welcome.

"We could possibly receive some of the recycled water from the plant...which could be used for irrigation purposes," Machida said.

The three-year planning process has now reached its third, and final, series of public input workshops. This is the public's last chance to have its voice heard before the plan is presented to the San Jose and Santa Clara city councils in April.

Three upcoming community meetings are scheduled this month, including one at the [Cupertino Community Hall from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 27.](http://cupertino.patch.com/events/cupertino-plant-master-plan-workshop)



PHOTOS (4)



For more information on the rebuilding process and other community workshops, visit www.rebuildtheplant.org (<http://www.rebuildtheplant.org/>).

What would you like to see changed at the wastewater treatment plant? [Tell us in the comments.](#)



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