



MilpitasPatch

GOVERNMENT

Workshop for Wastewater Plant Attracts Large Turnout

Residents attended Saturday's workshop for the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant at the senior center.

By [Ceri Hitchcock-Hodgson](#) January 31, 2011

Correction: The article this morning claimed Milpitas' share of the \$168 million to rebuild the plant would come out to \$8,000 per Milpitas household over 30 years. Although some residents have said this, it is not a number that is supported by the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant. In addition, each city sets the rates for its residents.

More than 70 Milpitas residents showed up bright and early Saturday at the Barbara Lee Senior Center to attend to the public workshop discussing the upgrade of the [San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant](#) (<http://milpitas.patch.com/listings/san-josesanta-clara-water-pollution-control-plant>).

"There's a lot involved in the plan. From what happens to the land to how much it will cost, every local resident should know what's going on with it," said longtime Milpitas resident John Cassada.

"If you've ever complained about the [smell](#) (<http://milpitas.patch.com/articles/odor-complaint-calls-nearly-100-in-2010>) in Milpitas, you need to know how it's going to be stopped," he added.

Built in 1956, the plant need an [overhaul](#) (<http://milpitas.patch.com/articles/a-new-wastewater-plant-could-control-odors>), estimated at \$2.2 billion, to improve its aging facilities, prepare for the population growth over the next three decades and to make the transition from the odorous outdoor "sludge lagoons" and drying beds to covered, odor-controlled treatment units.

It would cost in excess of \$3 billion if the plant were built from scratch today, said John Stufflebean, director of San Jose's environmental services department, during the two-hour workshop created to get the community's input on the project, particularly what Milpitas would like to see done regarding the open acreage that will result from the rebuilding of the plant.

The plan calls for 300 acres of land to be returned to public use, according to Stufflebean.

The plant is not only the largest capital infrastructure project in the area, but it is also one of the largest plants in the country, measuring two miles across at its widest point.

As it is now, the aging plant is a "biological system that requires constant monitoring," according to Stufflebean and "doing nothing [to repair it] is not an option."

The water treatment center cleans up the sewage for more than 1.4 million residents and 17,000 businesses in eight South Bay cities—Campbell, Cupertino, Los Gatos, Milpitas, Monte Sereno, Santa Clara, San Jose and Saratoga.

The number is expected to rise by 400,000 by the year 2040, according to Stufflebean, and the plant's overhaul is in line with [Envision San Jose 2040](#) (http://www.sanjoseca.gov/planning/gp_update/default.asp), the South Bay city's 30-year general plan.

Milpitas' share of the estimated \$2.2 billion project cost is about 8 percent of the total price tag, or \$168 million. Some residents have calculated the breakdown to be about \$8,000 per Milpitas household distributed over the next 30 years. But that number is oversimplified, according to Jennifer Garnett, communications manager for the plant.

"There will be a cost impact but it's very hard to pin down what the numbers are," said Kathleen Phelan, city utility engineer.

"The \$168 million will be paid over 30 years by customers in all of Milpitas," she said. That breaks down to roughly 60 percent residential customers and 40 percent commercial and industrial customers, she said.

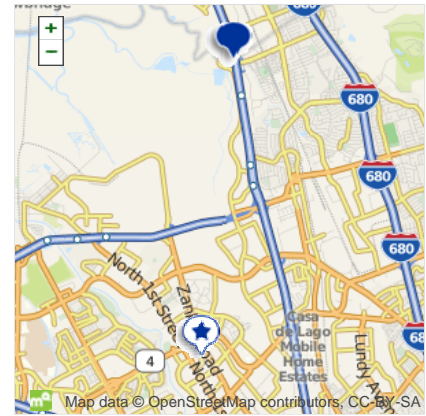
Currently the sewer rate comes out to about \$42 per month for Milpitas households, she said.

But Milpitas' price tag, as well as the overall \$2.2 billion cost to rebuild the plant is an estimate that is adjusted for inflation, she said. It is not a cost reflected in today's dollars.

The planning for the future of the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant is estimated to take 30 years to complete from start to finish.



PHOTOS (8)



"When they actually start designing the project, the numbers will firm up," said Phelan. Right now it is a conceptual plan, she said. The city of San Jose has not completed the financial plan for the wastewater plant yet.

Citizen input has been a component of the plant master plan, with 19 meetings of the Community Advisory Group held so far. Those meetings have offered "consistent feedback" to those at the project's helm, according to Jennifer Garnett, communications manager for the plant. An additional 11 community workshops such as the one on Saturday have been held in the region, she said.

Saturday's workshop provided another opportunity for the public to offer their opinion regarding such concerns as Milpitas' cost in the project and to have a voice in the use of what will be the plant's excess land.

The two-hour meeting experienced an unexpected interruption when an unidentified woman suffered a seizure during Stufflebean's Powerpoint presentation. That delayed proceedings for about half an hour while the Milpitas Fire Department attended to the emergency, eventually taking the woman to the hospital.

A number of residents commented that the land should be used to for bird sanctuaries and marsh land.

After the presentation, the public was invited to post their comments, concerns and creative solutions on Post-It notes that were put on a feedback wall provided by the workshop's organizers.

Did you attend the workshop? What did you think of it? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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