

City weighs options for Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant

Written by Sam Stites

Lake Oswego and Portland will decide whether to repair or replace the 54-year-old facility



PMG PHOTO: SAM STITES - The City will soon decide how to best manage the future of the Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant. A replacement project could free up a significant amount of developable land.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003637759817-0888.jpg>)

Authors note: A previous version of this story listed LONAC as the Lake Oswego Neighborhood Association Coalition. It is actually the Lake Oswego Neighborhood Action Coalition. This error has been corrected in an updated version.

A committee organized by the City of Lake Oswego's Public Works Department and led by Public Works Director and Deputy City Manager Anthony Hooper will take the next month to vet statements of qualifications from firms interested in the proposed project to upgrade or replace the Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant.

Last year the City Council received a proposal from PERC Water Corporation to replace the 55-year-old wastewater plant with a new type of wastewater treatment technology known as membrane bioreactor (MBR) that has the potential to reduce the plant's footprint from 13.5 to 3.5 acres, which could free

nearly 10 acres of land for the redevelopment of the Foothills area currently being eyed by the city. The council used that proposal as a jumping-off point to further explore the issue.

The committee will evaluate four different submissions totalling 20 separate firms that could be involved in the proposed project in hopes of initiating a request for proposal process sometime in June, at which point firms would submit plans of up to 30 percent design completion to either upgrade or replace the Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant.

The plant is located in Lake Oswego's Foothills District, but it is owned by the City of Portland and treats wastewater from both municipalities, so any repair or replacement will require an amendment to an existing intergovernmental agreement (IGA) between the cities.

A study commissioned by the two cities in 2014 found that the replacement plant would cost \$112 million, compared to \$154 million to repair the existing plant.

According to Hooper, they're hoping any project to repair or replace will come in at approximately \$133 million, which, under the current IGA, would be split 50/50 between the two cities. The other threshold for the project would be that the two cities don't have to raise sewage rates more than 3% as a result.

Replacing the current system with an MBR has many benefits, Hooper said, namely that the effluent discharge would be much cleaner than the current system puts out into the Willamette River. His department has done extensive research into MBR technology and visited two cities — La Center, Washington and Oregon City — that have implemented it into their systems.

"(Both La Center and Oregon City) are very positive about that technology to the point that the effluent they treat, what they release to the river, it's clean enough you could drink it," Hooper said. "The idea is that we could have a brand new facility, whereas the current facility was built in 1965. We could have a facility that has state-of-the-art technology, and it would also have a much better effluent discharged to the Willamette River."

Due diligence

Despite being intrigued by the new MBR technology, Hooper doesn't want the City of Lake Oswego to be a guinea pig for this and have it not work out, or cost the city and ratepayers more money in the long run. Right now the committee's plan is to vet those firms interested in the project and provide them detailed instructions as part of the RFP process in order to elicit proposals that meet a variety of concerns the City of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services outlined in a report replying to the original proposal made to the City of Lake Oswego by PERC Water Corp last year. At that point a decision will be made whether or not to pursue the project, Hooper said.

According to Portland BES Director Mike Jordan, the report submitted in response to the original proposal identified a list of questions which his bureau felt any further proposals for replacing the Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant would need to answer for the project to be feasible.

"What was submitted to our engineering group was a highly conceptual, really preliminary proposal about what that might look like," Jordan said. "What our response framed was a number of logistical, engineering and permit-oriented questions which, I think, were simply to illuminate that there were a number of unknowns at that point in the process that no one could know. The response from Lake

Oswego and PERC Water to our concerns and questions were that those things would be taken care of in the design process. That's a legitimate response since we were so early on in the discussion."

Jordan said that Portland is very supportive of Lake Oswego doing its due diligence to vet the the new technology, interested firms, financial feasibility, floodplain mitigation and all of the other aspects the project would involve. Jordan believes the Tryon Creek Wastewater Plant has proven to be a good partnership between the two cities, and he's intrigued to see what this committee led by Hooper comes up with, at which point the two cities will sit down to renegotiate the terms of their IGA — which would likely see Lake Oswego taking over ownership and permitting responsibilities for the facility with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Spurring development

City Councilor John LaMotte said he believes the MBR technology route could be hugely beneficial to the city by opening up that added land in the Foothills area for development, which could include the south bank of Tryon Creek and potentially facilitate a new street access point into Foothills from State Street.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003637760099-0888.jpg>)

"The existing plant needs to be upgraded and modernized. As with any large public facility or infrastructure project we need to look at a wide variety of funding sources, while also looking to minimize regular service rates," LaMotte told The Review. "In regards to redevelopment we need to assess the feasibility of reestablishing an urban renewal district to assist with costs beyond what developers are expected to pay for a project. Floodplain mitigation and a new street and utility system as discussed in the (Foothills Framework Plan 2012) will need to be addressed by developers and the City working together in a partnership."

According to LaMotte, an urban renewal district could be one potential vehicle through which the city could fund infrastructure and road improvements to stimulate interest in the developable land in the Foothills area. An urban renewal district once existed in the Foothills area to spur redevelopment in hopes of fulfilling the Foothills Framework Plan 2012, but that district was terminated by the City Council in 2013.

But some members of the community have reservations about the feasibility of building a brand new wastewater treatment facility, as well as the redevelopment of Foothills.

Former city councilor Jeff Gudman believes the council needs to see an independent analysis of what will happen to sewage rates under either of the two options — repair or replace — before any RFP is initiated.



Figure 1 FILE PHOTO - LAMOTTE

Gudman also has reservations about how using an urban renewal district would play out in funding infrastructure improvements in the Foothills area.

"There are routes to do this, but there are trade-offs," Gudman said. "They could do an urban renewal district, but it might take several years. Is the council willing to wait several years before it has the ability to borrow the money to do the infrastructure projects?"

Gudman points out that he's not for or against any of these proposals; rather, he's hoping to see the City Council receive more information on impact to sewage rates and a solid plan for how development might be funded.

"They need the numbers associated with any of the proposals, both for the wastewater plant and redevelopment of Foothills," he said. "Talking in grand terms of, 'We'll find the money,' is a necessary but not sufficient step."

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003637760219-0888.jpg>)

According to Hooper, he appreciates the role of Gudman and other members of the Lake Oswego Neighborhood Action Coalition (LONAC) in helping to question how the City might approach a project like this. He plans to take their concerns and comments to heart in preparing bid specifications as part of the RFP process to answer some of those remaining questions of the project's feasibility both logistically and financially.

At the end of the day, Hooper said, if the project doesn't pencil out and meet the City's financial threshold, the project to replace won't be pursued.

"We believe this is a good idea if it costs the same or less amount of money than it would to upgrade a plant that's 55 years old, and if it's able to give us 9-10 more acres of developable land, especially along the river, where it can stimulate overall development," Hooper said.

Contact Lake Oswego Review reporter Sam Stites at 503-479-2375 or [sstites@pamplinmedia.com](mailto:ssstites@pamplinmedia.com)

(<mailto:ssstites@pamplinmedia.com>).



Figure 2 FILE PHOTO - GUDMAN