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To: [Packard, Harvey@Waterboards](mailto:Packard.Harvey@Waterboards)
Subject: FW: City of Morro Bay commentary on sewer line issues
Date: Monday, May 12, 2014 3:05:29 PM
Attachments: [Sewerlinecondition.pdf](#)

From: Linda Stedjee [mailto:lstedjee@charter.net]
Sent: Thursday, May 08, 2014 12:51 PM
To: Harris, Ken@Waterboards
Subject: City of Morro Bay commentary on sewer line issues

Mr. Harris,

Among the attachments to the agenda for the May 22 meeting, I found a document prepared for your agency by the City of Morro Bay. It discusses the City's sewage collection system and ongoing efforts to repair problems.

While I applaud the efforts of the current staff and Council, who inherited the extensive sewer system problems from their predecessors, it appears that they do not intend any immediate action to repair the Main Street trunk line, and I am still extremely concerned about the ongoing damage to the environment and our well water that is caused by exfiltrating sewage.

While I fully understand the financial issues the City has identified, I find it difficult to accept the statement that they need to wait on WWTP decisions before they can determine what to do with the Main Street trunk line. Given the proposed sites on the table, much, if not all of the existing route of the trunk line is likely to remain the same. Fixing the portions that are not expected to move under any circumstances could surely be done now if the money were available.

I am hoping that maybe the RWQCB can help with this issue.

Background

Former City staff members no longer with the City consistently neglected the sewer system. Attached is a comprehensive report done by Richard Sadowski and Marla Jo Bruton back in 2007. Mr. Sadowski is a grade 4 CWEA-certified collections system expert. At the time the attached study was done, Mr. Sadowski's credentials trumped those of anyone on the City staff at that time.

However, that did not stop City staff from going on the attack when the condition of the collection system was documented and reported to the City Council and the RWQCB. In fact, in a February, 2008 letter to the RWQCB, one senior staff member (no longer with the City) claimed that in performing an analysis of the sewer lines, Mr. Sadowski might be practicing engineering without a license. In a 2008 letter, he said,

"The analysis contained in these reports was certainly independent as claimed by the author; however, there is some question about the validity of an engineering analysis being

performed by a person not licensed to do so. Since the preparation of this analysis may constitute the practice of engineering, the Regional Water Quality Control Board may wish to engage the Department of Consumer Affairs for a determination in this matter."

This appeared to be a blatant attempt at intimidation and it didn't work. Mr. Sadwoski used to build rocket launch pads at Vandenberg. No special license was required for that, and none was required for an independent analysis of the sewer lines, particularly given Mr. Sadowski's CWEA certification.

Among the other outrageous and silly statements in the 2008 letter is this one:

"The overall level of rehabilitation required is to be expected for a collections system that has an average pipe age of more than 50 years."

Clearly, that may be, if no one ever bothered to maintain the system, but it how this could be offered up as an excuse is incomprehensible to me.

The staff member also said,

*"The report authors also put forth the claim that the damage observed in our system was largely caused by deferred maintenance. While there is damage to portions of some of the clay pipe in the collections system, **the damage observed was not caused by deferred maintenance.** "Because vitrified clay pipe is chemically inert, it is not vulnerable to damage due to domestic sewage, sulfide attack, most industrial wastes and solvents or aggressive soils " (City Pipe Engineering Manual). Furthermore the City has a long history with an aggressive cleaning schedule that exceeds industry norms. Our cleaning intervals range from less than monthly to a maximum of biannual cleanings depending on the condition of the pipes. **The type of damage observed to some of the pipes in the collections system would appear to be mostly from earth movement,** with cracks at bells or displaced joints, and damage from faulty lateral installations."*

I suspect that most readers will find this as bizarre as I do.

There is more, but I believe the most pertinent content of the letter is this:

"In taking the time to read all of the reports in preparation of this response, we have noted that the vast majority of the areas of concern have either been repaired or are currently under design for the replacement. Some examples include:

1- The Jointly Owned Main Street Line that we have been in the planning phase with Cayucos since this fall."

Those words were written in February, 2008. It is now May, 2014, and NOTHING has been done to repair that trunk line.

As if all of that were not bad enough, in 2010, the same City staff member who wrote the above-

cited letter had two new BWRO trains installed at the desal plant (which is not legally permitted) for the purpose of removing nitrates from the well water. As you know, many of us believe that the nitrates come from leaking sewage. I believe that fixing the sewer lines would have been a much better use of the funds spent at the unpermitted desal plant.

Comments from other agencies

1. In a December, 2008 letter to the Morro Bay City Council, CCC Coastal Planner Mike Watson said,

“Critical Facilities. In the recent past there have been WWTP reliability issues (including piping, pump, and lift stations that have caused spills, contamination, and diversion of untreated wastewater into the Bay and coastal waters). As you know, the Commission recently acted on an appeal brought by local residents claiming that breaches in the City’s wastewater pipes was causing the City’s potable water wells to be cross-contaminated with undesirable constituents. Although the Commission chose not to take jurisdiction over the CDP in that case, it was clear from our review of the appeal that there may be problems with the City’s wastewater infrastructure. Thus, the DEIR should address how the proposed upgrade will also correct any deficiencies in these related WWTP facilities to eliminate future spills or contamination and ensure that coastal water quality is appropriately protected.”

The City did NOT include anything in the DEIR regarding the wastewater infrastructure.

2. A November, 2008 letter from the Sierra Club to OPC Chair Mike Chrisman said,

“On behalf of the 2,500 members of the Sierra Club in San Luis Obispo County , we wish to express our support for independent testing to determine the presence and impacts of exfiltrated sewage on the city of Morro Bay and the water quality and habitat of the Morro Bay National Estuary.

Exfiltrated sewage from the Morro Bay Wastewater Collection System is indicated by the hundreds of defects obvious from recent video tapes of the City’s inspection of system lines, as logged by the efforts of local concerned citizens, which testify to the poor condition of the collection system and the possibility that pollutants from the system are reaching the soil, groundwater, local creeks and the National Estuary.

Testing should also be conducted to explore the possibility that an MtBE mitigation project including major excavations on the boundary of the Morro Basin aquifer is responsible for a spike in nitrate levels observed in the Morro Basin well field since 2002.

We request that the OPC support the determination and resolution of pollution problems related to Morro Bay 's sewer lines and waste water treatment plant.”

Mr. Chrisman responded that the RWQCB was responsible, and asked to be kept informed.

Again, this was in 2008 – six years ago.

The bottom line

Certainly, we are all aware that the City of Morro Bay has financial problems, and that fixing the lines will cost some money, but every day that passes, more damage is being done to the environment. We have much better people in charge of City government now, but they are limited by the availability of funds.

Is there any way that the RWQCB could help the City to obtain grants for this work? It obviously does not make sense to allow ongoing damage to the environment and contamination of the wells if something can be done to obtain the funds to fix the problem.

Linda Stedjee