

Grenada Sanitary District

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July 28, 2023

2944.01

SENT BY EMAIL ONLY

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Gurleen Bhatia
Water Resource Control Engineer
Division of Financial Assistance
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 16th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Gurleen,

Subject: Grenada Sanitary District
Sewer System Project
CWSRF Agreement No. D2001025, Project No. C-06-8410-110
EXCEPTION

HISTORY

Grenada Sanitary District (District) operates the collection and treatment facility for the community of Grenada. Most of the community's connections (approximately 75) are served by a collection system initially constructed in 1917. The existing treatment facility was also developed at that time and consists of a single septic tank that discharges septic effluent to an open, unlined ditch. These facilities are well beyond their serviceable lives and require replacement.

The remainder of the community, approximately 35 homes, is served by individual, privately owned septic systems. These unsewered homes were built in the 1970s on small properties with no room to develop replacement septic and leach fields when they fail. The average age of these systems is estimated to be 42 to 51 years old, and they are nearing the end of their serviceable lives.

A short video has been prepared describing the collection system and can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8dzpocH18

EXISTING SITE RESTRICTIONS

The existing treatment and disposal facilities are located on a sliver of land between a railroad and an adjacent property, refer to Exhibit A. As can be seen in Exhibit A, the local power company installed overhead primary power directly over portions of the facility. In addition, the railroad, power utility, and permitting agencies will likely have certain setback requirements to any improvements. As a result, there is little usable land available on the existing site to construct new facilities. For these and a number of other reasons, securing a new site is a critical component in updating the District's existing infrastructure.

PROJECT DRIVERS

The proposed project is being driven forward for several reasons and are summarized below:

1. Failing Infrastructure – A preliminary survey of the system indicated that the existing collection, treatment, and disposal systems are well beyond their serviceable lives, are clearly beginning to fail, and are in need of replacement.
2. Financial – The District is a small, severely disadvantaged community that is unable to financially address their infrastructure concerns without assistance. The District has continued to maintain their system to the best of their ability without requesting assistance until now; however, the magnitude of work required is far beyond their financial ability.
3. Regulatory – The Regional Water Quality Control Board has indicated that the existing facility's Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) will be updated in the near future. The requirements of the forthcoming WDRs are not certain at this time, but it is understood that they, as well as future updates, will be more stringent than the existing requirements. The District desires to develop a facility that will be able to meet future requirements.
4. Public Safety – The exiting percolation and evaporation ponds receive raw septic tank effluent. These open ponds are as close as 7 feet adjacent to public right-of-way and 70 yards from the nearest residence. At best, proximity to the public makes the odors from the facility a nuisance to the community, and at worst, a public safety concern.
5. Sewer Service Moratorium – The existing facility is unable to allow new service connections until the existing system is repaired. The 35 unsewered existing homes will have few options once their systems fail.

LAND ACQUISITION

The existing facility required a relatively small amount of land. This is primarily because it was built in 1917 when no setbacks were required between the treatment facility and adjacent property lines. In addition, the original treatment system met the minimum treatment standards of its day. Over the course of the last 106 years, the required level of treatment and the space required to contain it have increased significantly.

The proposed project's required treatment and disposal area will be finalized as part of the forthcoming design effort. Preliminary sizing shows that a 20- to 40-acre site will be

required. Additional acreage beyond the required area is desirable, as it provides room for future replacement facilities and improvements, a buffer to limit odor concerns, etc.

The District has expended a significant amount of effort to identify landowners willing to sell land for the treatment and disposal site. This effort included contacting all landowners in proximity to the community who have parcels of adequate size for the proposed facility. Of those contacted, only two landowners have indicated willingness to entertain offers. These parcels, like most parcels in and around Grenada, are large agricultural tracts. Refer to Exhibit B.

The Bridwell property is just east of the existing facility and is 80 acres. This property is within the Williamson Act, and it is the District's understanding that it cannot be split. Being in the Williamson Act has other use challenges as well. These largely revolve around zoning concerns, required railroad easements, and increased risk of high groundwater. These challenges do not appear to be insurmountable, currently, and are based on preliminary information. Even if this property is procured, there is no guarantee it can be utilized at this time.

The second location is owned by the Newtons and is made up of several parcels with a total acreage of roughly 130 acres. The District had several meetings with the Newtons to determine if they would sell a portion of their land; however, the Newtons noted that they will not split their land and would only entertain offers on the full 130 acres. It is the District's understanding that these parcels are not within the Williamson Act. There are still limited zoning concerns; however, Siskiyou County has provided a letter noting how the zoning concerns can be addressed. Refer to Exhibit C.

Division of Financial Assistance (DFA) has suggested that the District extend their search further for more potential parcels; however, the District has already considered parcels within approximately one mile of the central collection system. Parcels beyond this will likely require funding beyond the maximum grant available to the District. This is primarily due to the capital cost of extended force mains and multiple pumping facilities. In addition, these facilities will require increased operations and maintenance costs for the District after the project is complete.

FUNDING POLICY CONCERNS

There are two primary policies that affect the viability of the project moving forward. First, the size of the parcels that are available, and second, commitment to reimburse.

DFA staff has indicated that the Newton and Bridwell sites are larger than needed for the project and will not be eligible for reimbursement. As noted earlier, the District has made a significant effort to identify any willing property owners, and only two properties have been found. The community of Grenada is located in the midst of farmland that is generally made up of large parcels. Locating alternative parcels of suitable land and of a specific size with landowners willing to sell appears to be highly unlikely. The District recognizes that DFA is hesitant to provide funding for areas larger than required; although, in the case of Grenada, there appears to only be large parcels available.

As noted earlier, the District serves a small, severely disadvantaged community and has extremely limited funds. It is the District's understanding that DFA will not reimburse or

commit to reimburse the District for land as part of the planning grant but rather as part of the forthcoming construction grant. This is problematic for the District for the following reasons:

1. Landowners Commitment to Sell – The District cannot provide potential sellers a timeline for repayment, certainty of the price, or that a specific parcel will be acceptable to DFA. This leaves both landowners and the District in a precarious position. Under different financial circumstances, this may not be as much of an issue. There are typically alternative sites, but this is not the case for the District. In addition, other entities may be able to procure loans; however, the District cannot afford to pay interest on the loan amount that would be required. In short, to obtain a commitment to sell from a landowner, the District needs to be able to provide some kind of DFA-backed commitment to buy.
2. Landowner Price Negotiations – Similar to the issues noted above, landowners are unwilling to commit to a cost not knowing the timing or certainty of reimbursement.
3. District Construction Grant Scope and Budget – Without a landowner’s commitment to sell, the District is forced to make broad assumptions in the Construction Grant Application. The location of the land affects much more than just the cost of the land. It affects the layout of the treatment and disposal facilities, the collection system layout, the number and size of lift stations, the scope of the environmental review, and finally the funds that will be requested of DFA.

POLICY EXCEPTION

The District understands the goal of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) program is to protect public health by ensuring reliable access to safe, affordable drinking water and sanitation. In this unique circumstance, it appears that certain policies may prevent DFA from achieving this goal in Grenada. To this end, the District is requesting that DFA make an exception to its policy so the District has the means of procuring land for the required treatment and disposal facilities. Ideally, this would include both an approval of a parcel identified by the District and a commitment to fund the purchase of the land within a specific timeline.

PROJECT SUPPORT

There are several entities that provided letters of support for the requested policy exceptions, including letters from Siskiyou County Board of Supervisor for District 3 and Vice-Chair Michael Kobseff, California Senator for District 1 Brian Dahle, and California North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Regulator Roy O’Conner. Refer to Exhibit D.

Please call me with any questions you have regarding this request.

Sincerely,

Phil Peck

Phil Peck, Chairman of the Board