

# Utility district looking at new sewer plant

**By Nick Baptista**

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The Valley Springs Public Utility District is pursuing a \$6 million federal grant to address its wastewater treatment plant woes.

The existing wastewater treatment plant is located off State Route 12/26 next to the Valley Oaks Shopping Center.

The treatment plan was designed in the 1950s, according to VSPUD General Manager Mike Fischer, and is out of compliance with some modern wastewater treatment standards.

Those include the treatment plant is located in the flood plain off Cosgrove Creek, the effluent storage reservoir is undersized to handle a 100-year storm, and the plant could cause degradation or pollution to shallow groundwater in the area. In addition, there is no room for expansion at the current location.

The district received a \$415,000 planning grant from the California State Water Board to study alternatives that would be affordable to customers.

Three alternatives were identified along with doing nothing. Those alternatives were improving the existing plant, shifting wastewater treatment service to Calaveras County Water District and relocating and rebuilding the plant.

The study through the grant was completed at no cost to ratepayers.

Moving and rebuilding the plant to modern standards proved to be the most promising and least expensive option to ratepayers, according to the evaluation. But that hinges upon receiving the federal grant and a low-interest loan.

VSPUD has submitted applications for financial assistance to implement the proposed project to the State Water Board Division of Financial Assistance Small Communities Wastewater Grant, a program under the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

The district due to median household income is classified as a Small Disadvantaged Community and eligible to receive a grant in the amount of up to \$6 million.

The site of proposed plan has been identified as the Coe property on Paloma Road two miles north of the existing plant.

Coe is willing to donate the property to the district with the agreement a wastewater education center would be established at the site.

“This would be a unique opportunity for people to learn a much-in-demand trade,” Dave Tanner said of the wastewater treatment school. Tanner and Coe have worked together for a number of years to utilize the Coe property for a variety of higher educational purposes including a Delta College satellite campus.

The new treatment and disposal facilities would be similar to those in use at the existing plant to keep annual operation and maintenance costs as low as feasible for district customers. The new site would eliminate virtually all risk of flooding and effluent spills to Cosgrove Creek and has larger potential effluent spray field areas over deeper soils that would reduce the potential for degradation or pollution of shallow groundwater.

The grant requires completion a districtwide income survey, Fischer said, and those forms will be mailed soon to customers.

It looks favorable for the district to receive the grant, he added, but a certain percentage of the forms need to be completed. Then it becomes a matter of whether the USDA has the funds available for the proposed project.

Even with the donated land and a \$6 million grant, the project would still need about \$2 million more to complete. Fischer said that funding would be obtained through a low-interest loan from the USDA.

The district used the same combination of grant and loan a few years ago to finance improvements to its well and water storage system.