

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

CENTRAL COAST DISTRICT OFFICE
725 FRONT STREET, SUITE 300
SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
PHONE: (831) 427-4863
FAX: (831) 427-4877
WEB: WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV



November 12, 2010

Rob Livick, Public Services Director
City of Morro Bay
955 Shasta Street
Morro Bay, CA 93442

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Morro Bay-Cayucos Wastewater Treatment Plant Replacement Project (SCH #2008101138)

Dear Mr. Livick:

We received the DEIR for the proposed replacement Morro Bay-Cayucos Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) project. Thank you for extending the DEIR comment period so that our comments can be included in the CEQA record. The WWTP is a major public works project that has the potential to provide significant benefits not only to the communities of Morro Bay and Cayucos, but also to the underlying and surrounding natural environment. Due to the type of project and its location seaward of the first through public road, please note that any City coastal development permit (CDP) action on the project may be appealed to the Commission, and please note that in addition to consistency with the City's certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) the project must also be consistent with the public access and recreation policies of the Coastal Act. In addition, changes to the ocean outfall and/or the intensity or type of its use could require their own Coastal Commission CDP application and approval, which would be subject to the Coastal Act alone.

In short, we have reviewed the DEIR and the proposed project, and based on our current understanding we believe that there are several fundamental problems with the project as it is currently proposed that will require substantial modification before it can be found LCP and Coastal Act consistent. Please accept the following comments on the DEIR and the project itself.

Summary

As we stated in our December 8, 2008 comment letter on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the DEIR, we are generally supportive of the proposed project inasmuch as it would benefit water quality in Estero Bay, bring the Cayucos Sanitary District into compliance with its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Phase II permit, and provide a vehicle for addressing other public utility constraints related to water supply in the area. However, as a major public works project with such capacity, and one that is sited in such a low-lying location near the shoreline and important public recreational and visual access features, the proposed project also raises a wide spectrum of Coastal Act and LCP issues and



concerns. In short, good planning and public policy dictate that the new WWTP be located, designed, and constructed in a manner that is consistent with all applicable land use and resource conservation policies, including those which are designed to foster sustainable use of scarce public resources. Based on the information provided in the DEIR, we have significant concerns with the currently proposed project and we have a number of recommendations for modifications and for next steps that we think are necessary and appropriate to achieve Coastal Act and LCP conformity. We also have specific comments, questions, and related information requests related to the DEIR that may lead to additional comments and recommendations, depending on the nature of the DEIR responses.

In short, we have identified several fundamental areas of apparent inconsistency with the LCP and the applicable policies of the Coastal Act. First, the District's proposed preferred site location appears to be inappropriate for the development proposed. The concept of locating major public works infrastructure in an area that is subject to multiple significant hazards is not consistent with the hazards policies of the LCP. Further, the location is directly adjacent to the shoreline in a visually sensitive area where such development could frustrate LCP and Coastal Act public recreational access and visitor-serving objectives, and lead to adverse public viewshed impacts. Finally, the area has significant archaeological resources that, as required by the LCP, must be avoided. All of these impacts could be avoided or minimized by moving the project to an alternative location.

Second, the proposal to reduce the capacity of the new WWTP is not consistent with LCP policies requiring infrastructure to accommodate future growth that is planned for in the LCP. As we indicated in our NOP comment letter, the plant should be adequately sized to handle current and future volumes of effluent originating from both Morro Bay and Cayucos while protecting against intentional or accidental diversions of untreated effluent during peak and/or wet weather flows. As described in our letter, future estimated effluent volumes are tied to development allowed by the City of Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo County LCPs. As proposed, the WWTP would not be capable of accommodating the wastewater flows that are anticipated in these LCPs, inconsistent with the LCP.

Finally, the proposal does not include a plan for water reclamation that meets the expectations of the City of Morro Bay LCP, the San Luis Obispo County LCP, or recent actions of the Commission, including in its recent approval of the Los Osos Waste Water Project. Under the current proposal, the new WWTP would produce a large quantity of highly treated wastewater, and the vast majority of it would be disposed of through the ocean outfall. This would not only cause unnecessary impacts on the marine environment, but it would also prevent the City and adjacent areas of the County from utilizing this freshwater source to help sustainably meet the region's water supply needs, and it could frustrate Coastal Act marine resource policies related to the use of an ocean outfall for disposal in this location. As described in our NOP comment letter, the EIR should identify a suite of potential beneficial uses for the treated water and any additional infrastructure and processes that would be needed to utilize the water. Thus far, the DEIR fails to include any such alternative project designs and/or adequate related information with which to understand and evaluate this aspect of the proposed project for LCP and Coastal Act consistency.



Given the proposed project's significant inconsistencies and the issues it raises with the LCP and the Coastal Act, we request that the DEIR be appropriately revised, updated, and recirculated for comment. Most importantly, such updated DEIR should present, and coequally evaluate against the same evaluation criteria, feasible alternatives for site locations that can avoid significant hazards and important coastal resource impacts, and alternative designs that incorporate the technology and infrastructure necessary to accommodate both wastewater flows at buildout as well as reuse of reclaimed water. Again, as indicated above, this is a major public improvement project constituting a major investment of public monies at a critical location that will fundamentally affect the way that certain scarce public resources are addressed for the foreseeable future in this area. Such project must meet LCP and Coastal Act requirements. Therefore, it is incumbent on the CEQA process to provide decision-makers, including the Commission, with the best possible information with which to make such an important decision, including with respect to alternative siting and design options that can achieve project objectives, and also address long-standing natural resource protection and sustainable use issues in a Coastal Act and LCP context. As it stands now, it does not appear that the DEIR provides the information necessary in this context to analyze the proposed project for consistency with the certified LCP and the Coastal Act, and we recommend it be supplemented and recirculated to address this critical deficiency.

Specific Comments

Project Description. The existing WWTP is located at 160 Atascadero Road in the City of Morro Bay, adjacent to the sand dunes, shoreline and Morro Creek, an RV Park, and Morro Bay High School. The proposed WWTP project would consist of demolishing the existing WWTP and constructing a new WWTP on the existing site. Although the DEIR refers to this project as an upgrade to the WWTP, it is in fact a complete replacement of the facility. Therefore, in analyzing the project for consistency with the certified LCP and the Coastal Act, the DEIR must consider the project to be development of a new WWTP. As such, and due to the significant constraints on the site of the existing WWTP, the DEIR must provide information regarding additional alternative locations that could meet the project objectives while achieving consistency with the LCP and the Coastal Act as applicable.

Site Location. As discussed above, the preferred site location is subject to several significant constraints. First, the site is located in a high hazard area, including because it is located within the 100-year flood plain of Morro Creek, in a tsunami-inundation area, approximately 800 feet from the current shoreline, and in an area that is susceptible to liquefaction due to underlying soil types. Second, due to its proximity to the beach, shoreline, public recreational access and visitor-serving uses, and important public viewsheds, and because it is near the center of the City, the use of the proposed location for the WWTP could frustrate public recreational access and visitor-serving objectives, and could adversely impact the public viewshed. And finally, the site is located on a Native American burial ground, which, as required by the LCP, must be avoided where feasible. Therefore, in order to provide the information necessary to evaluate the project for consistency with the LCP, the DEIR must provide a robust analysis of feasible alternative sites.



The DEIR evaluates one alternative site, but concludes that a WWTP at this alternative location would not be capable of treating all of the District's wastewater. The information presented thus far in this respect in the DEIR is not sufficient to determine that there are no feasible alternative locations for the new WWTP. Not only is it insufficient to evaluate only one alternative location, but the analysis needs to be focused on a co-equal evaluation across the same range of factors, and focusing on just one factor (like potential capacity) cannot serve that purpose. On the contrary, the DEIR must identify and account for additional sites that would be capable of accommodating a wastewater treatment plant that would meet the District's current and future needs, and must evaluate the costs and benefits equally across alternatives so that decision-makers can proceed to deliberate and make decisions based on such information. Lacking such information, we fear that there will not be adequate information with which to proceed to decisions on CDPs in this case. On this point, it is important that the DEIR clearly provide information about the benefits of alternative project locations. For example, a site location farther inland has the potential to not only avoid hazard issues and significantly reduce the project's impacts on water quality, biological resources, public viewsheds, public recreational and visitor-serving access, and archaeological resources, but it could also increase the efficacy and utility of potential water reclamation components, including with respect to distribution of reclaimed water to appropriate locations (e.g., agricultural irrigation, landscaping irrigation, etc.), and including the manner in which such reclamation can reduce related groundwater drawdown and augmentation on a location-specific basis.

Finally, the DEIR cites LCP Policy 5.03, which allows for protection of the existing WWTP at its current location because the ocean outfall line is coastal-dependent. Please note that this policy does not apply to the project which is currently being proposed because the project is for construction of a new WWTP. The policy in question is meant to indicate that this existing plant could be protected in situ (e.g., a floodwall to address flooding) if that were deemed appropriate for other reasons, but it is not an LCP blank check to justify a replacement plant incorporating different technologies at the same location. The DEIR needs to be clear that a new replacement WWTP is not the same as maintaining the existing plant, and Policy 5.03 does not apply. Further with respect to the ocean outfall and its relation to Policy 5.03, current technology may allow for the elimination of the ocean outfall, as shown by the recently approved wastewater plant in nearby Los Osos, or for use of the ocean outfall by a plant that is located further inland. As such, the coastal-dependent nature of the plant as it relates to the ocean outfall is a much more nuanced question than a rote reliance on its current use of the ocean outfall to justify the current site location. In short, LCP Policy 5.03 is not controlling in terms of the current application, and should not be used as a reason for siting the proposed project at the current location.

Hazards. The preferred site location is in a 100-year flood plain and a tsunami hazard zone located adjacent to the shoreline and in an area subject to seismic hazards. Therefore, as detailed below, the DEIR must provide the information necessary to evaluate the project for consistency with the hazards policies of the LCP, including Policies 9.01, 9.02, 9.03, 9.05 and 9.06, and including an evaluation of sites that do not share the same degree of hazardous constraints.

Flooding. As described in the DEIR, the project is sited in a topographic depression that is subject to flooding near the mouth of Morro Creek, a watercourse that drains a 24-square-mile watershed. The



Flood Hazard Analysis prepared for the site indicates that the depth of flood waters at the site would be between 3 and 4.5 feet during a 100-year storm event. The certified LCP describes the risks of flooding within the City and prohibits development in the 100-year flood plain. Page 156 of the LCP states that the floods of 1969 and 1973 showed that flooding could have been worse if the flood plain had been more highly developed, and on page 157, the LCP specifically identifies the location of the WWTP in the flood plain as one of the City's flooding problems. The LCP goes on, in Policy 9.03, to prohibit all new development in the 100-year floodplain, except for flood control projects, agricultural uses, and off-setting improvements required by HUD regulations. The new WWTP is not exempt from Policy 9.03, and therefore, cannot be approved at this location unless amendments are made to the LCP. Therefore, and as described above, the DEIR must provide information about alternative sites that are not within the 100-year flood plain.

Tsunamis. The DEIR states that because the existing WWTP is already located in a tsunami inundation area, replacing it at this site does not cause significant impacts. However, as discussed above, this project is a complete replacement of the existing WWTP, and therefore, must be evaluated as new development in the tsunami inundation area. The DEIR must provide the information necessary to evaluate the project for consistency with the LCP in this respect, including Policy 9.01, which requires new development to be located to minimize risks to life and property in relation to tsunami threats. Again, as discussed above, the most appropriate way to do this would be for the DEIR to present detailed information about additional alternative site locations.

Shoreline Erosion. The proposed project is located in an area that is and will be subject to shoreline erosion over the life of the project, including as it relates to global climate change and sea level rise. However, the DEIR lacks information with which to understand and appropriately respond to this constraint. Thus, the DEIR must include clear and up-to-date information about the risks to the project due to shoreline erosion, including due to global climate change and sea level rise. To do this, the DEIR should discuss the impacts to the project as a result of a range of sea level rise conditions and determine whether there is some amount of future sea level rise that would put the WWTP in danger from erosion. In addition, the DEIR should provide the elevation and inland extent of storm surge and flooding that might occur over the life of the development due to shoreline dangers. Such information must include how far inland and how high such water would go when the combination of hazardous factors are at their most extreme, and must include evaluation of impacts from and appropriate responses to same. At a minimum, such combination of factors to be evaluated should factor in an eroded beach, a 100-year storm event (or the equivalent of the 1982/83 El Nino event if the 100-year storm event has not be determined), an extreme high tide, and a 100-year rise in sea level at both optimistic and conservative ends of the projection spectrum. All assumptions and methodologies for identifying the expected degree of danger must be clearly identified and documented. The DEIR must also include a description of any future shoreline protection or other project modifications that would be necessary to protect the WWTP under such future hazardous conditions.

Liquefaction. The DEIR indicates that significant impacts could be caused by exposing new structures to the risk of damage due to liquefaction, unconsolidated soils and settlement. Proposed DEIR mitigation



measures 3.5-2 and 3.5-4 rely on future geotechnical investigations to recommend future modifications to the project that would avoid and minimize these hazards. However, future studies are not adequate for CDP purposes. It is critical that any such necessary investigations be conducted now and discussed in the DEIR to allow for evaluation of the project and alternatives for consistency with the LCP and the Coastal Act.

Public Access and Recreation. The preferred site location is directly adjacent to the beach, beach access, and a visitor-serving recreational vehicle (RV) park. The project has the potential to cause adverse impacts to such public recreational access and visitor-serving resources because it would reduce the availability of extremely scarce oceanfront land for such high LCP and Coastal Act priority purposes, and because it would cause adverse impacts to such resources due to both construction activities and additional truck traffic anticipated during operation of the new WWTP. It would also maintain an industrial site in the middle of an area that the LCP clearly contemplates for visitor-serving enhancements, including with respect to connecting Embarcadero Road in this area.

In addition to the LCP, the Coastal Act prioritizes public recreational use and development for areas along the shoreline such as this one. For example, Coastal Act Section 30210 requires that public recreational opportunities be maximized, Section 30221 protects oceanfront land for recreational use, Section 30222 prioritizes the use of suitable lands for visitor-serving commercial recreational facilities, and Section 30223 reserves upland areas necessary to support public recreational uses for such uses. In this case, it is not clear that using the existing site for a replacement WWTP can be found consistent with these and other similar policies, and it appears clear that the highest, best use for property such as this is for other than a wastewater industrial use, particularly when the question is not whether the existing plant should stay, rather it is whether a new replacement plant ought to be constructed in this location. That latter question necessarily involves looking anew at LCP and Coastal Act priorities, and evaluating the manner in which such priorities square with related local and regional long-term visions for redevelopment over time related to this special location. In other words, the DEIR evaluation of the proposed site must also evaluate it (and other alternative sites likewise) in relation to the potential lost opportunities associated with committing the site to a wastewater treatment plant use for the foreseeable future.

Moreover, the continuation of a wastewater plant at the proposed location will have impacts on both existing public recreational access and visitor serving resources in the area, as well as the manner in which such existing resources will be enhanced over time, including in terms of expected redevelopment in this area over the life of the project. The DEIR must include information that quantifies these effects and compares them related to other potential alternative sites that can meet siting requirements appropriately. It seems reasonable to presume that sites farther inland are likely to have inherently reduced impacts on public recreational access and visitor serving resources, both existing and over time, and these differences need to be a clear part of the alternatives evaluation. The DEIR must also discuss the potential public access and recreation impacts that could be caused by demolition and construction activities, including impacts caused by construction traffic, staging and traffic detours, as well as ongoing traffic impacts once the plant is fully operating. Again, areas that are not as much of a visitor



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destination and that are located further inland are likely to have lesser impacts in this regard, and these differences must be part of the DEIR's alternative site evaluation information and process.

Visual Resources. The proposed project would include constructing a new replacement WWTP on the southern portion of the site and demolishing existing development on the northern portion of the site. The project description in the DEIR states that the new development would be designed with a consistent architectural theme and that it would be compatible with the surroundings. It states that the new facilities would be taller than the existing facilities and would include new security fencing along the entire perimeter of the facility. The project description also states that the vacant area on the northern portion of the site would be graded and finished with either pavement or rock.

The LCP requires the scenic and visual qualities of the coast to be protected and requires development to be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and other coastal areas. The project involves constructing a new WWTP immediately adjacent to multiple areas that are used by the public for access and recreation at and along the coast. The site is located on Atascadero Road, which is shown in LCP Figure 30 as a street providing scenic views. In addition, as illustrated in the DEIR, views from the dunes looking inland across the site include mountain ridgelines and views from the road looking towards the coast across the site include Morro Rock. The site is also visible from Highway One. New development such as that proposed at this location has the potential to obstruct and degrade these important public views.

Although the DEIR provides a viewshed analysis, such analysis is limited to visual simulations created from three vantage points. It is not clear that the requisite LCP and Coastal Act public viewshed protection findings can be made based on such analysis, and we recommend it be supplemented to include a more detailed discussion of what WWTP elements would be visible from public streets and other public access points. For WWTP elements that would be visible from such vantages, the DEIR must include information about ways to avoid visual impacts, including through more articulated architectural features, and it needs to include more details about the proposed design, including in terms of proposed materials and color palettes. In addition, the DEIR must include a description of proposed lighting to be able to allow an analysis of the impacts to nighttime views. Moreover, it appears that the proposed landscaping would consist of a single row of trees along the perimeter fencing, a small area of landscaping at the entrance to the plant and what appears to be a grass lawn. The DEIR must identify and evaluate the details of such landscaping plan beyond that identified thus far, and must include visual depictions and proposed species from initial installation to maturity to allow evaluation of the visual impacts of the landscaping itself. In any event, please ensure that the landscaping is based on drought tolerant, native and non-invasive vegetation that can effectively screen and soften visual impacts associated with the development as seen from public areas. In addition, although the project description says the vacant area on the northern portion of the parcel would be paved, the area is shown as landscaped with dune vegetation on the aerial simulation. The DEIR should clarify what is proposed for this area and it should provide the information necessary to evaluate the visual and water quality impacts of placing new pavement or rocks, if that is what is proposed. If the area would be landscaped, details should be included in the landscaping plan, as described above.



Again, as discussed above, the DEIR must be supplemented in terms of alternatives analysis, and the same concept extends to visual resources. It is clear that the existing site is in a visually sensitive location, which raises public viewshed concerns and issues. It is not as clear that other potential alternative sites share these same constraints. In fact, such sites may have fewer visual impacts than the proposed site location, especially if they are located farther inland and away from prime public viewsheds. The visual costs and benefits for various alternative sites and designs need to be described and explained in a similar manner as previously described for other constraint and resource categories.

Archaeological Resources. The project site is located in close proximity to numerous documented archaeological sites and is located within a burial ground of the Salinan Tribe. The LCP requires that such significant archaeological and historic resources be preserved to the greatest extent possible, and requires all available measures, including tax relief and purchase of development rights, in order to avoid development on significant archaeological sites. Therefore, a new WWTP that requires ground disturbance and excavation at this location appears to be inconsistent with the LCP in this respect, and, as discussed above, the DEIR should provide the information necessary to evaluate alternative sites for consistency with the LCP and applicable policies of the Coastal Act with respect to archeological resources as well.

Plant Capacity. The existing WWTP is rated for a peak seasonal dry weather flow (PSDWF) of 2.36 million gallons per day (mgd), and a peak hour flow of 6.6 mgd. The existing plant provides secondary treatment for up to .97 mgd. Additional wastewater receives primary treatment and is blended with the secondary treated water before it is discharged through the ocean outfall. The existing WWTP has a 301(h) modified discharge permit from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), which allows for the discharge of a blend of primary and secondary treated effluent into the ocean. The capacity of the new WWTP would be reduced from 2.36 mgd to 1.5 mgd. The new WWTP would treat this 1.5 mgd to tertiary level, and any additional wastewater would be treated to the secondary level. The new WWTP would not require a waiver from wastewater discharge requirements.

The LCP requires the City to ensure wastewater treatment capacity for certain priority uses, including commercial fishing and agriculture and coastal dependent land uses. Also, LCP Policy 3.06 specifically requires the City to provide wastewater treatment facilities to accommodate the build-out population of 12,195. In addition to the City's residential population, the upgraded WWTP must also serve the residential population of the Cayucos portion of the service district in the unincorporated County area, as well as the entire district's industrial and commercial needs. The recently updated Estero Area Plan of the San Luis Obispo County LCP, which was certified by the Commission in 2008, states that the average dry weather flow (ADWF) for Cayucos at buildout would be between .318 mgd and .401 mgd, and that Morro Bay's projected ADWF at buildout is 1.42 mgd, for a total ADWF of approximately 1.8 mgd.¹ The Estero Area Plan also states that in 2006, the district's ADWF was approximately 1.48 mgd. In addition, Table 10 of the LCP projects the District's wastewater flow rates to be 2.46 mgd in 2000 and

¹ The ADWF is lower than the PSDWF. The ADWF capacity of the existing WWTP is 2.06 mgd. The ADWF capacity of the proposed WWTP is not indicated in the DEIR. However, it is most likely lower than the PSDWF rating of 1.5 mgd.



3.13 mgd at buildout. These rates are significantly higher than the 1.5 mgd PSDWF that the upgraded WWTP would treat. Therefore, the proposed WWTP may not be able to treat the average dry weather flow that was recorded in 2006, and it appears that it would be unable to treat the average flow at buildout projected by either the Estero Area Plan or the City's LCP.

The DEIR relies on various sources for information about population growth but does not provide a conclusion about the rate of population growth expected over the life of the updated WWTP in relation to the LCP's buildout requirements. The DEIR should make such a conclusion and it should clearly explain how the upgraded WWTP would accommodate the projected demand for wastewater over the life of the project in relation to expected and allowed LCP buildout. In addition, the DEIR should provide all of the information necessary to evaluate the project for consistency with the LCP, including the above-mentioned policies. If the project would not provide facilities to accommodate a City population of 12,195 as required by LCP Policy 3.06, it would need to be preceded by an LCP amendment designed to amend that policy and related LCP sections.

In short, the DEIR must be supplemented to clearly identify LCP consistent buildout numbers and the way in which the proposed WWTP will appropriately and sufficiently accommodate such wastewater requirements at LCP buildout to be able to find the proposed project LCP consistent on this point. Any modified siting and design measures necessary to appropriately account for such wastewater needs must be identified and discussed, and all underlying assumptions clearly presented, in the DEIR.

Water Reclamation. The proposed project includes a plan for a small amount of wastewater reclamation. The 1.5 mgd of tertiary treated water would meet Title 22 standards for disinfected secondary-23 recycled water and could therefore be used for industrial use on-site and for limited off-site purposes such as soil compaction, concrete mixing and dust control. As proposed, this water could only be used off-site if it is transported using trucks that would utilize the proposed truck filling station. In addition, the proposed project includes a plan for the future production of .4 mgd of disinfected tertiary recycled water, the highest standard of recycled water, which could be put to a wide range of uses, including agricultural irrigation, groundwater replenishment and residential landscaping. However, as proposed, the only way to transport this higher quality water off-site would be using trucks. No additional infrastructure is proposed and the project does not include any planning for future infrastructure that could be used to transport the water.

The availability of water in Morro Bay has improved since the late 1980s and early 1990s, due to the arrival of water from the State Water Project in 1997. However, as described in the City's Water Management Plan Status Report of December 2008, the reliability of State Water has decreased due to judicial decisions regarding endangered fish species and concerns about global warming. In addition, the use of State Water is extremely energy intensive and has significant environmental impacts far removed from Morro Bay, including impacts on anadromous fish and other species in the Delta. These, and other, State water concerns highlight the general issue associated with ensuring that appropriate measures are taken to move towards and ensure a locally sustainable water supply.



LCP Policy 3.08(5) states that “even with the delivery of state water, use of reclaimed water is the City’s second highest priority [after conservation] and remains a productive source of potential conservation for both large and small scale projects...” This LCP policy goes on to state that reclaimed water should be required as part of a wastewater plant upgrade. The LCP also requires the City to ensure the availability of water supply for priority uses such as commercial fishing and agriculture and visitor-serving uses. In addition, the Estero Area Plan in the San Luis Obispo County LCP, which was updated in 2009 and applies to the Cayucos area, addresses the need for water reclamation. Although the County’s LCP is not the standard of review for development within the City, it provides appropriate context for services that extend outside the City and are affected by the proposed project. The Estero Area Plan includes Public Facilities Program III.B.1 on page 3-25, which encourages sewage disposal agencies to find alternative uses for reclaimed water, and Program III.A.9 on page 3-25, which encourages the use of reclaimed water for agricultural irrigation where there is a source of adequate quality wastewater.

Therefore, the LCP clearly requires the City to pursue water reclamation as part of this WWTP project. In addition, the Commission’s recent action approving the Los Osos Waste Water Project and the Commission’s recent certification of the above-mentioned water reclamation programs in the San Luis Obispo County LCP make it clear that the Commission has clear expectations for meaningful water reclamation programs to be included in new wastewater facilities and projects. Furthermore, the use of reclaimed water would help the City meet its water supply needs and ensure water supply is available for priority uses as required by the LCP, especially if/when State Water is restricted or unavailable. The use of reclaimed water would also reduce the impacts to the groundwater basin caused by pumping for water. Reclaimed water could be used for many purposes, including agricultural irrigation inside and/or outside of the district’s service area, injection wells to maintain and enhance the water quality and biological resources associated with the Chorro and Morro groundwater basins as required by LCP Policy 11.17, and residential and municipal landscaping, among other uses. The use of reclaimed water could also obviate the need for an ocean outfall, and the related benefits of eliminating this component of wastewater treatment in Morro Bay must be a part of the DEIR alternatives analysis, including the measures necessary to eliminate the outfall itself if other uses for the reclaimed water make the outfall unnecessary.

As proposed, the upgraded WWTP would produce 1.5 mgd of high quality tertiary treated water, but only a very small portion of that would be reclaimed. The remainder would be discharged to the ocean, both causing impacts to aquatic resources and wasting an important water supply. For the currently proposed project, the DEIR must provide details about the quantity of water that would be reclaimed, the timeline for when reclaimed water would be available, and the constraints associated with transporting the water off-site using trucks and the truck filling station. The DEIR must also discuss the impacts of using trucks to transport the .4 mgd of disinfected tertiary recycled water that would eventually be produced, including the impacts to air quality and GHG emissions as well as the impacts to public access to the coast caused by the additional truck traffic, and then it must identify appropriate means to address such issues (e.g., the potential for reclaimed water infrastructure, etc.).



Finally, the DEIR must provide details for project alternatives that would include more significant opportunities to provide reclaimed water as required by the LCP. Such alternatives should provide increased quantities of reclaimed water, with at least one alternative providing details about the potential to reclaim 100% of the wastewater produced, timelines for when the reclaimed water would be available, and information about the infrastructure that would be necessary to fully accommodate the reuse of the water (and details regarding infrastructure like the ocean outfall that could feasibly be eliminated). It seems likely that a reclamation program, including one expanded to result in full reuse, will require associated pipeline infrastructure as opposed to solely truck transport, and the DEIR needs to identify any feasibility issues associated with such a program. Again, such evaluation must be made a coequal part of the overall investigation of alternatives previously described, including in relation to the potential to eliminate the ocean outfall component of the project.

Water Quality. The existing WWTP has three storm water outfalls. One extends from the project site through the dunes and onto the beach, one discharges directly into Morro Creek, and a third routes storm water through the treatment plant and then discharges it from the ocean outfall. The DEIR states that the beach storm water outfall is frequently covered with sand and therefore requires regular maintenance. It is unclear from the DEIR if changes would be made to the existing storm water conveyance system.

Water quality is especially important in this project given the magnitude of the project size, the proximity to sensitive coastal resources and the industrial nature of the use. The LCP requires development to avoid impacts on sensitive habitats, including streams, dunes, and other biological resource areas, and where unavoidable, to minimize such impacts and to appropriately offset and mitigate for such impacts. In addition, LCP Policy 9.10 requires runoff to be retained on-site when possible, Policy 9.11 prohibits new development from degrading water quality, and Policy 9.12 requires new development to minimize runoff and erosion. The Coastal Act's marine resource protection policies may also come into play in the Commission's retained jurisdictional areas. The DEIR does not currently include adequate information regarding the manner in which storm water would be addressed, and must be supplemented to include sufficient information to analyze the project for consistency with these and related policies. The DEIR must provide a detailed explanation of how storm water would be collected, filtered, and treated, and how it would leave the site, and it must identify ways to ensure that all storm water is appropriately managed so that it does not result in polluted runoff, including, by treating storm water in the treatment plant itself, and/or through increasing on-site infiltration. In addition, the DEIR must provide information about the impacts of the project on runoff quantity, quality and velocity, including those impacts that would be caused if the vacant northern portion of the site is paved, as proposed. Again, as with other issue areas, such water quality details need to be part of each alternative evaluated.

Finally, the DEIR relies on compliance with the SWPPP and other water quality requirements to ensure that any impacts to water quality would be mitigated. However, the DEIR needs to provide sufficient detail to ensure this, including by describing all proposed measures and BMPs to protect water quality during construction and operation of the plant.



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Conclusion. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important, major public improvement project. Given the significant issues raised by the proposed project and the range of issues it raises with the certified LCP and the Coastal Act, including the location of this major new infrastructure project in an extremely hazardous and sensitive area, the reduced wastewater treatment capacity, and the lack of a significant water reclamation program, we respectfully request that the project be re-envisioned in terms of alternative siting and design, and that the DEIR be revised and recirculated to address our concerns, including with respect to a more robust identification of project alternatives that can better address the LCP and the Coastal Act. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the project or these comments, please contact me at the address and phone number above.

Sincerely,



Madeline Cavalieri

Coastal Planner, Central Coast District Office

cc: State Clearinghouse (SCH #2008101138)
Bill Callahan, Cayucos Sanitary District Manager

