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San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Citizens' Advisory Committee
Wastewater Subcommittee

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 9, 2024
5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
525 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd Floor Tuolumne Conference Room

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Meeting URL
https://sfwater.zoom.us/j/84303228490?pwd=A5HWtlmlPnKuODGjGzd6kapoHTQbtj.1

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Meeting ID / Passcode
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Mission: The Wastewater Subcommittee shall review sewage and stormwater collection, treatment, and disposal system replacement, recycling, and other relevant plans, programs, and policies (Admin. Code Article XV, Sections 5.140 - 5.142).

Members

Amy Nagengast, Chair (D8)	Maika Pinkston (M-Enviro. Org)	Andrea Baker (B-Small Business)
Douglas Jacuzzi (D4)	Elizabeth Steele Teshara (D7)	
Moisés García (D9)		

D = District Supervisor appointed, M = Mayoral appointed, B = Board President appointed

Staff Liaisons: Lexus Moncrease and Chelsea Boilard
Staff Email for Public Comment: cac@sfwater.org

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. **Call to order and roll call**

   Members present at roll call: (4) Jacuzzi, García, Steele Teshara and Baker

   Members Absent: (2) Nagengast and Pinkston

2. **Approve May 14, 2024 Minutes**

   Motion was made (Jacuzzi) and seconded (Baker) to approve the May 14, 2024, Minutes.

   AYES: (4) Jacuzzi, García, Steele Teshara and Baker

   NOES: (0)

   ABSENT: (2) Nagengast and Pinkston

   Public Comment: None

3. **Report from the Chair**
   - Member García announced that he will be Acting Chair for the Subcommittee in Chair Nagengast's absence.

   Public Comment: None

4. **Public Comment:** Members of the public may address the Committee on matters that are within the Committee's jurisdiction and are not on today's agenda (*2 minutes per speaker*)

   Public Comment: None

5. **Presentation and Discussion:** Wastewater Nutrient Removal, Joel Prather, Assistant General Manager, SFPUC Wastewater Enterprise

   Presentation:

   Agenda
   August 2022 Harmful Algal Bloom
   Ongoing Nutrient Regulation in SF Bay: Nutrients Watershed Permit
   Contribution from SFPUC SEP
   Contribution from SFPUC SEP (2)
   How do wastewater treatment plants remove nitrogen?
   Simplified Wastewater Treatment Process
   Sidestream Treatment
   Mainstream Treatment
   What is SFPUC doing to remove nitrogen?
   New Treasure Island Water Resource Recovery Facility
   Nitrogen Reduction Planned for Southeast Treatment Plant
   Southeast Interim Sidestream Nutrient Removal Project (overview)
   Southeast Interim Sidestream Nutrient Removal Project (details)
   Southeast Mainstream Nutrient Reduction

   Discussion:
   - **Member Jacuzzi** asked when direct potable water was authorized in California.

     Assistant General Manager (AGM) Prather responded that authorized direct potable water within the last few months.

Member Jacuzzi asked if the six-month waiting period had been ended for direct potable water.

AGM Prather confirmed that it is direct potable that was approved, meaning that it doesn't need to go to a reservoir or groundwater before going to the tap. There was a recent SFPUC article about this issue that can be shared.

- **Member Jacuzzi** inquired whether AGM Prather was aware of the recent lawsuit from Baykeeper in San Jose.

  AGM Prather replied that he had read about Baykeeper suing San Jose over the discharge into the creeks related to sewer overflow, but that wasn't directly related to nitrogen. He explained that SFPUC's current permits do not currently require the agency to monitor its nitrogen loads; San Jose does, but San Francisco may be different.

- **Member Steele Teshara** asked AGM Prather to clarity his comments; it sounds like the new technology at the Treasure Island treatment plant could not be applied to the older Southeast plant.

  AGM Prather responded that SFPUC does not yet know what technology will be used for that mainstream treatment. At Treasure Island it's a membrane bioreactor.

  Member Steele Teshara requested further explanation of a membrane bioreactor.

  AGM Prather explained that "bio" can be translated to mean that bugs are doing the work to break down solids or breaking down ammonia into a nitrate and nitrite and making those into gases. The bugs live on a membrane that the water flows through, and that is what cleans the water. That is the technology that is being used at Treasure Island; it's a compact system and works well for that flow, which is 0.2 million gallons per day, as opposed to the average 40 million gallons at Southeast. To use a membrane technology at Southeast, it would need to be very large and there is not a lot of space there. SFPUC is looking at other technologies at Southeast that use a more condensed process to eliminate the oxygen, make it anoxic, and then the bugs can take over.

  AGM Prather further described the distinction between the technologies for each plant, that for a plant built in the 1950s like Southeast, nitrogen removal was not a consideration at all, but for a brand new plant like Treasure Island, that consideration as well as recycled water, etc., is incorporated into the planning. The standards have changed, and so incorporating these new technologies into the older existing plant is a challenge and is more expensive. Southeast is on a small, confined space, and with the Biodigester Project, the digestors are 50 feet tall and 40 feet deep because there was not enough space to go wider. It's a similar constraint with nutrient removal.

- **Member Steele Teshara** inquired whether the recycled water at Treasure Island will just be for the island, or whether it would be used across the City at sites like Golden Gate Park.

  AGM Prather replied that Treasure Island is a small plant so there will not be a lot of recycled water produced. There is a pipe from Treasure Island to Oakland so theoretically SFPUC could pump that water elsewhere, but right now the plan is for it to be available for use just on Treasure Island. The project will have a tap within the plant so that construction trucks on the island will be able to access the water. With that tap, it's possible for a water truck to fill up and transport it somewhere—but again the flows are only 0.2 million gallons a day, which is very low. The recycled water at Oceanside is non-potable, which is being piped to Golden Gate Park and along Sunset Boulevard.

- **Member Baker** asked, once the nitrogen is converted to gas, where it is released.

  AGM Prather responded that it's released into the ambient air, and that it is not harmful.

- **Member Baker** requested more information about the research that the SFPUC is supporting, that AGM Prather mentioned in his presentation.

  AGM Prather explained that the current watershed permit held by SFPUC requires all agencies to pay into a fund for the San Francisco Estuary Institute, which is studying nutrients and their effects on the Bay and algal blooms. SFPUC anticipates that this agreement will continue with the next permit as well.

  Member Baker asked if AGM Prather knew the amount of funding contributed.

  AGM Prather replied that he did not have that information but that he could follow up.

- **Member García** inquired about the permit expected to be approved this week, and the timeline required for agencies to address nutrient loading.

  AGM Prather responded that the SFPUC anticipates the permit to be structured to include an interim limit, starting in the fall of 2024 for a ten-year period. By the end of that period, SFPUC will be expected to reduce nutrient loads by the percentage set Bay-wide, essentially allowing ten years for agencies to get these projects done. The interim limits are based on five-year averages for each respective plant, so SFPUC doesn't expect any issues with meeting the interim limits; it's the longer-term limits which are going to be the challenge. Ten years is not a lot of time, and many utilities are feeling that pressure; it's expected that part of the discussion at the permit hearing will be about revising the process and timeline to give utilities more time to figure this out. This is also why SFPUC is working on technologies in the

interim, like the sidestream treatment, to reduce some of what is being discharged. The goal is to identify the specific technology for use before SFPUC goes back to the Commission in two years for our next 10-year capital plan.

- **Member Baker** asked about the percentage of reduction in the interim versus long-term.

  AGM Prather confirmed the interim goal for reduction through sidestream treatment is 10-15%, and that he expects that the long-term Bay-wide goal will be 50-60%. SFPUC anticipates using two separate processes— one which will accomplish the interim goal and then moving entirely to a new mainstream process to accomplish the long-term reduction goal, which will also include decommissioning the old plant.

- **Member García** inquired whether this is new for California regulators in comparison to nationwide.

  AGM Prather responded that this is new specifically to the Bay. Up at Russian River there are regulations about not discharging into the river because of the algal blooms they've seen. For the Bay this is new, but there are also studies happening for the Pacific Ocean down south where they are seeing issues with nutrients.

- **Member Jacuzzi** asked about discharges from the Oceanside Plant, whether there were nutrient issues there.

  AGM Prather responded that Oceanside currently releases into a high flow current four and a half miles out, and currently there are no concerns. But SFPUC is watching closely what happens in Southern California where there are plants also discharging into the ocean.

- **Member Steele Teshara** asked about Oceanside discharges and whether the treatment process is different.

  AGM Prather clarified that the only part of the process that is different, is that Southeast Plant, because it's discharging into the Bay with significantly less flow, has a final step in the treatment process where the water is treated with chlorine and then another chemical to neutralize the chlorine, to both kill any remaining bacteria and make it safe for discharge. Oceanside because of the flow and distance, does not require that final step. There are biologists that go out into the Bay and test samples of the water, to make sure there are no adverse effects. And we see some of the best crabs come out of that water, and the seagulls love the grease on top of the water.

- **Member** García inquired about impact on ratepayers.

  AGM Prather responded that yes, SFPUC has projected those rates out during this last cycle. Ratepayers will be shouldering the brunt of this cost, but we've factored it in, and the rates are in alignment with SFPUC's affordability policy over the next 30 years.

- **Member Baker** questioned AGM Prather about what happens if the funds run short.

AGM Prather replied that the agency will continue to assess throughout the project. He referenced the two year planning process to identify the technology to use, and then cost that out. That will include looking at whether it can be built out modularly since we aren't seeing the huge population growth that was anticipated, and other considerations. Potentially the cost could go down. But if the cost goes up, SFPUC will have to address it as it happens.

- **Member García** asked whether there is state or federal support.

  AGM Prather responded that SFPUC's External Affairs group is actively pursuing funding at the state and federal level, as well as the Grants and Loans group, and we are also coordinating with BACWA and other utilities in the area.

- **Member García** thanked AGM Prather for his presentation and invited him to share any items that he thinks the Wastewater Subcommittee should look into. Member García also provided a brief overview of the CAC.

Public Comment: None

6. **Staff report**

7. **Future Agenda Items and Resolutions**

   a. Adopted Resolutions for Follow Up
   - Resolution in Support of SFPUC Class A Biosolids Local Distribution Program **adopted August 21, 2018**
   - Resolution in Support of Cityworks Interns Recommendations **adopted on November 21, 2017**
   - Resolution in Support of Equitable Green Infrastructure Implementation throughout the Southeast Sector of San Francisco and throughout the City **adopted on June 20, 2017**
   - Resolution Urging SFPUC Commission to Initiate Planning and Environmental Review for Building a New Community Center at Third and Evans and to Direct Staff to Develop an Interim Greenhouse Environmental and Workforce Development Program **adopted on October 18, 2016**
   - Resolution Supporting the SFPUC to Conduct Robust Community Engagement to Determine the Community's Preference for Remodeling Southeast Community Facility at 1800 Oakdale or Building a New Community Center at 1550 Evans **adopted on January 19, 2016**

   Public Comment: None

8. **Announcements/Comments** Visit www.sfpuc.org/cac for final confirmation of the next meeting date.

   Public Comment: None

9. **Adjournment at 6:27pm.**

For more information concerning the agendas, minutes, and meeting information, please visit www.sfwater.org/cac. For more information concerning the CAC, please contact by email at cac@sfwater.org or by calling (415) 517-8465.

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