

HMB Review



SAM establishes aggressive timeline for recycled water

Agency wants to use state financing

Posted: Thursday, July 9, 2015 9:30 am

SAM establishes aggressive timeline for recycled water By Julia Reis [julia@hmbreview.com]

Sewer Authority Mid-Coastside officials say they would like a recycled water treatment facility up and running by March.

Agency representatives acknowledge that it's an ambitious goal, but say the process could be accelerated thanks to recent action at the state level. The SAM board of directors met on June 29 and received an update to its 2010 recycled water facilities planning study from SRT Consultants. The update included a new project cost estimate and implementation schedule that establishes March 1, 2016, as the proposed start of recycled water treatment.

"It's a super unrealistic attempt, but we're going to make a shot at that," said SAM Chair Ric Lohman. "We're going to launch with that big goal."

After years of discussion about the possibility of bringing recycled water to the Coastside, the drought has reinvigorated talks between SAM, Coastside County Water District and potential recycled water customer Ocean Colony Partners. The Half Moon Bay Golf Links owner approached SAM about revisiting a 2010 proposal to provide recycled water for irrigation.

The new proposal calls for SAM to produce the recycled water from a facility that would be built at its plant. Coastside County Water District would then distribute it to the golf course. SAM's board passed a letter of intent saying as much in October.

The letter of intent stipulates that the facility would treat wastewater to a quality level sufficient for CCWD to distribute as recycled water to the golf course.

With California in its fourth year of drought, the state is encouraging municipalities to take on groundwater replenishment and recycled water projects by offering funding opportunities and loosening permit processes. Gov. Jerry Brown recently signed SB 88, which exempts the development and approval of building standards for recycled water or certain groundwater replenishment projects from the California Environmental Quality Act. That law typically requires a lead agency to complete an environmental impact report on a project that may significantly affect the environment, or to adopt a negative declaration if it won't have that effect.

Under SB 88 provisions, a project would be exempt if it does not affect wetlands or sensitive habitats and mitigates drought conditions. SB 88 would expire on Jan. 1, 2017, or when the governor's state of emergency due to the drought expires, whichever comes first.

Lohman said SAM was already moving forward with its recycled water project when it heard about SB 88 shortly before the June 29 meeting. However, he says its adoption is well timed.

"Instead of having to go through a six-month to a year approval (under CEQA), it may become automatic," he said. "That's really good for our timeline, and saves us money, too."

Acting SAM manager Clemens Heldmaier said the board could vote on a CEQA exemption for the project at its next meeting. However, he said, the agency needs to confirm that SB 88 would be applicable.

"We're looking to find security that this is the path we want to take," Heldmaier said.

There could be a financial incentive for SAM to take on recycled water now, as well. Voters passed Proposition 1 in November. It authorizes the state to issue \$7.5 billion in general obligation bonds to finance a water quality, supply and infrastructure

improvement program. The bond act sets aside monies for grants and loans for certain water conservation and efficiency projects, including recycled water.

Lohman said that SAM will pursue grants and loans from the state to fund its project, which has a current cost estimate between \$2.8 and \$4.6 million according to the consultant's presentation.

"Everybody in the state is going for it, so we just need to get in line," Lohman said. "There are several approaches and we're going to take them all."

SAM plans to concurrently develop its financial plan, address the permitting process and negotiate a formal contract with CCWD and Ocean Colony Partners. The group plans to meet within the next week to further those discussions.

"That's the cornerstone right now that's essentially missing," Heldmaier said. "Hopefully we can come up with an agreement fairly soon."

