

SEPTEMBER 28, 2016

## REPAIRING AND MAINTAINING THE WASTEWATER SYSTEM: Higher Rates, Lower Risks

Oxnard's families, businesses and visitors all depend on wastewater services every day, even though they happen behind the scenes. When a faucet runs, a toilet flushes, a shower is taken, dishes are cleaned or clothes are washed, the wastewater generated must be safely and reliably treated and disposed of to protect public health, ensure a clean environment and meet strict state and federal regulations.

The wastewater system consists of hundreds of miles of pipelines connecting homes and businesses to the City's wastewater treatment plant. These pipes were

given a D grade (out of an A, B, C, D, F scale) by independent experts and require expensive repair and replacement to avoid leaks and failures. The plant itself, which was built in the 1950s and upgraded in the 1970s, is past its useful life and also needs major repairs to provide a temporary fix until new facilities can be built. Today 30 percent of that facility's equipment is in poor or very poor condition, according to the experts' report.

In the past, Oxnard has chosen to defer necessary maintenance to keep rates low, but this choice created long-term consequences.

### If the wastewater fund continues to bring in revenues that are lower than expenses:

- If the wastewater rate increase is repealed, the operating revenue for the Wastewater Enterprise Fund will be depleted by the end of calendar year 2017.
- The Public Works Department cannot predict with exact accuracy when aging infrastructure will fail but with a repeal of rates we will see an exponential increase in systemwide failures.
- As infrastructure continues to degrade, events like the failure of four manholes and the resulting sewer spill on May 11, 2016 will happen again.
- Increased manhole failures and the resulting spills will cause an increase in fines levied by state and federal agencies.
- The Wastewater division will be unable to staff the facility at levels the State Water Resource Control Board has recommended for safe operations.
- Wastewater operations will have to be funded through the General Fund at an estimated rate of \$15 million per year – nearly 10 percent of the total General Fund. This amount only includes the cost of operating the plant.
- The City Council will have to decide what City services will be reduced or cut.

### UPCOMING FACILITIES TOURS: Learn about the day-to-day operations behind your utilities.

#### WASTEWATER

**When:** 11 a.m. Saturday, October 1  
**When:** 4 p.m. Wednesday, October 5  
**Where:** 6001 S. Perkins Rd.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

**When:** 4 p.m. Tuesday, October 4  
**Where:** 111 S. Del Norte Blvd.

#### WATER

**When:** 4 p.m. Thursday, October 6  
**Where:** 251 S. Hayes Ave.

**We look forward to connecting with you!**

### EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: Kim McKibben

Most people are probably unaware of what lies beyond the system of pipes that whisks wastewater away from their homes. In the City of Oxnard, Kim McKibben is one of the critical links in the safe disposal of that wastewater. She is a lab technician at the wastewater treatment plant. The 29-year City employee is responsible for making sure all wastewater has been properly treated and all harmful elements are removed before the wastewater is discharged to various watersheds (bodies of water) and the Pacific Ocean.



"Oxnard is the largest discharger of wastewater to the ocean between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area," said McKibben.

The mission at the wastewater treatment plant is to provide dependable operations, comply with regulations, reuse biosolids and recycle effluent. McKibben's early college career was in veterinary science and then the medical field. She eventually settled on microbiology. She recommends that anyone interested in becoming a lab technician should focus on science classes, particularly those related to environmental sciences.

## WASTEWATER BY THE NUMBERS



For fiscal year 2016-2017, a total of \$34.1 million is budgeted for Wastewater division expenses.

This graphic shows how each cent of revenue is allocated.



- Debt Service/Capital Outlay - 29%
- Labor - 25%
- Indirect & Infrastructure - 13%
- Chemicals & Utilities - 12%
- Maintenance & Supplies - 12%
- Contract Services - 9%

## QUICK TRIVIA

### How much does it cost to flush your toilet?

**A. less than 2 cents per flush**

**B. 3 to 5 cents per flush**

**C. More than 12 cents per flush**

Submit your answer at: [www.oxnard.org/newsletters](http://www.oxnard.org/newsletters)

In August we asked you to guess when Oxnard's oldest water pipes were installed. Those of you who guessed the 1930s were right! The oldest water mains in the City of Oxnard have been delivering water to families, businesses and visitors for about 85 years. These pipes, made of cast iron, are located downtown on Fifth Street. Some water mains in the La Colonia neighborhood were also installed before the end of the World War II. While these pipes are still functioning, they frequently require expensive repairs, patches and maintenance. They are also vulnerable to leaks, breaks and water loss. Water rate increases would allow the City to replace some of the pipes most in need.

## ASK DAN

### Does the City add fluoride to the water it delivers to customers?

Oxnard does not add fluoride. But our tap water does contain a small amount of the cavity-prevention mineral because it is in the imported water that makes up about half of the City's total supply. The City regularly monitors drinking water quality to meet state and federal standards.

If you have a question to Ask Dan or an idea for an article topic, please email [askdan@oxnard.org](mailto:askdan@oxnard.org).