

Thomas K. Butt, Councilmember



September 28, 1997

Floyd Johnson, City Manager
City of Richmond
Civic Center Plaza
2600 Barrett Avenue
Richmond, CA 94804

Subject: Richmond Municipal Sewage District #1

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) located at 601 Canal Boulevard serves Richmond Municipal Sewer District No. 1, which includes approximately 60,000 Richmond residents. The remainder of Richmond residents are served by the Stege Sanitary District and the West County Wastewater District. The plant is designed for an average dry weather flow of 10.0 million gallons per day (MGD) and a peak wet weather flow of 39.2 MGD. The average daily dry weather flow is 7.25 MGD.

The WPCP was constructed in 1958 with major additions or modifications constructed in 1961, 1968, 1974, 1980, 1982, 1985, and 1993.

I became interested in the Water Pollution Control Plant because of the sewage odors emanating from the plant which permeate my neighborhood were particularly bad in the spring and early summer of 1997. Not only are my neighbors complaining about the odors, but complaints are also coming from occupants of commercial buildings north and south of the WPCP along Canal Boulevard, including Pixar.

During May and June of 1997, I called the WPCP several times to complain about odors. I was told on each occasion that everything was normal, and there was no known reason for any unusual odors to be occurring. During this time, I was also told by a neighbor that part of the problem may be sludge overflowing digester covers due to deteriorated seals. When I asked Don Austin about the seals during budget hearings, he told me that seals were not part of the system and that the sludge itself provided the seals.

In June I toured the WPCP with Richard Rushlow, Plant Operations Waste Water Supervisor. I was generally impressed with the operation. I did not detect any unusual odors of the type I could frequently smell at my house, except in the influent basin and in a pump room where some sewage had spilled due to a maintenance operation. When we were viewing the digesters, I asked Mr. Rushlow about the covers and seals. Contrary to

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The anticipated revenues are \$5,900,000, most of which comes from sewer service charges. This leaves only \$306,537 available annually for contribution to the reserve fund. At this time, the reserves are almost depleted, with the budget showing an estimated year-end balance of \$569,640. Part of the problem may stem from the recent illegal practice of raiding the sewer fund to augment the general fund.

In an interview with Don Austin, Waste Water Department Public Works Superintendent, on July 11, 1997, A list of millions of dollars of capital improvement and maintenance requirements was provided:

Item	Estimated Cost
Digester covers (#1 and #2)	900,000
Rebuild sedimentation tanks (#1 and #2)	200,000
Sanitary sewer rehabilitation (residential areas only)	3,000,000
Influent pumps (#1 through#4)	1,200,000
Rebuild #3 sludge heater	100,000
Replace water lines (#1 and #2)	500,000
Clarifier center wells (#1 and #2)	500,000
Resurface plant roads	300,000
Changeover aeration tanks	1,000,000
Replace Kellers Beach lift station	250,000
Replace building roofs	No estimate
Plant painting	
Chemical distribution system	
Plant air system	No estimate
Ventilation system headworks	No estimate
WCA outfall, force main, sludge and appurtenances	No estimate
Sewage lift stations	No estimate
Storm water lift stations	No estimate
Personnel locker room	No estimate
Replacement of major rolling equipment	No estimate
Minimum Total	7,950,000

The 1996-2001 Capital Improvement Projects Budget for Wastewater shows only \$500,000 programmed annually, or a total of only \$1,500,000 from FY 1998-99 through 2000-01. Obviously, we cannot do over \$8 million of improvements in the foreseeable future with \$500,000 a year, which is more than is even available.

During the Council Retreat in the spring of 1997, the City manager provided a list of "Proposed Capital Improvement Projects." Under "mandated" were "Sanitary Sewer Rehab Program (Munic. Sewer Dist. Area Project to reduce the inflow and infiltration" at

what Mr. Austin had previously stated in a public meeting, Mr. Rushlow confirmed that the seals were, in fact, worn away. As a result, there were periodic “burps” when methane gas would blow huge gobs of sludge out over the top of the tank or cause sludge to foam up over the top.¹ He said that one digester cover was slated for replacement, but he did not know when or whether funding was available. He said that decision would be made by people above his management level.

In September of 1997, we were having a particularly bad outbreak of mosquitoes in Point Richmond. Once again, a helpful neighbor tipped me off that the sewage treatment plant was the source. I talked to Scott Harrison of the CCC Mosquito Abatement District who confirmed that the sewage treatment plant is the major source of mosquitoes in the Point Richmond area. He told me that in a recent visit he had found mosquitoes breeding in two out-of-service tanks and the out-of-service #2 digester. I observed the #3 digester shortly after and confirmed that its cover was also immersed in exposed sludge.

In my continuing investigation, I found out that there are millions of dollars of deferred maintenance and capital projects at the treatment plant for which there is no financing or implementation plan. This is particularly disturbing because, as a sewer district, the treatment plant does not have to depend on voter approval for funding. All it needs to do is adjust service fees to cover operational and capital needs, including amortizing loans from the California State Water Resources Water Control Board Revolving Fund. There is no political explanation to excuse a failure of the treatment plant management to have an improvement plan in progress. The need for a timely plan is even more important due the long lead time between setting fees and realizing the income.

The budget for Wastewater-Community and Cultural Services of about \$5.5 million includes both operating expenses and a \$466,000 annual debt service from a \$6.5 million loan from the California State Water Resources Water Control Board Revolving Fund Loan project N. C-06-4039-120 used for the 1993 WPCP improvements. A summary of the budget is as follows:

Item	1997-98 Budget
Wastewater (sewer system maintenance)	810,608
Wastewater Treatment Facility	3,919,232
Industrial Pretreatment Program	397,623
Total Operating Costs	5,127,463
Less Debt Service	466,000
Total Annual Costs	5,593,463

¹ The City of Richmond Municipal sewer District *Odor Control Procedural Manual* states “Foam on the digester floating cover shall be cleaned by day shift.”

a cost of \$10 million, and "Water Pollution Control Plant Improvements (Munic. Sewer Dist. Area)" at a cost of \$6,500,000.


What this means is that there is a shortfall of from \$6 million to 16.5 million for maintenance and improvements necessary to keep the WPCP and the sewer collection system functional. With the un-costed items, that shortfall could be as much as \$20 million. Kurt Hunter has said that the rainfall infiltration may cost as much as \$50 million to \$100 million to solve. Since the current annual reserve allocation is only about \$300,000, there is a revenue shortfall of \$200,000 annually in achieving even the \$500,000 annual projection which clearly is grossly insufficient to address the true requirements.

According to a report prepared in 1991, The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) recommends a 20% - 40% operating reserve and development of a facility replacement fund. Following these guidelines, there should be a reserve of from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000, exclusive of any funds budgeted for capital improvements.

In order to produce a usable capital improvement program, Don Austin said a master plan prepared by a consultant at a cost of approximately \$300,000 would be required, which would eat up a whole year's reserve.

In my opinion, the management of Richmond Municipal Sewer District No. 1 demonstrates evidence of gross dereliction of duty and may be even criminally negligent. I am demanding that you immediately prepare a written implementation plan to operate, maintain, and improve the facilities of Richmond Municipal Sewer District No. 1 in a functionally and fiscally responsible manner.

Sincerely,



Thomas K. Butt, FAIA

Cc: Mayor and City Council
