

Crescent Sanitary District Public Meeting

By: Jeffrey Brent

Hosted by the Crescent Sanitary District Board, a public informational meeting was recently held on November 14, 2015 at the Crescent Community Center where an overview and updates pertinent to the District's current wastewater treatment system plans were presented. Approximately 20 citizens of the Crescent, Oregon area joined the Wastewater Board members in session.

Along with welcoming all in attendance, Board President Cher L. Dolan opened the meeting by explaining its purpose, and encouraging all those in attendance to voice questions regarding the plans and current status of the sewer project throughout the gathering. Following Ms. Dolan's brief overview, Project Manager, Chuck Lawrence outlined the history of the Crescent Sanitary District. Beginning with its formation in 1976, Lawrence further explained that while previous Crescent Sanitary Boards had initiated several attempts to see sewer projects through initial planning stages over the years, all early efforts were stalled due to, among other factors, cost concerns and lackluster public support, and it was not until 2012 with the formation of a new Sanitation Board that the necessity and positive potential of the current sewer project was resurrected.

For now, the Crescent, Oregon area does not house a sanitary wastewater treatment facility. Currently, all residents and businesses are solely dependent upon conventional septic systems, many of which are dilapidated and failing, for their waste management. Environmental studies conducted for the failed 2007 Facility Plan revealed evidence of ground contamination by nitrates, potentially hazardous to both humans and wildlife residing in the area, and while detailed measurements determined nitrate levels in and around the district were out of compliance with the requirements of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ), nitrates have not yet infiltrated local drinking water. However, with higher than normal levels having been detected in the Little Deschutes River which flows through town, the ODEQ has advised the current Crescent Sanitary District that a solution to clean up the contamination is imperative. Along with the full consideration and cooperation of the ODEQ, the Crescent Sanitary District, in researching and planning for a wastewater treatment facility, is also currently collaborating with the Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA), Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), and the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD). As well, special assistance and direction is being provided by both Annette Liebe of the Oregon Governor's Office and Kelly Potter of the ODEQ Resource Office. State Representative Mike McLane and the Klamath County Commissioners have endorsed the Crescent Sanitary District project.

Along with Project Manager/Grant Writer Chuck Lawrence, hired in late 2012, the Crescent Sanitary District Board contracted with Anderson Engineering to devise an updated Engineering Facility Plan which has been completed and approved by the ODEQ, and is currently working with John Pellissier, Management Unit Forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry towards the possible security of

property for the future placement of a treatment facility. A private firm has been contracted by Anderson Engineering to complete a new environmental study.

Funding of the entire project will be multifaceted. The Crescent Sanitary District is striving to fund the project with grants and low interest loans with hopes of providing affordability for the public. A prerequisite to qualifying for low interest loans, principle forgiveness, and grants, the District must meet strict requirements as an economically depressed community. With Crescent, Oregon not recognized as an incorporated city, the median household income is determined by the U.S. Census Bureau, leaving the Crescent Sanitary District lumped in with an area which includes neighborhoods of high income not within the boundaries of the district. In truth, the majority of the District embodies low to moderate income households, and as a result of this discrepancy, the District has obtained permission from the funding agencies to conduct an income study for those residents within the boundaries of the Crescent Sanitary District, primarily located along the Highway 97 corridor.

An income study will be conducted by Portland State University. It is very important that the residents provide accurate and complete income for each individual household. Any information obtained will remain strictly confidential and individual income and responses will **not** be shared or made public. Only the overall District's average household income will be used when determining eligibility for funding. Should the District qualify for low interest funding, grants, and loan principle forgiveness, it is hopeful and possible that the overall project will indeed prove affordable and therefore align with the Crescent Sanitary Board's dedication to ensuring monthly sewer rates will remain as low as possible for all affected residents.

While many questions and opinions were presented to the Board and Mr. Lawrence during the November 14, 2015 meeting, there appeared to be overwhelming public support regarding the Crescent Sanitary District wastewater plans with many of those in attendance reaching mutual agreement and understanding that the project is a necessary step in the preservation, livability, and survival of their quaint Central Oregon community, with the provision of a safer environment and a potential boost to their small town's economy superseding the probability of higher costs in the future and the threatening possibility of rising levels of groundwater contamination.