

# No public benefits

## *Newest wastewater facility site in Morro Bay will cost taxpayer money for private interests*

BY CYNTHIA HAWLEY

Nancy Bast hit the nail on the head in her commentary "Ulterior agendas" (July 26). The memorandum of agreement that she cites between the city of Morro Bay and Tri W Enterprises Inc. shows that the only beneficiary of building a wastewater treatment plant on the South Bay Boulevard site is Tri W Enterprises Inc.—at great and lasting public expense.

The city is so hard-pressed to come up with reasons for selecting this site that it has to make them up. For example, the city makes the false claim on its website that an "advantage of the South Bay Boulevard site is its ability to support reclamation in the form of indirect potable reuse." This is not an advantage of the South Bay Boulevard site because that procedure can be used at other identified sites.

There is no benefit to the ratepayers of a sewage treatment plant at that site. There are only detriments—unaffordable rate increases that are going to cause people on fixed incomes to move away and long-term disruption of access to businesses on Quintana Road to bury unnecessary pipes for pumping raw sewage uphill to Tri W Enterprises' property.

The Morro Bay City Council convened an expert panel of wastewater professionals who informed council members that, "The biggest contributor to cost at the South Bay Boulevard (SBB) site is the site itself. Pipeline and earthwork costs there are very high. The most effective way to reduce construction cost is to go back to, near, or on the existing WWTP site."

By ignoring this vital information, the City Council conclusively turned its back on the welfare of the community, and the memorandum of understanding shows why.

But the betrayal is deeper than paying more for the property than for other potential sites, buying more than three times the acreage needed for a wastewater treatment plant, and unnecessarily paying the "very high" costs of pipelines and earthwork to the site. It's that burdening families and businesses with these unnecessary long-term costs is just collateral damage to the evident purpose of removing the barriers to development of private property that has been undevelopable for years. Eliminating those barriers depends on the city opening up the property with physical access to and utilities for the wastewater treatment plant. The City Council's promises to direct city resources toward annexation of the property and provide access and services to it blatantly show this purpose.

Adding insult to injury, the City Council has never brought this to a public meeting to discuss, and vote on, whether opening up this area for annexation and expanded development would benefit the city of Morro Bay. There has been no analysis of the impacts that this growth might

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have on the community and its resources. The council just made a deal with the property owner. Unfortunately, in Morro Bay this behavior by the City Council no longer surprises us.

Finally, the California Constitution under Proposition 218 prohibits the use of money collected in rates to be spent on anything other than providing the services for which the rates were collected.

What we know now from the expert panel of wastewater professionals and the memorandum of understanding between the city and Tri W Enterprises Inc. is: 1) Costs can be reduced by using another site; 2) There are no benefits to ratepayers to using the South Bay Boulevard site; and 3) The unnecessarily higher cost of building at the South Bay Boulevard site is for the purpose of subsidizing private interests. Under Proposition 218, money spent on building at the South Bay Boulevard site above what would be spent at another site is not money spent on providing water and sewer services to rate payers and is unconstitutional.

Fortunately for us in California, ratepayers have the power to prevent this kind of misappropriation of public funds by protesting the water and sewer rate increases proposed by the City Council to pay for it. Δ

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