



Attachment A

SENT TO COUNCIL: Distributed on:

DEC 01 2008

by City Manager's Office  
*Memorandum*

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** John Stufflebean

**SUBJECT:** PLANT MASTER PLAN –  
BASELINE SURVEY RESULTS

**DATE:** 11-24-08

Approved

Date

11/30/08

### INFORMATION

In August 2008, as part of the early public outreach strategy associated with the Master Plan for the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (Plant), staff used professional services to conduct a baseline telephone survey of 1,200 residents across the eight cities of the Plant service area. Survey questions were developed to a) ascertain current levels of knowledge about the Plant and its functions, b) assess attitudes about sewage fees, and c) explore values about possible Master Plan proposals for the Plant's bufferlands.

The survey report written by Goodwin Simon Victoria Research is attached and provides demographic analysis of responses to each question as well as comparison of responses by city. The highlights of the survey findings are as follows:

#### **Highlights of Findings**

##### **1. Residents Show Concern for Bay Water Quality but Lack An Understanding of Needs at the Plant**

Respondents were first asked to consider the seriousness of the Plant's condition along with three Bay water quality issues. These issues are juxtaposed with four other commonly understood urban issues—traffic, crime, education, and drought—to lend context to the ratings. Traffic, drought, and education stood out as the top three issues that a large majority of people (79%, 70%, and 66% respectively) rated as a very or somewhat serious problem. But close behind these were the three Bay water quality issues—pollution of the Bay, accumulation of toxics in food/water, and condition of salt marsh habitat—garnering ratings of 63%, 58%, and 57% respectively as very or somewhat serious concerns.

This expressed concern for Bay water quality did not earn a commensurate concern for the Plant's condition. Roughly one in four residents (28%) ranked the Plant's condition as either very or somewhat serious. This is not unexpected as infrastructure problems at the Plant have not

yet been widely publicized. In the next set of questions, we also learned that a large number of people are unclear on the role the Plant plays in protecting Bay water quality.

Across the service area, we see that Cupertino residents tend to express somewhat more concern about pollution in the Bay than residents in other cities. People closest to the Plant tend to express more concern about the Plant's condition.

## **2. Roughly Half of Public Lacks Understanding of Two Sewer Systems; Polluting Behaviors are Occurring**

Many residents incorrectly answered simple questions about the local sanitary and storm drain systems (Questions #3 and #4). About 40% did not know where water from their bathtubs, sinks, and toilets goes; about 40% thought storm drain water goes into the sanitary sewer system; and 50% were unsure if sewage from their home was treated. Later in the survey (Question #27), residents were asked about what they flush down toilets and sinks. Fully 9% told us that in 2007, they emptied medicines down the sink or toilet; 7% said they put paint down a sink or toilet; and 1% said they put motor oil or anti-freeze in the sink or toilet.

## **3. About 1 in 5 Are Aware of Plant; Relations With Neighbors Appear Okay**

About 1 in 5 respondents knew the Plant's general location (Question #6). Similarly, about 1 in 5 knew that the Plant discharges into the Bay (Question #14). This is not unexpected, given the Plant's rare appearance in the news and its isolated location. Interestingly, a much higher percentage of respondents (41%) seem to think the Plant is a good neighbor and only 13% considered the Plant to be a bad neighbor (Question #12).

## **4. Residents Give Spill Prevention Top Priority**

Concern for Bay water quality was again expressed when residents were asked to rate the priority of a variety of issues for inclusion in the Plant Master Plan (Question #19). Of the 13 issues posed, "preventing sewage spills" elicited the greatest response, ranked by 83% of residents as deserving high priority. It should be noted that at this point in the survey, respondents were told more about the Plant, its aging infrastructure, and that the facility discharges into the Bay. It appears that with understanding of the Plant's role, the public connects the issue of aging infrastructure and their concern over sewage spills. The following is a consolidated list of priorities that garnered at least a majority rating:

1. Preventing sewage spills - 83%
2. Increasing Plant capacity (to reduce backups or accommodate population growth) - 80%
3. Reducing odors to protect neighbors - 80%
4. Making sure Plant has greenest technology or is energy efficient - 79%
5. Recycling treated water - 78%
6. Protecting habitat around Plant - 73%
7. Protecting Plant from rise in sea level - 62%

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

11-24-08

Subject: Plant Master Plan – Baseline Survey Results

Page 3

#### **5. Majorities Support Wetlands Protection and Oppose Bufferlands Development**

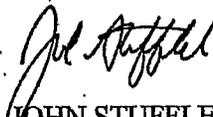
Residents were asked if they would support or oppose six possible uses of the land around the Plant (Question #21). Note that the six options presented to respondents may differ from the land use alternatives that will be posed in the master planning process. Nevertheless, the responses to this question provide some insight into residents' values on land use. Using the land as an environmental preserve to protect wetlands earned the strongest support (65%). Using the land for housing or commercial development earned the strongest opposition (63%). On the point of whether land should be leased or sold, 28% would support and 44% would oppose (with the remainder neutral) selling the land for private development, even if it "reduced the need for future sewage fee increases" (Question #22).

#### **6. Majority Are Unaware How Sewage Fees are Paid But Largely Deem Fees Okay**

In the Plant service area, only residents in Santa Clara and Milpitas pay sewage fees on a regular utility bill, and over 60% of respondents in these cities correctly indicated this payment method (Question #17). Residents in all other cities pay fees on their annual property tax bill, but only 1 in 4 respondents in these cities knew this. Nevertheless, when asked about the amount of the fees (Question #18), roughly half across all cities indicated that the fee amount was about right. The bulk of the other half is unsure about the cost.

#### **Use of Survey Findings**

This information gives Master Plan decision makers a sense of current public understanding and opinion and is helpful to staff in developing outreach tactics and collateral, for both the Plant Master Plan and the outreach efforts of other environmental programs. As the Master Plan progresses, a second survey will be conducted to allow for comparative analysis of the effectiveness of outreach implementation and any changes in public awareness and opinions.



JOHN STUFFLEBEAN  
Director, Environmental Services

If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Garnett, Communications Manager, Environmental Services, at (408) 535-8554.

Attachment: Findings from Survey on Attitudes Related to Issues Affecting the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant