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EPCOR chosen as partner for new wastewater treatment plant

Clara Howell April 15 2021

Lake Oswego City Council will decide May 4 whether to start Phase 1 of the project.

(https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003701330875-0889.jpg)The city of Lake Oswego continues to inch deeper into the exploration of building a new wastewater treatment plant, which would be owned by the city through a public-private partnership.

During a Lake Oswego City Council meeting April 13, the council engaged with key players in the project and heard updates about the feasibility work that's been accomplished thus far. This work session took place roughly three weeks after the city selected EPCOR as the preferred utility company to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the new plant, which would serve Lake Oswego and parts of the greater Portland area.

The current Tryon Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is owned by the city of Portland, was built in 1964 and needs to either be rebuilt or upgraded to meet regulatory requirements. The current plant would need approximately \$130 million of investment to bring it up to new environmental standards. If a new plant is built, it would be owned by Lake Oswego and operated by EPCOR.

"Headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, EPCOR USA builds, owns and operates water, wastewater and natural gas facilities and infrastructure," read a city news release sent March 24. "EPCOR USA provides water, wastewater, wholesale water and natural gas services to approximately 780,000 people across 42 communities and 18 counties in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas."

With the selection of EPCOR, next steps include coming before the council May 4 with a Preliminary Service Agreement with EPCOR to start Phase 1 of the project.

"The first phase of this innovative public-private partnership (P3) involves planning, designing, costing and permitting to determine whether a new, environmentally friendly 43.8 million gallons per day (MGD) facility can be delivered at a cost no greater than that of upgrading the existing Tryon Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant to meet necessary Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) permitting requirements," the news release read. "If approved by the Cities of Lake Oswego and Portland, Phase 2 groundbreaking on the new facility would be expected to begin next year, with operations commencing in December 2024."



PMG FILE PHOTO - The Lake Oswego City Council will decide May 4 whether to start Phase 1 of the project to build a new wastewater treatment plant.

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During the April 13 meeting, City Manager Martha Bennett said there were four main reasons for pursuing the project. The new plant would be built on a smaller footprint — hopefully around six acres, half the size of the current plant. She also said it would help the city be a better neighbor and upgrading the plant would create a more responsible product when treating the wastewater and putting it back into the river.

"There are noises and there are smells from the (current) plant that really affect the livability of this part of town," Bennett said.

Bennett added that it also would allow the city to reclaim the area of Lake Oswego that's adjacent to the Willamette River for roughly the same cost as investing in upgrades at the existing plant.

The city of Portland would sell the Tryon Creek Property to Lake Oswego for \$1, but the city would then be in charge of demolishing the old plant and remediating the soil.

According to the city staff report, Portland projected sewer rate increases to be 3.9% for 15 years if the city chose to upgrade the existing plant. One of the main goals when constructing a new plant would be to keep the cost to ratepayers the same as it would be if the current plant was upgraded.

If the city decides to enter Phase 1 in May — which would span about 14 months — it would involve a significant financial commitment. While the city still can terminate the project if it decides it is not feasible or the goals set forth cannot be accomplished, there would be money lost.

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While Lake Oswego and Portland would split the bill, the total estimated costs to cancel the project after EPCOR completes the initial development and basis of design review would be about \$2.5 million in Lake Oswego. If the city canceled the project after EPCOR completed about 30% of the design, it would be about \$3.7 million (just for Lake Oswego's portion) and after 60%, it would be just under \$5.5 million.

"City consultant costs are estimated to be about \$100,000 per month during the PSA period; however, Portland will pay 50% of these costs if the project is canceled; otherwise these costs will be included in the Project Cost and Portland will share the cost according to their relative amount of sewage that is treated by the new plant," the staff report read. "If Lake Oswego or Portland 'off-ramps,' (moves on from the project) wastewater would continue to be treated at the existing plant, and Portland would restart capital projects to upgrade that plant."

The money spent on the project to date is just over \$1 million. There also would be associated breakage fees depending on the reason for termination of the project.

"If the results of testing, conceptual design, financial analysis and preliminary engineering in Phase 1 demonstrate that a new wastewater treatment plant would be the same impact to rates as upgrading the existing plant, meets DEQ requirements, and is technically viable, then the City would proceed to Phase 2 of building, financing, operating and maintaining the new facility," the city's staff report read. "With a decision to move forward, a new intergovernmental Agreement with Portland would need to be developed and agreed upon by both city councils by July 2022."

Mayor Joe Buck questioned what would happen if the project wasn't approved by DEQ.

Project members said it would be a risk, but that EPCOR brought on team members to help mitigate that. They added that DEQ is familiar with the newer technologies being proposed for the wastewater treatment plant.

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Lee Ward with EPCOR explained that the preferred technology for the plant would be AquaNereda over the second option: Membrane BioReactor Technology.

"This choice has reduced upfront capital costs and lower long-term operational and maintenance costs than the MBR technology," the staff report read. "This technology is also adaptable to high flows caused by rain infiltration into the wastewater system by being able to handle the peak flows through their treatment."

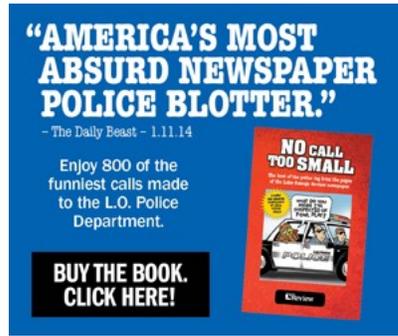
Councilor Aaron Rapf expressed the importance of sustainability in this project.

Ward shared how EPCOR's other treatment plants are operating sustainably. He said at their largest treatment plant, they added a process to treat and reuse the water and currently are working on a project to bring renewable natural gas to the facility. They've also just decided to add solar power and are looking into that option now. In other places, they do composting.

"We definitely have been involved in sustainable types of ventures," Ward said.

Councilor Rachel Verdick also echoed Rapf's statement about making the project as energy efficient as possible. Verdick expressed concerns about the demolition and remediation of the existing site and soil, as well as building a new facility in a floodplain.

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Ward said there's a specification outlined where they would have to build certain infrastructure above a certain flood limit.

"That is understood and an expectation," said Ward, adding that it's too early to guess how the site might look after remediation but that EPCOR will look into that and give better insight to the city at a later date.

Public Works Director Anthony Hooper said the city asked them to work on that aspect as much as possible and that if the city decides to move into the next phase of the project, they will have a better idea of what the costs are.

For more information about this project, visit the city's website. (<https://bit.ly/3gf5hTg>)



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