

PERSIGO WASH SEWER TREATMENT PLANT - PROBLEM ANALYSIS

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

The responsibilities and duties of the City and County are not clearly defined and therefore the plant operation, policy implementation, and maintenance programs are inadequate.

PROBLEM FACTS:

1. County staff are dissatisfied with the operation of the plant by the City.
2. City staff has stated that the lack of direction from the County has forced them to make policy and operational decisions without County involvement.
3. The contract between the City and the County does not contain adequate accountability requirements.
4. A capital improvements program is not being carried out.
5. Infiltration is not being controlled, and therefore a great deal of storm water is being processed at the plant.
6. EPA has required a total separation of storm water and sewage.
7. The EPA grant that is earmarked for work to separate storm water from sewage could be endangered by lack of compliance with EPA regulations.
8. The County is not given an exact account of monies associated with the Persigo Treatment Plant, the collection system, system maintenance, payment of bond debts, user fees, new hookups, etc.
9. No one person employed by the County is responsible for administration of the Persigo Wash Treatment Plant.
10. Operation of the plant is apparently not being done properly.
11. Predicted cash flow makes payment of bond debts unlikely and increases the probability of tax increases throughout Mesa County to cover plant costs.
12. The necessary cooperation between the City and the County makes the situation more difficult.
13. Neither the City or the County has anyone with the necessary expertise to control the sewer treatment plant operations.

14. Penalties for not complying with the contract between the City and County are not defined.

15. The contract for operation and management of the treatment plant assumes that because the City was operating a treatment plant previously they are capable of operating the new plant, which may or may not be true.

16. The only sanitary engineer that has been hired quit due to "unacceptable conditions".

17. The amount of information concerning the Persigo Wash Treatment Plant is so vast that it will require more than one person to assimilate all of it into a meaningful form.

18. The County does not have direct access to all of the information that the City has concerning the treatment plant.

19. There does not appear to be any single plan associated with planning for the future expansion of the plant or collection system improvements.

PROBLEM CAUSE:

There are a few basic problem areas as follows:

1. Duties and responsibilities for both the County and the City are not clearly defined.

2. The County has not maintained involvement with the operation, maintenance, and management of the treatment plant and collection system.

3. The expertise needed to operate and manage the sewer treatment plant properly (i.e. a wastewater treatment engineer) is not available on a day to day and minute to minute basis.

4. Accountability, and penalties for not being accountable, are not clearly stated and agreed upon by both the City and the County.

OBJECTIVE:

Make the County an integral part of the Persigo Wash Sewer Treatment Plant management and operation. Find a means by which the expertise necessary to handle the treatment plant will be made available and used. Clearly define duties and responsibilities for the operation and maintenance of the treatment plant with respect to both the City and the County.

POSSIBLE PROBLEM SOLUTIONS:

Solution Ratings: A - Good
B - Fair
C - Poor
D - Unacceptable

1. Give the Treatment Plant, Bond debt, etc. to the City and get completely out of the problem.
2. Take over the operation, maintenance, and management of the treatment plant.
3. Rewrite the agreement between the City and the County to clearly define duties and responsibilities for both the City and the County.
4. Hire a waste water treatment engineer for the Environmental Health Department and make the engineers primary function administration of the Persigo Wash Sewer Treatment Plant.
5. Assign one person (an existing employee) in the County to be responsible for review and approval of the treatment plant operation, maintenance, and administration as well as expenditures from the sewer fund.
6. Require that any expenditure from the sewer fund be approved by the commissioners.
7. Give the operation of the plant and maintenance of the system to a qualified private firm capable of doing the work.
8. Hire a qualified engineering firm to analyze plant operations and recommend changes.
9. Hire a qualified financial analyst or an acceptable firm (i.e. Merrill Lynch, Boettcher, E. F. Hutton, etc.) to examine sewer funds and recommend changes with respect to bonds, plant expenditures, capital improvements, user fees, etc.
10. Create a capital improvements program that can be agreed to by both the city and the county.
11. Investigate and implement methods by which infiltration problems can be alleviated.

12. Examine the qualifications of the current plant operators not just by the type of license the operator has but by the actual abilities the operator has and implement an educational program for the operators.

13. Get copies of all correspondence, agreements, and any other documents that relate to the Persigo Wash Sewer Treatment Plant, and require that the County be sent copies of any future documents that relate to the subject. (Perhaps send these papers to the County employee assigned to administration of the plant)

14. Ask for Federal help in the form of advise and problem analysis with respect to solutions for the problems.

DISCUSSION:

The problems surrounding the Persigo Wash Sewage Treatment Plant are somewhat complex and have taken years to develop. It is likely that the solution or solutions will be as complex as the problem and require a significant amount of time to develop and implement. Most of the solutions suggested above have some merit but they have not been rated at this time and there is no recommended solution. It will be necessary to form a group of County personnel to pursue solutions to the problems and recommend solutions to the commissioners or the entity with the power to implement solutions.

The plant has operated to date without the continued involvement of a wastewater treatment engineer. Attempting to operate any piece of equipment strictly by the book means that resolution of any problem is only possible if it is in the book. In this case the subject is a very complex network of balanced mechanical and biological systems. You may not assume that an operator with a license that certifies him/her to run the plant also guarantees that the operator has the background to handle the complex problems that are associated with a plant of this type.

The Counties lack of involvement in the management, and operation of the plant is at best in direct conflict with the apparent financial liability of the County for the plant. The result of this financial liability is that the County as whole, not just the City residents, will pay for poor decisions that are made at the plant. This would seem to imply a responsibility for protection of the needs of the residents outside the City limits by the County government.

The agreement and the supplemental agreements between the City and the County for operation of the Treatment Plant do not adequately describe the responsibilities for either entity. This leaves some question as to what is expected and provides the potential for problems when either the City or the County desires a change or improvement in either plant operation or financial management. The City and the County governments answer to two different groups of people with significantly different interests. This alone creates the potential for conflict between the two governments as each attempts to protect the desires of the people they represent. Without a solid contractual base there is no real recourse to obtain solutions to problems except for verbal arguments that are often lengthy and unproductive. Rewriting the agreement with all of the requirements, deadlines, responsibilities, and duties associated with either the City and/or the County would seem reasonable at this time. Penalties for not complying with the agreement should also be stated clearly.

Solving the problems associated with management and operation of the plant will take a considerable amount of time, and effort to ensure that the Counties interests are protected. This should not be done by department heads and administration, who are often forced to divide their time between a great many issues, but rather should involve personnel from the Planning Department, Environmental Health Department, Finance Department, and the Engineering Department. This committee should report their findings for review to Mark Eckert who in turn will pass on the final recommendations to the commissioners.