

City of Sweet Home Wastewater Treatment Plant Testimony
SB 5534
7 May 2021

Senators and Representatives,

Thank you for your patience.

I am Lisa Gourley, Sweet Home City Councilor. With me are Council President Pro-Tem Diane Gerson, Councilor Dave Trask and City Manager Ray Towry. Thank you for inviting us to speak today and considering our request for your help with our Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade in Sweet Home. We thank you for your original allocation in the last biennium that we were not able to utilize due to the cancellation of the bond sales from the COVID pandemic. We respectfully request you again consider allocating that same \$7 million dollars to finance our wastewater treatment plant upgrade.

For background:

Our current wastewater treatment plant has been in service since 1947. Major upgrades were completed in 1974 and 1994. A facility plan quantified a “wet weather capacity deficiency,” that resulted in a 1999 Mutual Agreement Order with the DEQ.

To put it simply, during rain events we estimated 22 million gallons of wastewater sent to the treatment plant per day. The plant can only handle around seven million gallons per day. When the plant reaches capacity, the untreated wastewater is diverted straight to the South Santiam River which adjoins the North Santiam, which empties into the Willamette, which then meets the Columbia. As the first municipality on the river the majority of your constituents are probably downstream from us.

Sweet Home has invested over \$15 million since 2003 to make improvements to the wastewater collection system, significantly reducing the Inflow and Infiltration.

Continuing to pursue this remedy is now at the point of diminishing returns. Expensive pipe replacement projects show little reduction in infiltration of the collection system and compromise our already delicate roads. Further, the aging plant equipment is past its life expectancy and deteriorating quickly. We are forced to address plant deficiencies.

Since we were last here in 2018 Sweet Home has completed a preliminary engineering study focused on rehabilitation and increased capacity that is instead leading us to a single phase, 28.2 million dollar project – significantly less than our original 42 million dollar estimate. We are nearing 90% design completion and are actively engaged with our regulatory agencies to attain approval of the project. That work included structural diagnosis of the plant components and geotechnical study of the soil, all paid for by our community. We have raised our sewer rates to one of the higher rates in Oregon and forecast to have just over \$5 million of rate payer funds

on hand for the project. We have also met with Business Oregon, USDA and our federal elected officials to identify funding options. We are committed to this project.

The median household income of Sweet Home is one of the lowest in the state of Oregon, low enough that every student in Sweet Home grade schools receives free lunch. Over 10% of our public-school children are classified as “homeless.” Historically we have one of the highest unemployment rates in the state.

Our small, economically challenged community has been working diligently to fix our aging wastewater infrastructure but we need your help.

Again, we thank you for hearing us and ask you help us by AGAIN allotting \$7 million for construction of our Wastewater Treatment Plant rehabilitation.