

City of Oak Harbor – Clean Water Facilities Planning

Stakeholder Interview Recap

Triangle Associates, as part of the consultant project team, conducted phone interviews with area residents in the fall of 2010. The purpose of the interviews was to gauge awareness of Oak Harbor's wastewater treatment system and anticipate questions and concerns in advance of the first Public Forum.

Participants were asked questions concerning:

- What they valued about living in Oak Harbor
- Their impressions of the current economy
- How they envisioned for Oak Harbor over the next 5 – 10 years
- Their impressions of current sewer service
- Their primary source for information about sewer and other city services
- Their ideas for best ways to keep people informed about Oak Harbor news
- Their thoughts and suggestions for locating a new wastewater treatment facility and paying for a new system
- Their thoughts on what should be the primary consideration when developing a new wastewater treatment system for Oak Harbor

Over the course of the interviews, certain themes emerged:

- For the most part, interviewees had little knowledge of planning efforts underway to revamp Oak Harbor's wastewater treatment.
- Interviewees were pleased with the quality of sewer service they have been receiving
- Interviewees held common values about living in Oak Harbor – proximity to the water, good place to raise a family, benefits of smaller community (low traffic, low crime rates, easy to navigate, quiet).
- People kept informed by reading Whidbey News Times, watching Channel 10, and word of mouth.
- Primary considerations for building a new facility are that it protects the environment, be cost-effective, and can be easily expanded to serve future needs.
- The area adjacent to Windjammer Park was frequently cited as a poor location for a new wastewater treatment facility.
- A number of interviewees volunteered that they had noticed and appreciated City-sponsored infrastructure improvements.

Participant Comments - Organized by Topic

Benefits of living in Oak Harbor	Current economy	Vision for the future	Impression of sewer service
Close to water. Convenience of city	These are tough times	It will continue to be commercial center for island. More strip mall sprawl. Would like to see revitalized downtown.	No problem with current service but I understand we're at capacity.
Climate. Low crime. Not a big city environment. Accessible.	It seems okay, especially in the outer part of town.	I hope we don't see just a growth in big box stores. I would like to see more pedestrian traffic downtown.	I am worried that old sewer lines are cracked or broken and so there is seepage going directly in bay. There are odor issues with the treatment plant and with pollution in the bay. Effluent quality is not good and it is causing pollution problems. You used to be able to play in the bay. Not anymore. My dog died because of a sewer leak in the bay that nobody was warned about.
Small town	Challenging. Not a lot of economic opportunity for young people	I don't think it will change too much. I don't expect much population growth. The people who come here are looking for serenity.	The service seems fine and reliable.
Low crime. Been here forever. We used to have pristine water but not now. Pollution has really impacted fishing and watersheds.	Seems okay, but old downtown (SE Pioneer Way) is not doing very well except bars and saloon.	I think the city will expand somewhat but within it's current boundaries. The city's future is tied with the Navy.	The service is adequate.
The water, view, small community feeling. Good place for raising a family.	Businesses, at least along Pioneer Way are struggling. But I think it will get better. The City has creative ideas about beautifying the area and changing traffic patterns. Oak Harbor is like a house, it needs to be maintained and renovated. It's been neglected but I see a lot of effort	Air Station should be within the city of Oak Harbor.	It seems fine.

Benefits of living in Oak Harbor	Current economy	Vision for the future	Impression of sewer service
	being made by the City to fix things up.		
Close, open community. Waterfront. Being by the sea.	<p>Hard to say. I do see a lot of maintenance being done by the city and I'm pretty happy with how they're doing.</p> <p>I worry that there is really only one way to get off the island and I think that limits growth.</p> <p>The city is investing too much into downtown. I don't think the tax revenues from downtown merchants justifies it. I'm tired of the squabbling.</p>	I do think things will get better. The city has great plans for the future. We have a lot of aging infrastructure but it looks like an effort is being made to address it.	I've heard the current system isn't really adequate.
Beautiful area. Family-oriented. Quiet. Size makes it accessible. Navy influence means a lot of nice young people in town.	This last year and a half have been bad. Lots of homes going into trustee sales (about 30 per month). OH may not be as hard hit as other areas but it's certainly hurting.	No answer.	I'm fine with it.
Oak Harbor is my life. Lived here for 40 years. Great place to raise a family.	Pretty good. The presence of the Navy provides good stability. We're doing much better than a lot of other places in the country.	No answer	It's expensive. And reliable. I've never had a service interruption.

Primary source for topic information	Recommendations for informing people	Suggestions for locating and/or funding wastewater treatment facility	Most important considerations in developing a new sewer system
City Council meetings	Website. Email me information.	The city absolutely should not have a sewer plant in the middle of town. That plant is a stone's throw away from a kiddie pool. It makes no sense whatsoever.	Environmental considerations - protection of the Puget Sound.

Primary source for topic information	Recommendations for informing people	Suggestions for locating and/or funding wastewater treatment facility	Most important considerations in developing a new sewer system
Newspaper	Work with the service organizations in town. Also there are a number of good locations for posting information: banks, the post office door, the new Whidbey Coffee Shop; Thrive Gym.	The City should partner with the Navy to expand the Ault Field facility. Turn OH's two current facilities into pumping stations. The plant should be on the west side of the island because of the better flushing capacity of the Sound there. From what I've heard, the Ault facility is expandable and uses current technology.	Do it as inexpensively as possible
I read the newspaper and talk to city councilmembers.	Newspaper. Suggest that the City write the article though because the paper usually screws it up.	Best option is to pipe it to Ault Field so the effluent can go into the San Juan De Fuca. Plus it's isolated there... no one will build near a airfield.	Site location and cost effectiveness
I'm active in the Chamber and that's where I get most of my information about what's going on in the community.	Newspaper	The location within a park is wrong. I would expand the lagoon plant. It's close to water and would help keep costs down.	Controlling pollution. Deal with storm water. Outfall should be drained into Chambers Bay because there is better water circulation there.
Whidbey News Times	Newspapers. Word of mouth.	Isolate it. Don't put it in Windjammer Park.	Long-term reliability and expandibility. Cost efficiency.
Channel 10. Newspapers do a little coverage but not much.		Do not put it in Windjammer Park.	
I watch the city council meetings on Channel 10 and I talk to customers who come into my store.		I think you should turn the park location into a transfer station and pump the waste to the Navy site.	
Local newspapers.		I think you should turn the park location into a transfer station and pump the waste to the Navy site.	
		Not in the middle of a city park! Odor control.	
		Seems like the Navy should help	

Primary source for topic information	Recommendations for informing people	Suggestions for locating and/or funding wastewater treatment facility	Most important considerations in developing a new sewer system
		with the costs	
		I think the hook-up fees are supposed to pay for system development charges. I'm hoping there won't be a big spike in sewer rates.	
		The Navy should share in the planning and the costs.	
	People are jaded because they think just a few people in the city are making decisions without there being any real consensus or public input. Some people have a pretty negative feeling about the direction the city is going.	I think you should turn the park location into a transfer station and pump the waste to the Navy site.	