Council Initiates Eminent Domain for New Water Treatment Plant

The Grants Pass City Council voted to file a lawsuit for condemnation to move forward with construction of a new water treatment plant on 9.97 acres located near the intersection of SE “J” St. and SE Mill St., after the council was informed that current negotiations for the property have come to a standstill.

The city has offered to purchase the property for $2,606,000, which is the appraised value of the portion of the property that the city seeks to acquire.

The need for the new plant was established in 2014 after a citizen advisory committee conducted a two-year evaluation of the aging condition of the existing plant and determined repairs to the plant were no longer an option. Built in 1931, the existing plant on “M” Street is quickly degrading after nearly 80 years of continual use.

During the evaluation process the committee studied five total alternatives, using a triple bottom line analysis, including the cost to the community, benefit to the community, and potential environmental benefits of each option. Ultimately the decision to build a new plant on a new site sparked a search of viable locations to begin construction.

In the end, the site at 695 SE “J” St. was determined to best suit the location criteria, while also representing the best economical option with regards to proximity to the existing water intake, required footprint of the new plant, and plans for future expansion to keep up with impending growth.

Today, the city provides an average of 5.5 million gallons of water per day to more than 12,000 connections serving more than 35,000 people. That translates to roughly 3,500 gallons per minute 24 hours per day, seven days per week to meet average demand. Seismic or operational failure of the existing plant would leave the city left to function with only 2-3 days of stored water.

In December 2016, the city council directed city staff to initiate negotiations with the property owners at 695 SE “J” St. to purchase the property.

Appraisers were hired and the property owners granted access to the property for consideration, but a proposed purchase agreement for a portion of the property was rejected, and negotiations continued.

As a result of those ongoing negotiations, city staff then made further recommendations to adjust the amount of land to be purchased from the property owners to include the entire 16.94-acre parcel in order to move the sale forward. That offer was then also rejected.

After more than two years of back-and-forth discussions, councilors ultimately adopted a resolution declaring a public need for the property March 20, 2019.

As negotiations continued, city staff made further recommendations to reduce the amount of land required from the property owners to complete the project, while still allowing the property owners to maintain their current business operations, and a new resolution declaring need for only 9.97 acres of the east side of the property was adopted Jan. 15, 2020.

During this process, cost estimates for completing the new water plant have continued to increase due to inflation, consumer price indexing, and the costs of materials. Projected costs established in 2015 of just under $50 million have compounded at a rate of roughly five percent per year to more than $80 million.

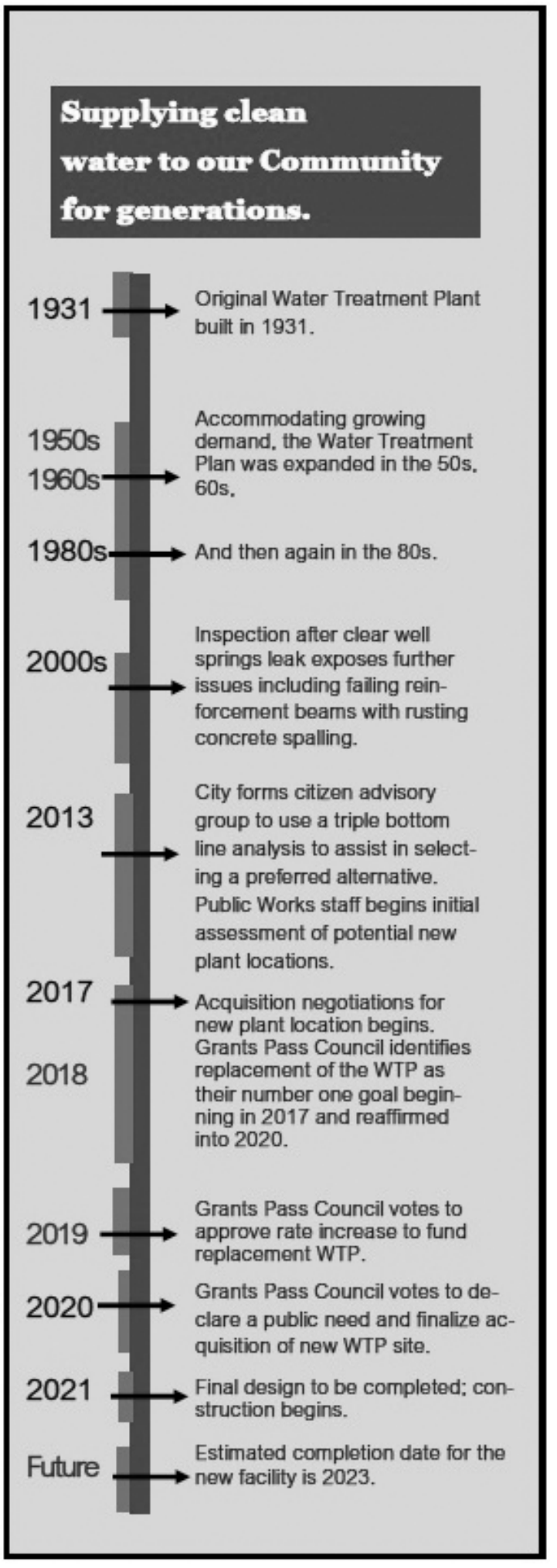
On March 2, council authorized and directed staff to file a lawsuit for condemnation of the property on March 23, when the most recent 40-day offer period matures. Additionally, the council authorized and directed that a contemporaneous motion for early possession also be filed, with an expected possession date of June 30.

Proceedings to acquire property under eminent domain are referred to as "condemnation" proceedings. The process is the exercise of the power of government to acquire private property necessary for public use on the payment of just compensation and following due process of law.

Eminent domain authority is one of the strongest powers given to government, and it is government’s responsibility to use it with extreme care and caution.

Fairness to the property owner is a key part to the utilization of eminent domain. Commitment to the retention of the business at the property to continue operations remains a key part of the planning process.

The council also agreed that city representatives will be available for continued negotiations, including willingness to enter mediation with the property owners in an effort to resolve this matter without the expense of litigation.



Public Works

Council Emphasizes Importance of Public Information on WTP

The recent city council decision to move forward with acquisition of a 9.97-acre site for construction of a new Water Treatment Plant (WTP) calls for regular and timely information to the public about the process ahead.

Replacement of the old treatment plant in a cost-effective and expedient manner is the immediate priority and given the WTP replacement project represents a significant ratepayer-funded investment, it is important that citizens remain informed.

The city council has long emphasized the need for ongoing communications with the public about the importance of the WTP project.

"Letting people know their money is going to good use is just good government and common sense," said Mayor Roy Lindsay.

In response to city council direction, city staff has recently refreshed and updated the Water Treatment section of the city's website. The landing page of that section lists the services provided by the utility. It also provides daily updates on water consumption and Rogue River levels, flows, turbidity, and temperature.

There is even a link to the live Daily Courier Cam located on the Rogue River near Grants Pass Parkway, looking down at the river from the city's water filtration plant across from Baker Park. The cam is one of five live feeds supplied by the Daily Courier from various positions throughout the city. Together, the five cams receive more than 200,000 views per year.

On the main Water Utility page there are links in the box on the left-hand side of the page where site visitors can learn more about bulk water, low-water-use gardening, useful water links, water distribution, water documents, water treatment, water quality reports, water standard drawings, water service installation, the value of water, and water conservation tips.

Additional updates to the website provide additional information about the history of the 89-year-old Grants Pass WTP, and the next steps in the process of the Water Treatment Plant Replacement Project.

People have lived in the Rogue River watershed for at least 8,500 years. In addition to providing world-famous white-water recreation and fishing, water from the Rogue River has supplied the City of Grants Pass with its drinking water since 1888.

Today, the existing plant built in 1931, is among the oldest operating treatment facilities in the state of Oregon. The history section of the website also features a timeline (see sidebar) outlining water treatment activity from 1931 to present day, and into the future.

The WTP Replacement Project section of the website will continue to be updated periodically with new project information as it is available. The most recent update describes the city's Jan. 15 decision to acquire the property needed near the intersection of SE "J" Street and SE Mill Street to build the new plant. It also explains that replacing the existing plant has been a city council top priority for a number of years.

With staff continuing to work with property owners about moving forward with this important project, construction could begin as early as 2021. Testing for hazardous materials left behind by previous uses has already occurred and plans to remove any problems are already in place. Heavy equipment will eventually move in to clear the site for construction, with the goal of the new WTP to be producing high-quality drinking water by the winter of 2023.

Public Works Director Jason Canady has set a goal to provide regular updates, at least every 4-6 weeks, until the new WTP is operational.

Updates on construction progress can be found on the website, here in the pages of GP Now, City Manager Weekly Reports, and the city's social media accounts.

Take a Tour of the WTP

Members of the public are invited to tour the city's Water Treatment Plant to see first-hand how the historic facility operates.

To schedule a tour, submit a tour request form to the Public Works Department a minimum of five business days in advance of requested tour date.

Forms are located online:

www.grantspassoregon.gov/354/Water

All visitors must present valid picture ID (driver's license, state-issued ID or passport). Children need to be accompanied by an adult before gaining access to tour site.

Send the completed form to the Public Works Office, 101 NW A St., Rm 205, Grants Pass, OR, or fax to: (541)479-6765, or email: dphelan@grantspassoregon.gov

THE CITY'S AGING WATER TREATMENT PLANT WAS BUILT IN 1931.

132 Years of Water

The history of drinking water in Grants Pass dates back to 1888

People have lived in the Rogue River watershed for at least 8,500 years.

Water from the river has supplied the City of Grants Pass with its drinking water since 1888. A company called the Grants Pass Water, Light and Power Company was formed in 1893 for the purpose of operating a powerhouse on the river and eventually supplying the city with water, gas, and electricity.

Between 1888 and 1889, a dam was constructed across the river a half-mile west of 6th Street to divert the water from the south bank to a powerhouse located on the north bank. In 1900 and 1901, extensive work improved the dam; however, it would still wash out and then need to be rebuilt.

Early 20th Century

In 1906, the Rogue River Water Company purchased the water system. At that time water was pumped directly from the river and treated with chlorine. It needed to be filtered to make it clear and pleasant tasting.

The powerhouse was operated until July of 1907 when a new pump station was installed 3,000 feet upstream from the 6th Street Bridge.

In 1931, the City of Grants Pass purchased and began operating the water system, and construction began of the current Water Treatment Plant and a reservoir.

New Century

Today, water from the treatment plant is pumped by 13 remote booster-pumping stations and stored in eight reservoirs located throughout the city.

This distribution system is made up of five distinct pressure zones that change as elevation increases and covers the entire city, Urban Growth Boundary, and areas around the Merlin landfill and North Valley industrial complex.

Liquid chlorine is added at strategic points in the distribution system to maintain the chlorine residual that is mandated by the Oregon Health Authority - Drinking Water Program and Federal Guidelines.

High water quality is ensured through continuous monitoring and by bacterial, chemical, and radiological tests taken daily from numerous sites throughout the distribution system.