

Avoid Wastewater Drama! Vote “Yes” On Proposition 441

We love drama on the stage, in novels, and sometimes in love affairs. As a community, we just don’t want drama with wastewater!

We all expect potable water to be available 24/7/365 and for wastewater, i.e., what goes down our drains and toilets, to magically disappear without public nuisance, without health hazards, and without much thought on our part. A “Yes” vote on Proposition 441 will provide the funds to help keep it that way.

Water infrastructure lasts a long time ... wastewater treatment plants are typically designed for 30-year lives ... but they don’t last forever. Flagstaff’s Wildcat Hill Water Reclamation Plant was built in 1971 and the Rio Plant was built in 1993. In other words, they’re at or beyond their design lives. Thanks to community water conservation, they’re still within their liquid flow design capacities. However, the plants are reaching their limits for neutralizing and handling solids. There’s little or no remaining capacity in the system to allow maintenance downtime or to deal with equipment failures; nearly everything needs to work all of the time.

Jackson, Mississippi is a recent high-profile example of the dire consequences of under-investment in water infrastructure. There, under-investment in their potable water system left residents with boil water mandates and with low or no water pressure for months, eventually requiring emergency intervention.

By its own guidelines, the City of Flagstaff is tardy in seeking funds for wastewater infrastructure. That’s likely due to upsets created by COVID and by recent retirements and turnover at the highest levels of Water Services. That makes it all the more imperative that voters pass Proposition 441 now.

Twenty-nine million dollars of the \$57 million in bonds authorized by Proposition 441 will fund high priority wastewater infrastructure improvements (the balance of funds will be used for wildfire firefighting equipment and for storm water flood-prevention infrastructure). Here are the wastewater highlights:

- Two additional digester vessels ... the sites where beneficial microorganisms digest what we send through the pipes to them;
- Reliable, high efficiency intake pumps and turbo blowers designed for better load-tracking and to provide a return on investment in reduced energy consumption;
- Turbines enabling the city to generate electricity from the methane produced by digesting wastewater solids. This is cost effective and supports the Flagstaff climate plan;
- Backup generators at the Rio de Flag plant to maintain operations through power outages.

Bonds are the best way to pay for these improvements. Rather than imposing a rate-spike to pay immediately, it's best to spread the payments over the service life of this long-lived capital equipment. Citizens receiving the benefits will pay off the bonds through time.

Believe it or not, Flagstaff discharged raw sewage into the Rio de Flag south of Butler Avenue as late as 1955. Let's not inadvertently return to the bad old days through lack of investment in this fundamental city service. Please vote yes on Proposition 441 for the preventative investments needed to keep our wastewater system running, to preserve human and environmental health, and to avoid drama where it's not wanted!

The Flagstaff Water Group:

Robert Vane

Bryan Bates

Ward Davis

George Kladnik

John Nauman