

Progress Toward the Solution

Thank you, New Times, for this opportunity to present the facts regarding the Los Osos Wastewater project. Unfortunately, Ron Crawford's "Problems with the Solution" (New Times, July 6) misrepresented the project's status and costs.

The Los Osos Community Services District's (LOCSO) approach to this 20-year problem is still more economical, will achieve all phases of the project sooner, and offers broader environmental benefits than the former County project. It is important for our community to continue to work together to solve Los Osos's wastewater

sound, after substantial interaction with RWQCB staff, we proactively offered to collect the entire community (within the Prohibition Zone) rather than enter into a long-drawn-out dispute that would add delays and costs.

- **Odors.** Odors are a concern with any wastewater project. We have chosen an advanced ponding technology with a 30-year track record of no odors. Our technical experts agree that, because of anaerobic and aerobic biological processes, odors will not occur.

- **Project design.** The LOCSO employs wastewater experts to accomplish many

information will soon be available at www.lososcsd.org. We post agenda notices in nine public locations throughout the community, and hold Saturday office hours so people can come talk to us about the project. In June all property owners received a newsletter describing the project, its location and costs and benefits.

- **Fines.** The RWQCB is NOT considering levying fines against Los Osos at their meeting on Friday, July 14. They will be receiving a routine status report. The RWQCB realizes that the LOCSO project is actively addressing its water quality concerns.

- **Withdrawing approval after construction.** Once the RWQCB and State Water Resources Control Board has committed to approving and funding the project, they will not withdraw their approval. This is not a regulatory or political reality after a project is completed. LOCSO's discussions with the RWQCB's staff have shown the Regional Board staff to be supportive of our project. We are working out the details to resolve the nitrate problems. They are supportive of having this wastewater project proceed.

- **Environmental benefits.** Our project will treat the collected wastewater to exceptionally high standards for irrigation and for recharging our groundwater, reducing nitrate pollution, providing opportunities for aquifer resupply, and eliminating the need for imported drinking water.

- **Other benefits.** Although not funded by the wastewater project, the location called the Resource Park provides a badly needed community park, a botanical garden, and 3.7 miles of trails.

In 15 months, the LOCSO has done more than just work on the wastewater project. It hired staff, took over the operation of the water company and emergency services, set up an office, hired consultants, and developed operational policies and procedures. In March 1999, the LOCSO Board voted to take on the wastewater project and by June the State Water Resources Control Board voted to give the Los Osos project a \$47 million low-interest loan.

The public is invited to LOCSO Wastewater Committee meetings on the second Wednesday and fourth Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. at the office, 2122 9th St., Los Osos (528-9370). LOCSO meetings are the first and third Thursdays at 7 p.m. at South Bay Community Center, and they're open to the public as well. A

Pandora Nash-Karner is vice president of the LOCSO, chair of the Wastewater Committee, and a member of the Solution Group. In 1999 she was named, along with her husband, Gary, as Los Osos Citizen of the Year. Bruce Buel, who has 22 years' expertise in managing California special districts, is general manager of the Los Osos CSD.

Complex project goes through a morphosis from concept to reality—normal, healthy, prudent evolution that is symptomatic of a 'problem.'

issue. We are in the process of refining the project to achieve the community's goals of affordability, effectiveness, and timeliness. Any complex project goes through a metamorphosis from concept to reality—a normal, healthy, prudent evolution that is not symptomatic of a "problem."

Mr. Crawford's article is misleading, incorrect, and in need of clarification. He starts by accepting the County's published estimate of their project cost. He ignored the information uncovered during the last two years on real costs and the timeframe of the County project. Our consultants, some of whom are former county consultants, have proved that the County's project would have cost substantially more than \$70 million, and was nowhere near ready to be built. The State Water Resources Control Board (RWQCB) staff has informed the LOCSO that the County's project report was "incomplete and rejected twice." A low-interest State Revolving Fund loan would not have been granted to fund the County's project, and they would have been required to abandon and redesign their project, seek outside (and much more expensive) financing, or pay for the additional requirements out of the County's General Fund.

- **Project cost.** "nearing \$75 million." Wrong: \$55 million. The LOCSO is aggressively pursuing grant funds to help offset project costs, and the new state budget includes \$1 million for our project.

- **Draft Wastewater Project Report.** Prior to submitting the Report to the RWQCB in January, LOCSO supplied its staff with a rough draft for review. They were helpful in identifying chapters that needed more information and issues that needed further study. This interaction is part of the normal course of working with a regulatory agency. Subsequent to the final submittal of the report, the LOCSO resolved the major issues raised by RWQCB staff. Executive officer Roger Briggs has accepted our report.

- **Partial sewerage.** Yes, one of the RWQCB staff concerns was an issue they had with the County—that of sewerage or collecting only a portion of the community. LOCSO's consultants believed that collecting the majority of the community would achieve the state's water quality objectives at a lower cost. While we still believe that partial collection is technically

tasks. They are currently assessing the project and project alternatives, costs, funding sources for the project, and assurance of the project's regulatory compliance.

Delays. The LOCSO encountered a five-month delay waiting for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) to grant us permission to test the suitability of the treatment and disposal sites. This delay was caused by the volume of work currently being processed through the USF&WS, which is charged with enforcing the Endangered Species Act. This was well-documented to the RWQCB staff, and they fully understand that this delay was beyond our control. The County's project would have faced the same delay.

- **Mitigation costs.** Federal and state regulatory agencies require environmental mitigation to avoid or lessen impacts resulting from the installation of any wastewater treatment facility. Mitigation may be more expensive than expected, but its costs will not be known until the impacts have been identified in our project Environmental Impact Report, to be published in November. The County project's mitigation costs were never officially defined by the agencies, and those costs remain unknown.

- **Community support.** The LOCSO has held numerous town hall meetings to discuss the project and answer questions. Reaction has been very favorable. Members of the public seem delighted that the center of Los Osos will look like a beautiful aquatic park. We're committed to including the community in the process. The LOCSO operates cable channel 59 and all district meetings are rebroadcast at 1 a.m., 9 a.m., and 6 p.m. daily. Project

SUMMER

SALE



Still plenty of incredible deals — including discounts on special order furniture!

MERIDIAN
FURNISHINGS, FLORA AND FINE GIFTS

952 Higuera Street • San Luis Obispo, CA • (805) 545-8001