

THE TRIBUNE
EDITORIAL BOARD
Chip Visci
Publisher
Bill Moran
Opinion Page Editor
Sandra Duerr
Executive Editor
Stephanie Finucane
Associate Editor
P.O. Box 112, 2025
S. Ingomar St.
San Luis Obispo,
CA 93406
Phone: 781-7852
Fax: 781-7905

SCHEDULE OF COLUMNISTS						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Victor Davis Hanson	Dan Walters/Phil Yost	David Brooks	Paul Krugman	Kathleen Parker	Ellen Goodman	Tom Friedman

B6 THE TRIBUNE SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2005 SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIF.

OPINION

EDITORIAL OPINION OF THE TRIBUNE

Osos must go ahead with sewer

Los Osos has grappled with one issue for so long that the community's very name is now synonymous with the word "sewer."

The issue has frothed for more than three decades. Some residents fought a sewer when the town's population was about 5,000. Then, state and federal grants would have financed 88 percent of any project.

Some residents continue to fight a sewer in a town now populated by 15,000. Meanwhile, 30 years of seeking alternative solutions to a standard collection and treatment system has increased the cost of a sewer to \$150 million, with residents facing the prospect of \$200-a-month sewer bills.

In response, an initiative called Measure B-05 asks voters if they want a say in whether the community should have a sewer treatment plant. And, if so, how and where that plant should be located.

A brief history

The Regional Water Quality Control Board has held a hammer over the community since 1983, saying Los Osos can no longer discharge its sewage into septic tanks. It's called a cease and desist order.

In 1988, the water board called a moratorium on all new construction pending completion of a sewer. As the county's design progressed (with an estimated price tag of \$71 mil-

Tribune says 'no' on Measure B-05; though the plant's location isn't ideal, further delays will hurt residents more

tion), the residents asked for and received permission from the Coastal Commission to form their own Community Services District in an effort to find a "faster, cheaper" alternative to the county's design.

The newly formed CSD developed a ponding plan at the site of the currently planned treatment plant — right in the middle of the community. After two years, it was discovered that a ponding system wouldn't clean treated effluent to state standards. The CSD then decided on building a traditional treatment plant at the same site on which the ponds were to be built — right in the middle of the community.

When some residents found that the ponding system with its "drop-dead gorgeous" park-like setting had now morphed into a traditional treatment plant, the community's well-guarded political civility went into a free-fall: lawsuits were filed and vicious comments were hurled at marathon CSD meetings.

Future possibilities

Proponents of Measure B-05 say the plant can be moved to a location outside of the community. They say

the Andre property or some other undisclosed site should be chosen.

Unfortunately, the Andre site isn't viable. Pacific Gas and Electric Co. holds a transmission line easement over the property and isn't keen on sharing it with a treatment plant.

So, what happens if Measure B-05 passes with a simple majority?

Here's a possible scenario: The Regional Water Quality Control Board may see this as the last straw in the community's sincerity in cleaning up its wastewater problems. It may assess a \$10,000-per-day fine on the CSD. This, in turn, would bankrupt the CSD, which means the community's governance would return to county oversight. The county would then once again be on the hook for building a sewer. With the costs of steel, concrete and labor continuing to rise in double digits each year, the cost of a county-designed sewer could be considerably more than the current \$150 million price tag. Whether or not the community would lose its millions of dollars in state revolving low-interest loans is unclear.

The bottom line

In the final analysis, Los Osos is

facing a horrible dilemma. Its low-income residents — whether homeowners or renters — will be hurt the most by a \$150 million sewer system.

With property values increasing each year, many older, longtime, lower-income homeowners will be able to finance their monthly bills with reverse mortgages. But there is no question that those on fixed or modest incomes will be hit hardest.

That said, The Tribune urges a "NO" vote on Measure B-05.

The community has been on a quest for a faster, cheaper solution to its wastewater problems for more than 30 years. There simply isn't such a system that can meet the stringent water-quality standards that have been set for the community by the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Is the center of a community the best place to put a sewer plant? It wouldn't be our first choice. However, there's been no solidly identified area outside of town that would be an acceptable and less expensive site for such a plant.

Finally, it's imperative that our local legislators, from state Sen. Abel Maldonado to Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee to Rep. Lois Capps, search every avenue to secure financial relief for the town's economically fragile residents, who will have to weather what will surely be rough fiscal waters ahead.

SANDRA DUERR

ASK THE EDITOR

Tell us how we're doing on accuracy

As I've mentioned before, we have been regularly contacting sources in our stories since June 2004 to find out whether we quoted them correctly — and in the proper context. It's part of our ongoing effort to achieve both accuracy and balance in our daily news report.



Sandra Duerr is the executive editor of The Tribune.

We share the detailed responses with those staff members involved and the overall findings with you. By doing so, we hope that we are shedding light on our operation and, in the process, earning your trust.

So far, The Tribune has sent out 163 accuracy surveys. It's a job handled weekly by executive assistant Heather Smith, who randomly selects five sources quoted in local stories throughout the newspaper. Sixty-two of the surveys were returned. Of those, 46, or 74 percent, called us "very accurate." The remaining 16, or 26 percent, offered constructive criticism on how we could improve. Last month, for example, 17 people, selected randomly, received the survey. Of those, eight returned it. These offered:

Countdown on community in Watson's valley

VOICES

Letters and Commentary from the Central Coast and beyond

SANLUISOBISPO.COM

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2005

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ON THE LOS OSOS SEWER

THE TRIBUNE B7

'Is the center of a community the best place to put a sewer plant? It wouldn't be our first choice. However, there's been no solidly identified area outside of town that would be an acceptable and less expensive site for such a plant.'

IN FAVOR OF THE PROPOSED SEWER

Tribune editorial, Sept. 4

Los Osos has few options

A rational argument
I want to thank you and honor your integrity for acknowledging the double bind that the community is up against; that there are wishes and harsh bureaucratic realities; that the community had achieved a greater level of unity when we opposed the ponds; that we have sunk to a grievously shameful level of disrespect toward one another rather than the state of community that we moved here to be a part of.

Please continue to help the readers of our county remember that in the face of many diverse wishes for and against this project, there are, in truth, very few options to meet the stringent demands from multiple governmental agencies.

Dave Mayfield
Los Osos

The only viable solution

Thank you a million times over for your Los Osos sewer editorial, which accurately summarized the situation here. I, for one, want to move on with the only viable solution to our problem — a new sewer in town. The opponents to this project frighten me, and I hope they are defeated soundly in the upcoming special election.

Michael Johnston
Los Osos

Join the New World

You can't be thanked enough for Sunday's editorial, urging Los Osos to join the New World by recommending a "no" vote on Measure B-05. If a modern sewer system is

Richard and Nancy Leslie
Los Osos

not built, then I think the community has every right to change its name to "Dogpatch." It would be deserved. I urge the recall candidates to step away from their ill-advised path of community self-destruction. The Sunday editorial rightly notes the plight of the community's low-income residents. These are people we do need to help. Here's where our national lives could collectively gain financial relief: Let's channel our energy in that direction.

The controversy over location of the plant is a red herring. I wonder what the opponents would come up with if Rep. Lois Capps found the money tomorrow to cover the entire cost for everything as now proposed by the Los Osos Community Services District? That would be an interesting dilemma for recall supporters. I urge you to write another editorial, soon, recommending a "no" vote on the recall. If the recall fails, then I think Los Osos does have a brighter future ahead.

Lee Ferrero
Los Osos

Editorial tells it like it is

We were surprised at the great editorial you wrote in Sunday's Tribune. We thank you for telling it like it is here in Los Osos.

Thanks again for your editorial. We can certainly use that kind of information.

Jim and Audrey Hensley
Los Osos

Too many safety risks

I disagree with the Sept. 4 editorial, "Osos must go ahead with sewer." I support the sewer, not the plant location. As an engineer, I consider the health and safety of the community must come first. Human waste is a known harmful substance and must not be processed in the center of town. The site is too small to address the necessary design requirements. It was purchased outright before receiving the final construction permit, which is suspicious and very unusual for a public project. The Community Services District has tried to force-fit the plant. It has too many technical shortcomings.

The sewer poses liquefaction risks to homes. A natural disaster, such as heavy rains or earthquake, will exacerbate the risks and pollute the bay. It is wiser and cheaper for Los Osos to correct the serious errors now. The cost to relocate later will far exceed the current threats of fines. We just learned our lesson in New Orleans. Los Osos, vote "yes" on Measure B and fix the sewer now!

Pravin Bhutta
Los Osos

Solution isn't so simple

The Sept. 4 editorial in the Tribune regarding the Los Osos sewer is appalling. You make it sound so simple: Vote "no" on the initiative and everything will be hunky-dory? Seniors can get a reverse mortgage? Local legislators "searched all avenues"

OPPOSED TO THE PROPOSED SEWER

for fixing?

Are you kidding? Seniors shouldn't have to mortgage homes to pay for a sewer! Our Community Services District tells us they've already tried to get funds. So, now they are building first and will try again to find money to pay for it? Good luck on that. The state is broke, and the federal government is mired in debt, has a billion-dollar-a-day war going on in Iraq, and now has to rebuild the entire coast of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Some facts you may have forgotten are 35 percent to 40 percent of the sewer district is considered low income. Only part of Los Osos pays for the sewer, but the whole town votes on the recall and site initiative. We need to vote "yes" on the recall and "yes" on initiative B in order to return control of our future to us.

Ginny Dobias
Los Osos

Los Osos deserves better

The subtext of The Tribune's Sept. 4 lukewarm editorial was interesting: Yes, the Los Osos sewer is a bungled bad deal all round but just roll over and take it because enough already we're tired of hearing about it.

On Sept. 27, the residents of this community will finally have their only chance to decide if they want to be known as a community that didn't care enough not to end up with an industrial-size sewer treatment

plant in the middle of itself. Or whether it's a community that thinks it deserves a bit better than tired expediency.

Ann Calhoun
Los Osos

Editorial is biased

To the irresponsible editor of The Tribune who could not even put his or her name to the Sept. 4 editorial:

How dare you poke your nose and give a biased opinion on something you are not fully informed about? Do you know that they will be pumping 800,000 gallons a day of water into the Broderick hill site? They will do so, not for one week, or one month, or for one year, but forever. How long do you think the earth will be stable before it starts to slip or seep? Do you realize they will be trucking human excrement by the truckload through our town and depositing it in Santa Maria forever? You do know that this project will be financially devastating for thousands of families, yet you think this is going to be good for Los Osos. Are you going to find low- and medium-priced housing in San Luis for all of these families?

Your job is to keep us informed, not to give biased opinions after being provided by the Community Services District and the developers. We have a good alternative. Come to the recall office and get the facts, not the propaganda from the general manager.

Marlene McQueen
Los Osos