

Monte Rio/Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project & Feasibility Study Update

June 29, 2024, Community Meeting - Summary

Introduction

On June 29, 2024, a community meeting was held to discuss the Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project for the lower Russian River area of Monte Rio and Villa Grande. Approximately forty-three community members participated in the meeting held at the Monte Rio Community Center. Several agencies participated in the meeting including Sonoma County Supervisorial District 5, Sonoma County's Administrator's Office Division of Climate Action and Resiliency, Permit Sonoma, and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. They were also joined by consultants Brelje & Race who are conducting a feasibility study for the project and presented wastewater alternatives to advance a solution for the Monte Rio and Villa Grande area.



The purpose of the meeting was to continue the discussion about the wastewater efforts in Monte Rio / Villa Grande, including the wastewater alternatives being considered through the feasibility study. Below are the objectives of the meeting:

- Provide a regulatory update pertaining to septic systems
- Present the consultant's Alternatives Analysis
- Obtain input and feedback from the community about the alternatives presented
- Hold a Q&A panel for participants inquiries and comments

The meeting was facilitated by MIG and included interactive live polling questions that participants answered using their smartphones.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Sonoma County Supervisor Lynda Hopkins shared opening remarks about the project. She explained the importance of the project and shared the history of earlier efforts to try to resolve septic wastewater impacts on the Russian River. She discussed the role of Ombudsman Michael Makdisi and his work in finding affordable solutions in the wastewater efforts as well as the team's commitment to support local areas left unserved from the Sewer District.

Overview and Regulatory Update

Clean Water Ombudsman and Analyst for the Sonoma County Administrator's Office Michael Makdisi provided a high-level overview and introduction to the regulatory updates and alternative analysis presentations. After explaining his role, Michael described the project, defined basic terms, and provided a high-level overview of the laws, policies and regulations related to septic systems. He mentioned the significant efforts by government agencies and the Citizen's Advisory Group and noted their continuous collaboration on the pilot project. In a lead-up to the regulatory updates, Michael also highlighted a few key items, such as the cesspool prohibition and the anticipated location-dependent applicability of the rules.

Before the presentation continued, Noé Noyola, community facilitator from MIG, Inc., captured initial questions that participants presented. These questions were answered through the presentation topics or were repeated during the Resource Panel of experts. These questions are listed below:

- Is there financial support for these updates and repairs?
- What is the river segment for this area?
- Site specific questions – what locations are being affected?
- What are the different types of sewers being suggested? Are liquid only sewers being considered?
- Does the County have county-approved OWTS?
- How realistic is the sewer connection?
- What laws affect these OWTS updates?
- Which areas are considered incorporated versus unincorporated?
- Is a drain field a leech field?

Charles Reed, P.E, Supervising Water Resource Control Engineer for the Regional Water Quality Control Board, presented a regulatory update focused on the Basin Plan and Russian River Pathogen Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Action Plan. Charles noted that the TMDL identified failing septic systems as one source of pathogen pollution and described the TMDL's impact on septic system owners and on the community of Monte Rio / Villa Grande. Charles explained the Regional Board's role in the protection of water and how that impacts septic systems. He explained how the State's Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS) Policy

requires a special set of rules to apply when septic systems within certain areas because of the Pathogen TMDL. Charles explained that the County be implementing these special provisions for on-site septic systems through the County's OWTS Manual. Charles then shared a map showing the areas impacted by the special requirements and defined which septic systems would need repair or replacement, focusing on those that need an enhanced dispersal system. Charles shared that Permit Sonoma will be the agency in charge of approving repairs or regulating replacement, but that the Regional Board will be handling a few cases directly. Charles also mentioned that the Regional Board will be looking to fill the information gap about what kinds of systems are being used throughout the county, and shared the updated timeline for the Russian River TMDL, which has been extended to 2025.

Nathan Quarles, P.E., Deputy Director of Construction and Engineering for Permit Sonoma, presented on the County's Septic Regulations, specifically the OWTS Manual. He presented on the both the county-wide provisions as well as special provisions applicable to only certain areas near the Russian River.

Nathan informed attendees that the latest version of the OWTS Manual would be going to the Board of Supervisors July 16, 2024, for approval. He mentioned that the County is still taking comments on the OWTS Manual before going to the board and suggested that participants should review the Manual. Nathan went over provisions for the impaired water bodies. He described that new and replacement systems within 600 feet from the Russian River would need to have supplemental treatment or enhanced dispersal system, unless within the exception. He also talked about a few county-wide requirements, such as three feet of separation to groundwater and three feet of good soil. Nathan then discussed the implementation of septic requirements, and how Permit Sonoma only gets involved if there is a health issue or if someone comes to them for a permit, even with a requested permit, not all development requires well and septic review. He also covered a couple other matters, including reserve area standards and encumbrances, the value of community systems, site constraints, interim provisions, and corrective actions such as a proposed cesspool conversion.

Alternatives Analysis Presentation

Dave Coleman, Senior Principal of Brelje & Race, showcased the Alternative Development and Analysis Scope. The Scope included:

- Alternatives Refinement
- Regulatory Considerations
- Life Cycle Costs Analysis, Governance/ Management
- Recommendations of a preferred Project

Dave introduced Sophia Grubb, Project Engineer with Brelje & Race, who is one of the authors of the Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis to further discuss the alternatives.

Sophia Grubb presented on the first Alternative: Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems including issues related to design criteria, and alternatives for repair or replacement of systems. The systems she presented as part of the first Alternative included cluster septic systems, mound systems, bottomless sand filters, and subsurface drip systems. She also presented participants with the parcels each system would fit best. Sophia continued to describe the two options for supplemental treatment which include aerobic treatment units and waterless toilets. Sophia reviewed the site evaluation and capital costs of each system type ranging from \$34,000-\$142,000 plus additional operational and maintenance costs. She then spoke about potential governance or management agencies for this alternative, which would likely require approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and would be responsible for community planning or looking for grant funding or routine inspections and enforcement.

Dave continued to discuss the second Alternative for wastewater system which is the Low-Pressure Sewage Collection System. He also presented the areas in the County that the sewer system would be extended to. This Alternative still requires considerations related to capacity and connections to multiple communities. The Low-Pressure Sewage Collection System would range from \$50,200,00-\$53,300,000, plus additional operational maintenance costs. Dave noted that many of the costs for this type of project normally would involve a good amount of public financing and could be implemented in phases. He also discussed governance and management and noted that this alternative would also require LAFCO approval.

Resource Panel – Q&A Session

Agency representatives played the role of a resource panel to answer questions from the community. The panel included:

- Michael Makdisi, Ombudsman, County of Sonoma Administrator’s Office
- Nathan Quarles, Permit Sonoma
- Charles Reed, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Dave Coleman, Brelje & Race
- Sophia Grubb, Brelje & Race

Questions, comments and answers from this portion of the meeting can be accessed immediately through the video recording.

Next Steps

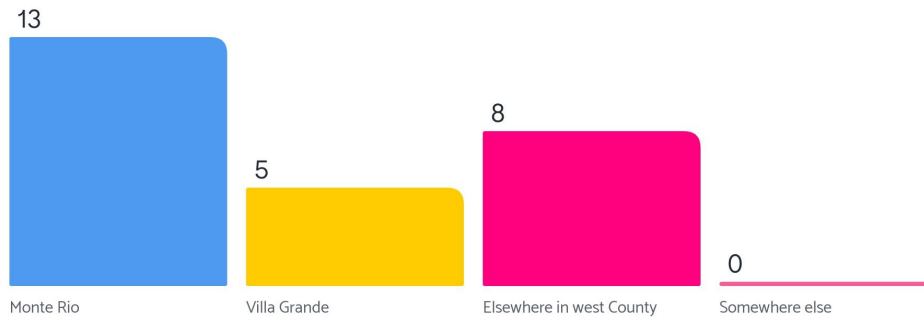
At the end of the meeting, Ombudsman Michael Makdisi provided information and resources. He highlighted a few upcoming events, such as the anticipated hearing about the Pathogen TMDL Action Plan in Spring of 2025. He suggested steps, including ways to participate and engage. He mentioned the next steps for the pilot project, including a presentation to the Board of Supervisors of the Alternatives Analysis report and related community feedback.

Michael also offered his contact information and encouraged the participants to engage with and provide their feedback through the Citizens Advisory Group.

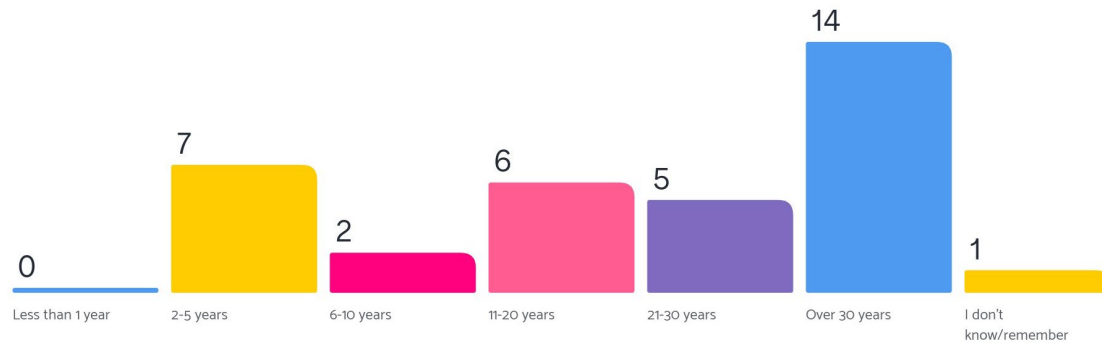
Polling Results

Participants were polled over the course of the meeting through the online tool Mentimeter. Participants scanned a QR code on the screen and responded to questions directly on their phone. The following are the summary charts.

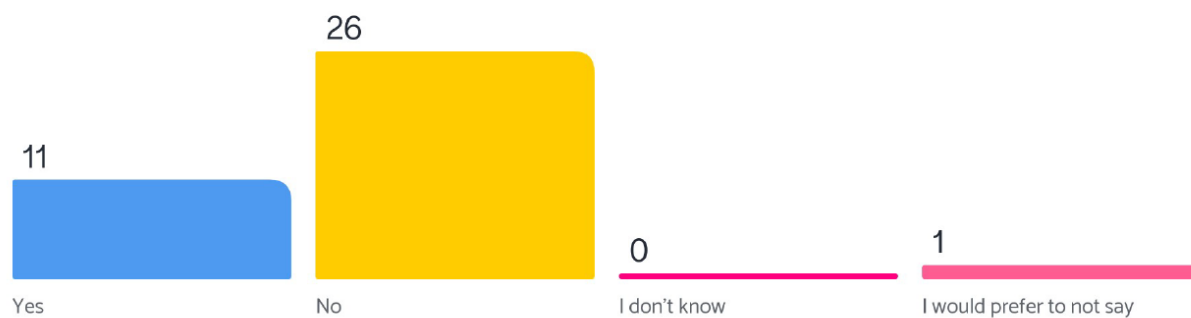
Where do you live or own property?



How many years have you lived in or owned your property?



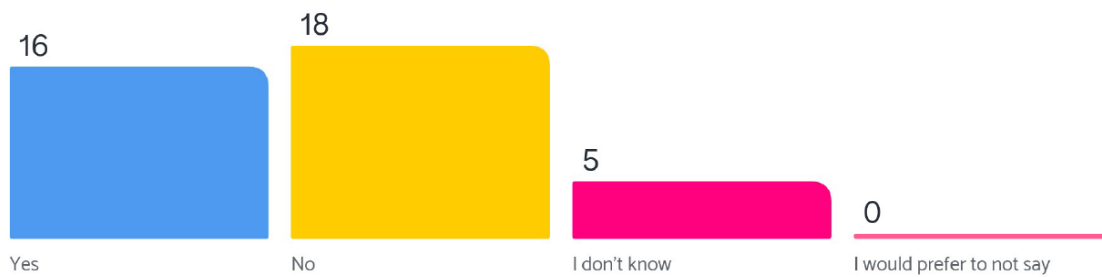
Have ever had to repair your septic system for surfacing of wastewater, plumbing back up, or collapse?



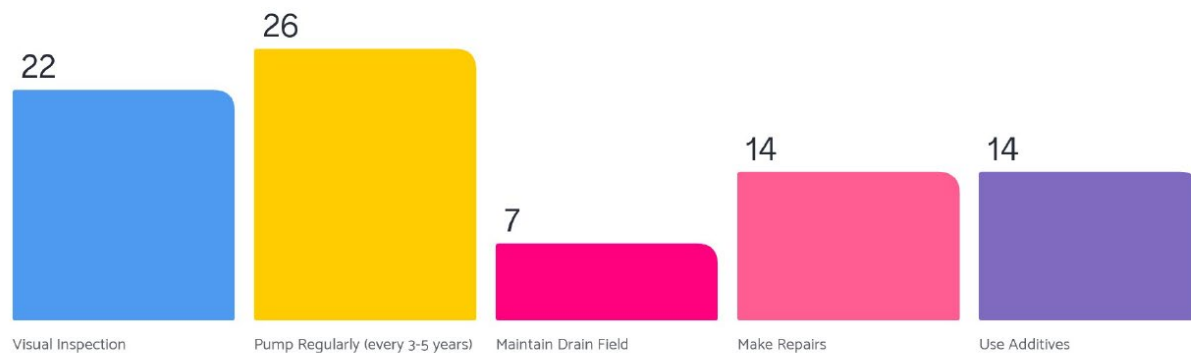
Does your system operate properly (not surfacing, not backing up into home)?



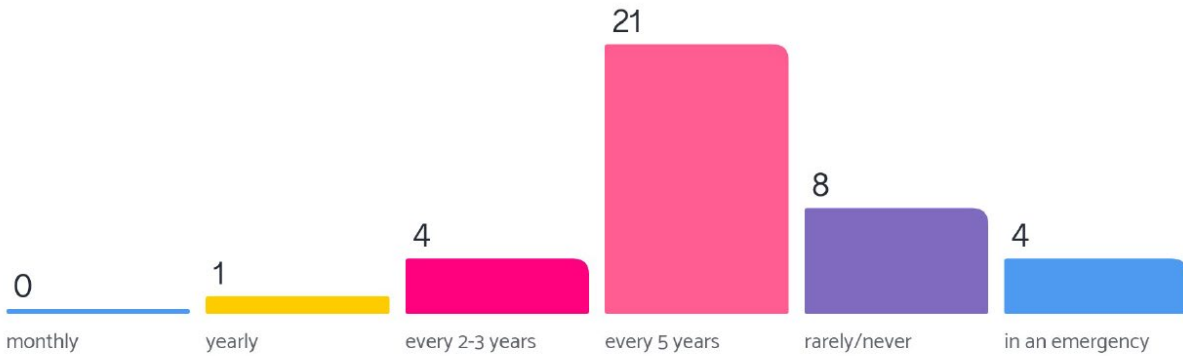
Do you know of any systems in your neighborhood that are experiencing issues or are failing?



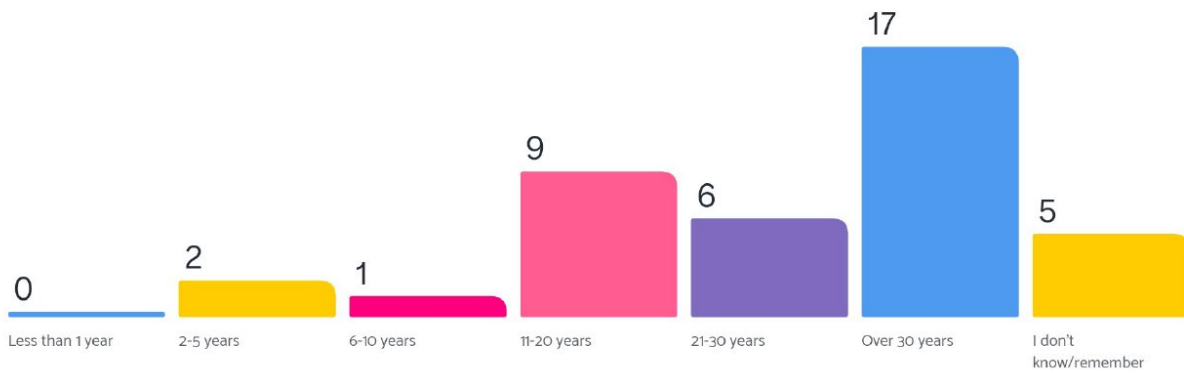
What type of maintenance are you doing on your system?



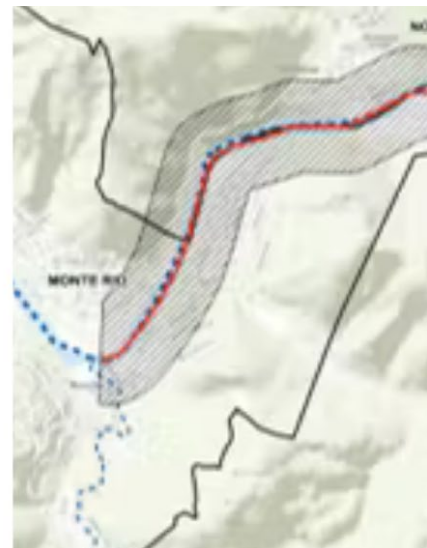
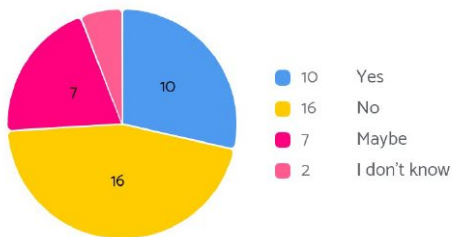
On average, how often are you pumping your system?



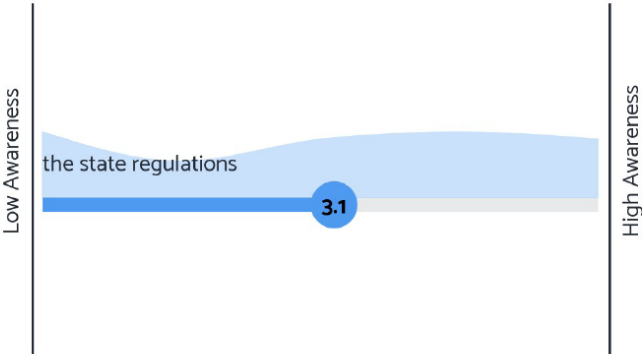
What is the approximate age of your septic system?



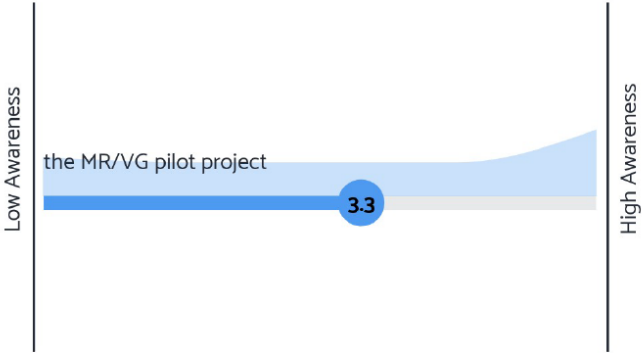
Do you have a septic system in the "Special Requirements" area (i.e., 600 feet from the mainstem River between Fife Creek and Dutch Bill Creek)?



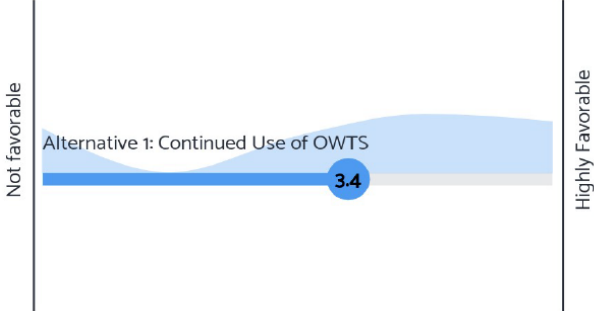
On a scale of 1-5, to what extent were you aware of...



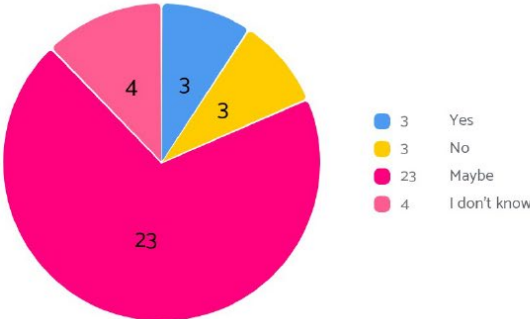
On a scale of 1-5, to what extent were you aware of...



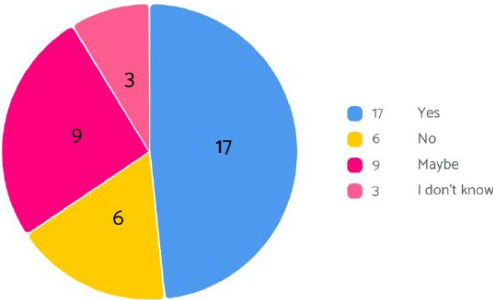
How favorable do you feel about Alternative 1: Continued Use of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems?



Are you open to upgrading your individual septic system with one of the options presented?



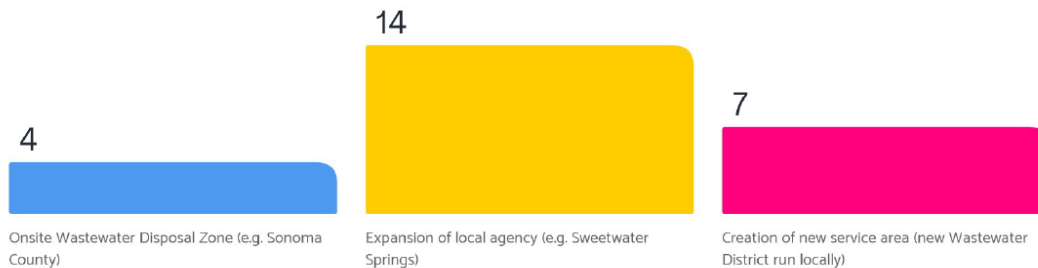
If deemed the best option for your property, are you open to participating in a cluster system?



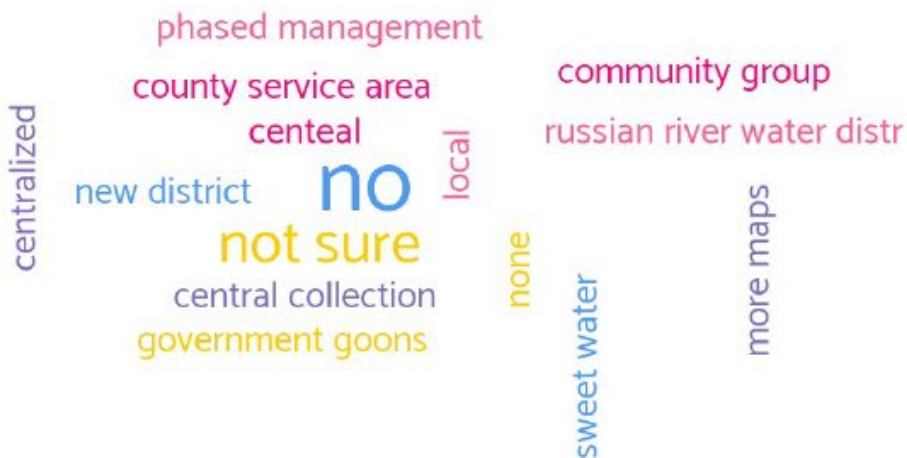
What are your most significant concerns about Alternative 1: Continued Use of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems?



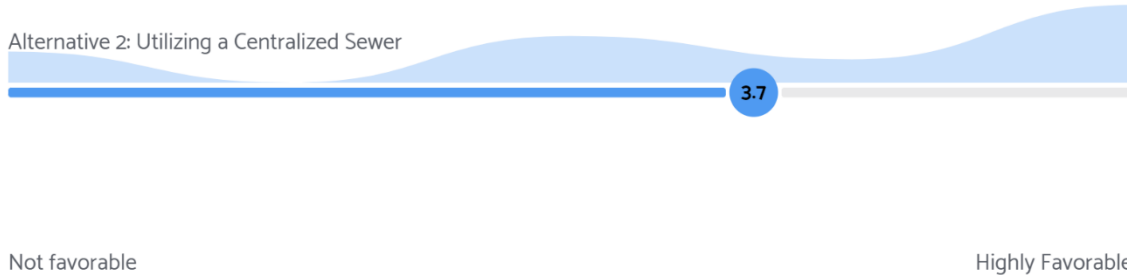
What would be your preferred governance/management entity for Alternative 1: Continued Use of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems?



Preferred governance/management entity for Alternative 1: Continued Use of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems: Any other entities we should consider?



How favorable do you feel about Alternative 2: Utilizing a Centralized Sewage Collection System?



What are your most significant concerns about Alternative 2: the Centralized Sewage Collection System?

38 responses

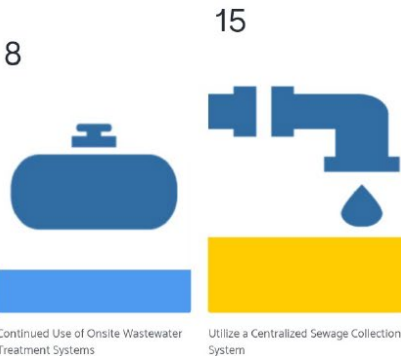


Preferred governance/management entity for Alternative 2: Utilizing a Centralized Sewage Collection System: What other entities we should consider?

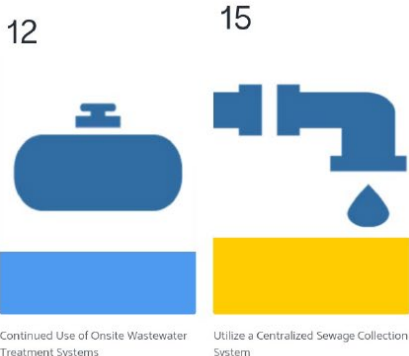
12 responses



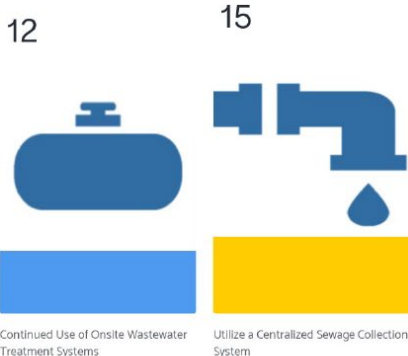
Which of the alternatives is better for the environment and health of the river?



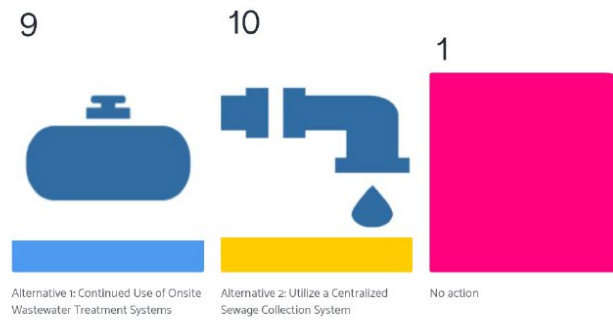
Which of the alternatives is better for the economy of the community?



Which of the alternatives is better for you as property owner?



If you had to choose today, which alternative would you select for the Monte Rio / Villa Grande Study Area?

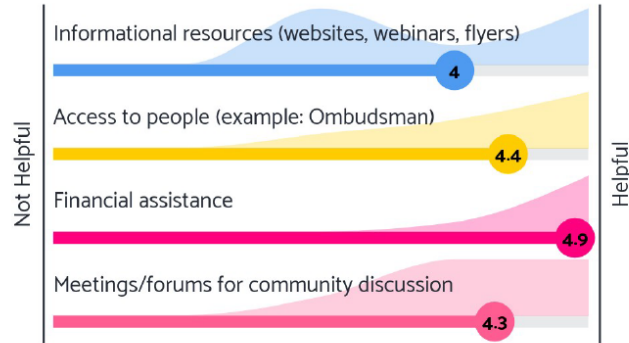


From your perspective, what would happen if we do nothing?

29 responses



What types of resources would be most helpful?



What information are you most interested in learning about?

