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ANSWERING THE FACEBOOK QUESTIONS about the Boonville Water & Sewer projects.

by Valerie Hanelt, Chair, Anderson Valley Community Services District

How did the water projects get started? In 2012 the California State Legislature and the governor passed the "California's Human Right to Water" law which declares that "every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes. Proposition One was passed to provide funds to the California State Waterboard to issue grants for the planning and construction of community water projects. It is best to construct a sewer system AND a drinking water system to ensure "clean water". Prior to this there had been construction funds, but not planning funds. We were literally one of the first communities to appear in the State offices late 2013 to get our application started for a planning grant. This was the first opportunity for grant funds since the 1980's when most communities got "sewered" and built state funded water systems. We had passed this opportunity up, so this is our next chance - 40 years later. This has actually worked in our favor ultimately as we are not upgrading a 40-year-old system - we are benefiting from the advances in technology and installing an MBR. This technology is used by smaller communities such as Gaming casinos, small developments (Boonville is considered a tiny system), and forward military bases). Our first task was to get real data about our ground water contamination. We did not have any funding at that point, so we had to keep our budget small. We contracted with Alpha Labs in Ukiah to do "blind" testing of two areas in Boonville with the highest population density. The Haehl street block and the row of residences on the east side of 128 from (but not including) Boontberry to the Anderson Creek overcrossing. The residents were willing to test - but we would not know which results went with which lot. (Ultimately some results were willingly shared with us by residents). The results of the testing is on our website AVCSO.org. Of the 24 wells tested, 87% tested positive for total coliform, 70% tested positive for E. Coli, and 61% had nitrates over 8.0 mg.L. (These are TERRIBLE results that shock any official who sees them!) This meant that Alpha Labs was required to inform 22 of the 24 owners that their water was dangerous and should not be ingested. The Mendocino Health department sent all parcel owners advisory information. (I want to point out that contamination does not respect property lines) No, private residences cannot be "red tagged". The best well was at Ricard's! He had installed a new deep well with concrete liner in 2003 when he was trying to develop those two parcels. He was not able to continue with development without municipal drinking water, however - so those parcels are 'dead in the water'.

The original municipal boundaries shared the sewer boundaries. This is because we were concentrating on small lots with inadequate separation between wells and septic. However, another goal of the State Waterboard was to incorporate as many PWS (Public Water Systems) as possible into one water district. (Note list of 13 PWS in earlier post). The last PWS was the elementary school so that allowed us to go all the way down AV Way and invite more residents to participate who would not have been eligible under the original funding. This also allowed us to invite Meadow Estates to join our system and plan on abandoning the system that they have (they are deciding that issue now). The funding to incorporate the PWS was added to Proposition One. This meant the project could have enough customers to afford to maintain the systems. Aside: We surveyed the 52 Meadow Estates parcel owners but not enough were interested in joining the municipal sewer system, so those lots will all continue with independent septic systems.

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## Clearing The Water

Dear Boonville residents,

Please go to the Firehouse and look at the maps posted on the outside of the building to see if your property is within the boundary of the Sewer and Drinking Water project. The Sewer is a smaller district comprised of the main “downtown” area of Boonville including the high school and the Clinic on Mountain View Rd. The Drinking Water project boundary is larger and contains the sewer area as well as the Meadow View development (by the airport), AV Way and the Elementary School and the Museum. There are approximately 150 parcels that are in both the sewer and drinking water projects and an additional 100 parcels that will only have access to the drinking water project.

Let's discuss the Drinking Water first.

ALL the easements for the components of this project have been acquired.

- There will be two 150,000 gal tanks (totaling 300,000 gal.) on an elevated parcel on the southern end of town at the end of Hutsell Rd. This stored water will be used for fire suppression and will supply water to the approximately 40 hydrants throughout the system spaced 500' apart.
- Private wells have already been acquired by easement contracts. The wells at the Clinic, Museum, and four private wells have been negotiated, and their owners will be compensated by the agreed upon amount (adjusted for inflation) when construction funds become available. The well field at Meadow Estates will provide 2-4 additional wells and once the new system is operational the CSD will take over the operation of the Meadow Estates water system with all new infrastructure (this agreement is pending). In addition to these eight wells, the CSD will be drilling three new wells along the airstrip. The total number of wells that will supply the water capacity needed is approximately 12 and we are finished with the acquisition of wells. Other than the wells listed above, no other wells will be required for the project.
- Joining the Drinking Water project is OPTIONAL. We are very close to having final rate information but at this time it is estimated that a single-family home would be charged a base rate of slightly under \$80/month. Usage of water will add to that. The approximate cost of 1,000 gal will be around \$5.12/month. The State suggests a single 'family' consumes about 5,000 gal/mo. That means the bill for base rate plus 5,000 gal for this 'average' family would be \$105/mo. If you irrigate outside with your own well and only use the metered water in your kitchen, bathroom, and laundry you would probably use substantially less than 5,000 gal. Currently, we do not have monthly rates for commercial properties, schools, Fairgrounds, or multiple family homes (duplexes, etc). Also, the CSD has to approve the rate structure so the single-family rates I am providing are unofficial numbers - but I feel confident the single family homes can use this information for making your decision as to whether you want to participate.
- As we are a “severely disadvantaged community” the State will be paying for 100% of the infrastructure. In 2019 the cost estimate was close to \$19 million for Drinking Water. We are finishing the last steps of the planning

process and will be applying for the construction grant. The State has been incredibly helpful and supportive - but I cannot promise that this project will be funded.

- If you elect to sign a contract to join the drinking water project (coming late this year) you will be provided with a meter box (next to street) as well as a lateral to ONE residence on your parcel. There are a lot of parcels with multiple residences so the owner will have to deal with the pipes to the other residences. The path the lateral takes from the meter box to your home hookup is decided between you and the contractor. If you have a commercial property, there is some question about whether you will have to pay for the meter and laterals. Many of our commercial properties have residences on them so we are negotiating to have those residences supplied with a meter box and lateral which would vastly simplify hooking up the commercial buildings on those mixed lots.
- Commercial parcels also have the option of not participating. The confusion is probably whether the commercial parcel is a Public Water System (PWS). We have the following PWS in Boonville: Clinic, High School and Elementary School, the Fairgrounds, groceries with delis (AV Mkt and Boontberry), restaurants (Disco Ranch, Redwood Drive In, Boonville Brewery, Farrer building food service, General Store, Boonville Hotel, Pennyroyal). Two PWS are now out of business (old Lauren's and the Pik&Pay). In about 2018 the Division of Drinking Water informed these PWS that, as it was probable that a municipal drinking water system would be installed, they should continue to do their monthly testing and submission of scores/mitigation of their systems to ensure safe water for their customers. Once the CSD system was in place they would not have to continue testing their water as that would be done by the municipal system. However, if any PWS decided to NOT join the water project then they would have to resume the permitting approval process with the Division of Drinking Water. This would require on-site storage of water (amongst many other requirements) and continued monthly testing. We had one PWS indicating some reluctance to join but every other PWS is anticipating much less hassle, red tape, and expense in their future.
- If you elect to join the Drinking Water system you will not pay for any infrastructure. When the system is up and running and you turn on your tap you will start paying your monthly rate which will include usage. The monthly bill is the only expense you will have. (An aside here, your property taxes are unaffected).
- If you do not elect to join at the outset (when the infrastructure is provided by the State Grant) there would be substantial expense to join later. You would have to arrange for and pay the construction costs to connect to the main line with a meter box and lateral(s). You will also have to pay for the County permit to do this. You will have to pay to become a member of our system and set up your account which includes our inspection of the work done to ensure it has been done correctly. The engineers estimated two years ago that these costs could come to \$30,000. That is why some property owners without a residence on their lot are electing to have a meter box installed so that they can develop in the future. They would pay the monthly charge of the base rate (about \$78/month) to keep their options open and avoid the high costs of installing water lines later.
- Capacity of the system. The State will pay for the infrastructure to provide enough water for 100% of the residents who sign up to be customers. This means we cannot guarantee that we will have enough capacity for anyone who wants to join later. You might be willing to pay the substantial costs, but we might not be able to accommodate you.

Now the Sewer system.

We are acquiring a 20-acre site for the treatment plant and leach field right in town. The owners have agreed on the sale when the construction funds are available. The estimated cost in 2018 for the Sewer system was \$17 Million. The system we are using is a MBR (membrane bioreactor) which uses microorganisms to produce essentially clean water (secondary plus). There is no pond. The effluent (liquids) are injected into a leach field. The sludge (solids) will be de-watered so that it is simpler and more cost effective to truck from the site. The sludge product at the end of this on-site process is odorless and light (I think it is like a shredded wheat cereal wafer - fluffy and no-smell.) The only visible part of the treatment plant is a 50x100 ft building. There is almost no odor (it's amazing). There would be very limited noise from fans, however, the building will be far back in the 20-acre site. The 2 ½ acre leach field will have a chain link fence around it and it is suitable for a recreational use - some communities use them for a soccer field. How about a dog-walking park? The CSD is studying supplying our treated water for other purposes; it can be used for livestock watering, agricultural irrigation, firefighting, road construction, etc. It cannot be used for hot tubs or swimming pools by code, but reportedly won't hurt you even if you drink it.

The purpose of the State grant is to remove all contaminants within the boundary, so this means there is no opting out. If the sewer project is approved, then ALL parcels in the sewer boundary are required to join. Your septic tanks will be decommissioned (flattened? filled with gravel?). The path of the lateral will be decided between the property owner and the contractor. I do not have the monthly charge for the sewer system yet. We are hoping it will be close to the drinking water rate. There is no change in the rate for usage; the monthly charge is constant for single family homes. (Commercial rates are based on flows, however). You will not start paying your monthly bill until you flush a toilet.

Timeline: we have about one more year of planning. We still have to

- finish the CEQA process (another public meeting is required and the parcel owners in the boundaries will be receiving a postcard announcing that date in the fall),
- get approved to be a Sewer and Drinking Water district by LAFCO (6 months), and then...
- we send you a "rate letter" (called the "218 protest"). This can be considered a "vote" - but it is not a ballot. You will get a letter (two letters if you are in both projects) that tells you what rate you can anticipate paying every month. Your options are: You can do nothing, signaling your acceptance, OR you can send back a "protest" signaling you do not want the project (s) to move forward. If 50%+ 1 protests (76 for sewer and 126 for drinking water) are received, then that project cannot proceed.

The next step is sending in our Construction Grant application. The time required to get to the end of that process is 1-3 years. Once we get the green light, the engineers will finish 100% of the design (6 months) and then it goes out to bid (6 months).

Each project will take about two construction seasons. Sewer would go first but while the trenching takes place (each project is on different sides of the streets as potable water lines cannot be next to sewer lines), the water project is digging wells and installing the tanks and treatment buildings and then trenching while the sewer project is working at the its treatment site. We are very hopeful that installation will be 2027-2028. Caltrans has us

on their schedule with a “Complete Streets” grant to follow the infrastructure with installation of traffic and parking markings, bike lanes and fresh paving. We are very hopeful that we can get additional grants to redo the sidewalk areas with landscaping as well. A public toilet in the “downtown” is highly desirable – which would be made possible by the installation of infrastructure.

Development: Please go look at the map and think about where development could happen within the boundaries. The 150 parcels that will have both sewer and water will have new possibilities to use the space their leach field now occupies. Perhaps those folks would like to have a granny unit (for granny, kids, rental), or would like to have a different sort of building. All your residential lots are R-C (Rural Community) which is a very flexible zoning. Your original municipal water meter and grinder pump will support any capacity the County approves without upgrading. If you have only municipal drinking water you also can have more ‘density’ on your lot which would also allow a granny unit (ADU). Look at the downtown area on 128. How would you feel about a pharmacy? A gift shop? A small hotel? Renewal of our blighted buildings? If development in the sewer boundary bothers you the resource you have is to oppose it in the planning process.

The Water Projects meet the first Thursday of every month at 10:30 AM at the Firehouse. Both projects are updated by the engineers and are available to answer any questions. Please let the CSD know if you would like to be on the distribution list so that you can be alerted to the meetings and the zoom link if you would like to attend remotely.

The water projects have extensive information on the [avcsd.org](https://avcsd.org) website. All minutes and reports/documents/letter/FAQs are there, as well as any social media posts. This post will be on as well.

Additional post 2/16/25

A Comment has come up about the survey conducted by Rural Communities Assistance Corporation (a State Waterboard agency) that assessed parcel owner “interest” in the Drinking Water Project in the summer of 2023. This survey gave us information about the possibility of the number of future contracts we might be able to collect. It also was required to convince the State Waterboard DFA (Department of Funding Assistance) that this was a viable project and worth sinking funds into. The survey was not legally binding and we could not provide rate information. The results of the survey are on our website: <https://avcsd.org/docs/RCACdrinking.pdf>

The survey was separated into the Meadow Estates complex and ‘everyone else’. Meadow Estates (51 parcels) responded with 23 “interested”, 10 “not interested”. We were not able to collect a response from 18 parcel owners. At that point we realized that Meadow Estates was really one entity of 51 parcels in that if they decided to join our system there would be no other options for water supplied to the lots without wells. The final number of ME participants would be determined by the number of lots minus the few private wells should those private well owners decide to depend on their own well and not join the municipal system. We elected not to continue trying to contact the Meadow Estates ‘non-responders’ as the process for determining the number of hook ups in Meadow Estates would follow another process. The rest of the parcels in the Drinking Water boundary amounted to 218 parcels. This survey was sent out in English and Spanish and was followed up by calls and knocking on doors (accompanied by Spanish translator).

Results:

“Yes” 151 (69%)

“No” 48 (22%)

“No response”: 11 (5%) even after calling, and knocking on doors

“Maybe” 6 (3%) The comments provided were typically “it depends on how much it will cost”

We also got several responses that said the property was for sale and it would be decided by the next owner.

The State felt that 69% positive was robust enough to continue. Once the survey closed there continued to be flips from 'no' to 'maybe' after the owner was convinced the survey was not a legally binding contract and they could decide in the future after seeing the rates. These "flips" are not represented in the final report on the website.