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POINT REYES LIGHT

Marin launches Dillon Beach wastewater study

By Victoria Dodge
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Dillon Beach has been engaged in conversations with the county about water needs since late 2018. Now the county is embarking on a wastewater feasibility study starting this month and wrapping up by the end of the year.

The non-commitment project will include public outreach through meetings, workshops and direct communication with homeowners to discuss previous findings, project manager Arti Kundu said.

Dillon Beach was identified by the state's Department of Water Resources effort to target water resource planning and decision-making in disadvantaged or rural communities. A survey conducted in 2019 showed the community supported a feasibility study. The town's 1989 community plan notes that the county strongly encouraged a consolidated sewage system.

"Even more now, water sources and quality are the most important issues," Dillon Beach resident Melinda Bell said. "[The community's] goals are ample clean water, including water at the beach, and wastewater treatment meeting accepted standards. They are waiting to learn their options through the grant-funded study."

A needs assessment conducted in town in 2019 identified both water and wastewater as areas of concern, but the current study is focused only on wastewater solutions. A \$194,336 grant approved by the Board of Supervisors last week will allow the Community Development Agency and Environmental Health Services to study the environmental and operational problems associated with the town's current wastewater system.

Properties served by septic systems are given high priority. They include about 150 small residential parcels in the older village area, a few newer or larger residences in Oceana Drive, the Dillon Beach Resort and about 15 homes on Cliff Street and Bay Drive.

Oceana Marin, the development just north of the village, is served by a sewer system operated by North Marin Water District, the only wastewater system the district runs. Installed in 1971, the system uses gravity collection and pumps waste to a treatment facility consisting of two ponds and a subsurface disposal field. It serves 229 homes and has a build-out potential of around 300 homes, according to a 2015 update to the wastewater system's master plan. In 2000, North Marin clarified its policy on the expansion of wastewater service in West Marin. The five-part resolution states the district would consider expanding once engineering studies, land use consistencies and an environmental review were completed.

The county's feasibility study will look at individual onsite upgrades, cluster systems for small groups of properties that could connect to the existing sewer system and a standalone community wastewater system. Various combinations of collection, treatment, storage and disposal methods will be considered, including graywater systems and innovative technologies.

"At the end of the project, we will have an analysis and comparative review of the various project alternatives in identifying the best wastewater management alternatives for the Dillon Beach Village community," Ms. Kundu said.

In the 2019 survey, Dillon Beach residents expressed interest in creating a public wastewater district, much like the one in Tomales. In that town, more than 80 percent of registered voters petitioned in 1999 to detach from North Marin Water District, which operated the wastewater system at the time. Now the community services district runs wastewater collection and treatment for Tomales, its park and its schools.

Project manager Arti Kundu and Supervisor Dennis Rodoni will hold a community Zoom meeting for Dillon Beach residents from 5 to 6:30 p.m. on Sept. 17. The meeting I.D. is 958 4067 2114 and the passcode is 599912.