

Mendocino City Community Services District
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Dear District Customers and Property Owners,

We are pleased to provide this newsletter and what we hope will be a semi-annual report to update the community on important developments related to wastewater treatment, groundwater management, and water resiliency vital to our community well-being.

There have been many positive developments over the past six months:

- As you all know, **we have finally had a “normal” rain year**, with over 40 inches recorded in the District. As a result, ground water levels have improved substantially. This is evident in the “depth-to-water” measurements taken in May in the 24 District monitoring wells. On average, the readings were two to four feet better than the May readings in the prior three years. While water conservation remains a priority, the MCCSD Board declared in April that there is no longer a water shortage within the District.
- In March, the **Mendocino Superior Court ruled in favor of the District** in a case challenging various aspects of our ground water management program. This program, which was initiated between 1985-1990 following a community vote, MOU with the County, and adoption of local Ordinances, has been challenged in a series of lawsuits brought by property owner Steve Gomes since 2015. We had hoped that this ruling would bring an end to this litigation which, to date, has cost District customers over \$500,000 in legal fees and consumed many hours of staff and Board member time. We recently learned, however, that Mr. Gomes has decided to appeal the ruling, a decision that will impose further costs on District customers. While we prefer to use public funds to maintain and improve services rather than to defend the right to provide them, responding to the appeal will divert much needed resources.
- We have made **progress on a water storage and fire safety project** started in 2022 with the award of a \$4.9 million grant from the State. This project is joint with the Mendocino Unified School District (MUSD) and may involve drilling a few new wells on MUSD property up Little Lake road and expanding the storage capacity on that site by 500,000 gallons. This new capacity will serve as an emergency water supply for the schools, the fire department, the community center, and the village. We thank the MUSD for its leadership in this project and also recognize it for being the only local source willing to supply District customers with safe drinking water at the height of the recent drought.

- In May, **MCCSD launched a new District web site**. It is a little more modern, and we hope you will find it more user friendly. Check it out for regular District updates: ww.mccsd.com. We are always open to suggested improvements. Please bear with us as we work out the kinks.
- Finally, following direction by the State, **MCCSD returned to in-person meetings** as of March 1. We enjoy seeing our friends and neighbors face-to-face as we work to maintain and improve community services. We encourage you to attend when you can. All meetings are noticed on our website.

In other District developments, we remind everyone of the sewer and groundwater **rate increases** that were approved by 90% of District property owners following the Proposition 218 process in 2022. The first of these scheduled increases took effect on February 1, and the second **will take effect July 1**. The combined rate increase is the first since 2015, and is a response to (1) the rising cost of providing District services, (2) the cost of necessary repairs and equipment replacement at the treatment plant which has been in use for almost fifty years despite having a projected lifetime closer to 30 years, and (3) the cost of the Gomes litigation. The staff and Board are working hard to keep costs to customers as low as possible. We have, for example, applied for over \$20 million in grants over the last two years. The rate increases will not generate the \$43 million dollars needed to update MCCDS infrastructure, but it will help cover some emergency repairs and begin to build a reserve necessary to support any future loan applications or bond issuance.

With the State declaration ending the Covid-19 emergency and the welcome rains, **two Mendocino County ordinances have expired**. One (Ordinance No. 4494) had relaxed restrictions on the installation of water storage tanks. The second expired ordinance (No. 4472) had allowed for temporary business modifications including the addition of outdoor dining facilities. If you have installed any new tanks or your business has made any such modifications, please ensure that you remain in compliance with existing County and District regulations. For further information contact the Mendocino County Department of Planning and Building at <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/planning-building-services>.

Like many areas in the county, **MCCSD took hits during the winter storm season**: trees down, roof damages, power outages, electrical equipment damages, high flows, and influent suction lines damages. The operators responded to many late-night alarm calls and did an incredible job to keep everything running. If you see them around, please say thank you.

The small staff at MCCSD continue to work very hard day and night to maintain our aged sewer system, protect the water we all share, be more draught resilient, comply with new State requirements, and provide this community with the best service possible. We appreciate your continued support. We are here to help. Feel free to stop by the office or call if you have questions.

Respectfully,
 Ryan Rhoades
 District Superintendent