

Regional sewer partnership taking shape

Ken Vance Editor | Posted: Tuesday, June 19, 2012 11:15 am

An agreement on a regional sewer partnership was recently made with the goal to support job creation and economic development in Clark County.

Under terms of a recently-signed memorandum of understanding (MOU), Clark County, Clark Regional Wastewater District and the Cities of Battle Ground and Ridgefield have agreed to form a new partnership, the Discovery Clean Water Alliance, by the end of summer 2012.

The alliance would not replace existing sewer providers, but instead regionalize major sewer lines and treatment plants, thus eliminating the need for duplicative facilities in each service area. Customers would continue to receive service and bills from their existing provider. Each provider would pay for its proportional share of wholesale conveyance and treatment costs to the alliance based on actual sewage flows.

“Our citizens are not going to see much of a difference,” said Scott Sawyer, public works director for the City of Battle Ground. “What we had before was a three-way agreement with Clark County and the Clark Regional Wastewater District. We pumped our sewer down to the county-owned treatment plant and we hired the county to take care of the treatment process. We’ve now all joined together to regionalize the process.”

Sawyer said the City of Battle Ground would take partial ownership in the county treatment plant.

“The collection system here in Battle Ground remains the same,” Sawyer said. “Bills will still come from the City of Battle Ground.”

The shared approach would enable partners to manage capital costs through more efficient use of existing sewer capacity and shared funding of future expansions. Financial modeling suggests this would help protect customers from future rate spikes associated with large projects, thereby promoting more stable rates over the next 20 years.

The agreement also protects ratepayers from having to foot the bill for projects that do not benefit them. Any repair, replacement or capital cost would be shared by only the partners who use that part of the system.

Ridgefield’s situation is a little different than Battle Ground’s.

“Ridgefield has a little different situation,” said Steven Wall, public works director for the City of Ridgefield. “We are currently also talking with the Clark Regional Wastewater District and evaluating an option to transfer ownership of our wastewater collection system to the district.”

“Under this new alliance, the Ridgefield treatment plant would be transferred to the new alliance but would still be operated by the city in the first five years of the agreement,” Wall said. “All of the Ridgefield customers would remain Ridgefield customers.”

The partnership also should make it easier to complete infrastructure projects faster and at less cost throughout the regional service area. One example is the Discovery Corridor Wastewater Transmission System along Interstate 5 in North Clark County. A recent feasibility study indicated that providing sewer service in this area could encourage development of multiple employment centers and potentially create thousands of jobs, consistent with

the recently released Columbia River Economic Development Council's Economic Development Plan.

Over the next several months, elected officials from each agency will work together on a "Transition Board" to complete legal agreements, establish financial policies and take other steps toward formal creation of the alliance.

Wall indicated the entire project is currently in the design phase and the estimated cost is \$25 million, \$20 million of which would be paid for by low-interest loans already secured. The goal is to have the new entity operational by 2014.

Additional information about the Discovery Clean Water Alliance is available at www.discoverycwa.org or upon request from the participating agencies.