

Coos Bay doesn't budge on wastewater treatment plans



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COOS BAY — After much deliberation, Wastewater Treatment Plant No. 2 will go forward as planned, much to the dismay of local residents who will have to live next to the new plant.

The Coos Bay City Council elected Tuesday not to make any additional changes to the design of the new facility.

The council was given three new design options to choose from after hearing public testimony regarding the impact of the current designs on residents in the vicinity of the plant site.

The new options added a more cultural motif, including options similar to the structures on the boardwalk, historical commercial buildings and a lighthouse design.

With their properties being affected the most, local residents Yashveer Singh and Linda Pump voiced approval for the lighthouse option, which would have increased construction costs by \$788,548.

The boardwalk and historical commercial designs would have cost an additional \$158,957 and \$113,523, respectively.

Ultimately, councilors did not want to burden their constituents with any additional costs, citing the plant's estimated \$24 million cost.

"We're already raising sewer rates 6.5 percent per year so it's difficult for me to explain just adding a lighthouse feature," said councilor Jennifer

Groth.

While councilor Stephanie Kramer found the lighthouse option more aesthetically appealing, she referenced the city's constrained budget in her decision not to enact any change.

"Unless we could win the lottery, we can't justify the cost," Kramer said.

Community members in the vicinity of the proposed facility had sought alternative design options as a result of concerns over property loss due to the potential odors and visual obstruction of the plant.

Following the [special council session on Sept. 30 in which the city solicited input from the community regarding some of the architectural features](#), Singh was optimistic after he met with Mayor Crystal Shoji and City Manager Rodger Craddock to voice his concerns and suggest alternatives.

"We did get a bit of hope after we proposed adding elements of our coastal culture," Singh said. "But it's apparent to me that they had already made up their minds."

While he had proposed adding the lighthouse design to the facility, Singh cited the wide disparity in the cost of the different options in his reasoning as to why he believed the council was never serious in its efforts to assuage the concerns of local residents.

Pump was especially distraught about the facility given that she was relying on her property value to retire.

"The view was why I bought the house," Pump said. "I'm absolutely heartbroken because my property values are literally going into the toilet."

Pump, who works as a nurse, now believes she will have to work well past the age of 70 in order to retire.

In addition to her concerns over the loss of property values, Pump was also rankled by what she perceived to be deceitful advertising by the city in regards to the aesthetics of the plant.

"When we first received a letter two years ago, it said that the building

would be low, modern and blend into the scenery,” Pump said. “When I look at this thing, it reminds me of a maximum-security prison or a concentration camp.”

While Singh recognizes the importance of the plant, he feels the city needed to take into account how their decision affects local residents.

“If our city is going to continue to grow, I understand it’s something we’re going to need,” Singh said. “I’m the one affected, Linda is the one affected while other people stop, look and drive away.”