

Monte Rio  
Wastewater  
Task Group



# The Monte Rio Poop

## Wastewater Symposium Highlights Problems to be Solved

On October 16, 2010 the Monte Rio Community Center was filled with talk of septic systems, regulations, and alternative disposal methods. The Monte Rio Wastewater Task Group presented an all-day symposium to report to the community the information it had gathered up to that time about the problems that need to be solved. A written report was made available at the same time. The topics of the Symposium included:

- A statement of the sewage disposal problems that the task group identified that must be resolved.

*(Continued on page #2)*



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Wastewater  
Symposium 1

What is the  
MRWTG? 1

Where do  
we go from  
here? 3

How to  
Stay in  
Touch 4

## What is the Monte Rio Wastewater Task Group?

In 2007 the County ended a 10 year effort to design and build a sewage treatment plant for Monte Rio. Although that effort failed, the problems it was meant to address remain. Most onsite wastewater systems in the area do not meet current standards and the State has directed the County resolve that problem.

Proper wastewater treatment is primarily an environmental issue. State mandates to address wastewater are empowered by the Federal Clean Water act. It is also true that a lack of adequate wastewater treatment severely hampers economic development in the area, and reduces the ability of individual property owners to improve their

property. Because of that, redevelopment funds may be used to help address the problems.

The Russian River Redevelopment project is charged, in part, with the responsibility to eliminate blight and revitalize the economic base of the project area. In 2009, Kathleen Kane, Executive Director of the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC), appointed a task group which includes Monte Rio area residents and business property owners, nonresidents who have expertise in wastewater treatment and Supervisor Efrén Carrillo, as an advisory committee to study the issues related to

*(Continued on page #3)*

## Symposium—What's the Problem?

**“The status quo  
in Monte Rio is  
not  
sustainable...We  
do not have the  
choice to do  
nothing.”**

*(Continued from page 1)*

- A primer on how septic systems work and how they are designed.
- A discussion of regulations that apply to septic systems and other types of onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) by representatives of the Water Quality Control Board and PRMD who are the agencies that enforce them .
- A review of the reports and studies that were done prior to the proposal to build a sewage treatment plant at Sheridan Ranch.
- A review of how other communities in the area handle their wastewater both in terms of the systems they use and how they govern them. Included in the discussion were the community leach field at Oddfellows Park, septic tank management districts in Sea Ranch and Stinson Beach, a "package plant" at the Bohemian Grove and different types of conventional systems in Guerneville, Forestville, Graton and Windsor.
- A discussion of alternative systems including a long discussion about an onsite system called "Hoot" as an example of an onsite system that can treat wastewater a high level and has been approved in Sonoma county in some applications.

### **Here is a synopsis of the problem statement:**

- The regulation that defines where and how septic system leach fields can be built are contained in the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's "Basin Plan" which has been in effect since 1971. Most parcels in Monte Rio do not comply with the Basin Plan requirements because they are either too steep or too close to the River to accommodate a conventional

leach field. In 1997 the NCRWQCB issued a directive to the County to develop plans to eliminate non-code septic systems along the Russian River. That directive is still in effect.

- Under current requirements, conventional leach fields require a lot of land. Most parcels in Monte Rio are not large enough to accommodate a conventional leach field.
- Leach fields have a life expectancy of 30-40 years. Some systems have already failed and most will fail eventually. A failure of a leach field is not necessarily visible.
- There is no governance or accountability for the operation of septic systems in Monte Rio.
- Regulations will become more stringent. We can expect that, at minimum, the regulations will require that every septic system be identified, inspected on a regular basis and repaired or upgraded if necessary.

The status quo in Monte Rio is not sustainable in the long run. We remain under directive by the State to eliminate non-compliant systems. Monte Rio does not have the choice to do nothing.

If you were not able to attend the symposium, the document that was distributed is available online at the MRWTG page of the CDC web site at: [http://www.sonoma-county.org/cdc/redev\\_mrww\\_task\\_group.htm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/cdc/redev_mrww_task_group.htm). You can also request a hard copy by mail from CDC.

# Community Update—Where do we go from here?

## Feasibility Studies

The MRWTG took a year to study and understand the problem, to develop a report and a symposium and to present the information to the community. As part of that effort, the task group gathered information about what solutions are possible and what has been done in other communities like ours. This has been a deliberately slow process as the task group has worked to absorb complex issues and relay them to the community. The task group has not attempted to recommend a solution.

The next step is to understand what choices we have. As part of the investigative process, the group learned about an array of possibilities that could be considered including septic tank management districts, on-site treatment devices, distribution to redwood forests, a sewage treatment plant or a combination of different solutions. Determining which solution(s) will work, what each will cost and how they can be implemented, will require detailed feasibility studies completed by professionals. With that information the community will be able to select from a clear, complete and feasible set of choices.

## Governance

Regardless of which solution is selected, there will need to be governance. Even if the answer is to

continue with some form of individual onsite systems, the County and the State will require there to be an entity that will assure that they are functioning properly. Deciding what form of governance is most appropriate and then creating a plan to put it in place is another job that will require professional assistance and choices by the community.

## Community Update

On May 23, the task group will present to the community the results of the work that has been done to move forward on these issues and will request community feedback.

Funding and staff support will be needed to conduct studies of technical feasibility and governance, environmental impact reports, identify sources of funds and conduct a public process, including multiple community meetings and ultimately an election. The task group is considering making a recommendation for CDC to request redevelopment funds for these purposes.

If you cannot attend the May 23 meeting, please send in the feedback form included with this newsletter, or send your thoughts by email to [mrwtg@sonoma-county.org](mailto:mrwtg@sonoma-county.org).

## MRWTG

### **What is the Monte Rio Wastewater Task Group?**

*(Continued from page 1)*

wastewater treatment and disposal in the Monte Rio area. CDC has provided staff support and guidance through the process.

The task group was created to advise CDC, and to do so it has taken on the task of gathering information and communicating it to the community. A symposium was held in October, 2010 as part of that effort. The symposium was well attended by members of the community and the feedback from that event was clear – the community wants more information, and the task group is planning its next community meeting on May 23. This newsletter is another way for the task group to keep the community informed. The group has been meeting regularly, usually once a month. You are welcome to attend regular task group meetings.

In early January, Governor Brown recommended the elimination of redevelopment projects statewide. At the time of this writing, the fate of redevelopment in California is still being negotiated.

If we are unable to use redevelopment funds to complete the studies, the problems will still exist and we will have to find other funds to solve them.

Monte Rio  
Wastewater  
Task Group



# Community meeting

## Wastewater Update

*Where do we go from here?*

**Monday, May 23**

**6:00 PM**

**Monte Rio  
Community Center**

- Task Group review
- Water Board presentation
- Feasibility Studies
- Governance
- Public Input

There you can see schedules and agendas for upcoming meetings, agendas and notes from past meetings and links to relevant documents, including the task group report that is discussed in this newsletter. If you would like to be kept informed by email, log on to the site and use the "e-subscribe" feature.

**Email feedback**  
[mrwtg@sonoma-county.org](mailto:mrwtg@sonoma-county.org)  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mr-csws>

**MRWTG web page**  
[http://www.sonoma-county.org/cdd/redev\\_mrww\\_task\\_group.htm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/cdd/redev_mrww_task_group.htm)

**HOW TO  
PARTICIPATE OR  
JUST STAY IN TOUCH**



Sonoma County Community Development Commission  
Redevelopment Agency  
1440 Guerneville Rd  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403