

Port Vincent CWMS Expansion Project Public Consultation

Questions and Answers

On Sunday 2 May 2021 and Tuesday 4 May 2021 Council held public meetings at the Port Vincent Institute as part of the public consultation process for the Port Vincent CWMS Expansion Project. These meetings were attended by approximately 75 and 30 affected ratepayers and residents respectively, as well as elected members, Council staff and senior representatives of the Local Government Association (LGA) and Wallbridge Gilbert Aztec (WGA), the consulting engineering firm engaged to prepare the design for the proposed CWMS expansion.

The preface on all of the following is:

Council has to consult with communities who will be affected by potential new fees and charges prior to any implementation of those fees and charges. The current community consultation is about advising the community of the status of the CWMS project development; advising the quantum of fees and charges that would arise for ratepayers ***if*** the Port Vincent CWMS Expansion Project was ultimately approved by Council for implementation; listening to the community on project related issues to be considered; and providing answers to project questions.

Council has ***made no decisions as yet*** to implement this project. Council will make a decision at the June Council meeting. Part of Council's consideration will be the affected ratepayer response to 2 funding scenario questions asked of ratepayers as to whether they want the project and the associated annual service charges.

The following is a list of questions and answers that came out of these meetings. Where a question has been asked multiple times such has not been repeated below.

Q. Why is this project a priority now?

A. Since the 1980s the LGA has maintained a list of CWMS schemes throughout the state, which is used as the basis for council's to be able to apply for funding through the CWMS Program.

Port Vincent has appeared on this list since the early 1990s and was ranked as a Priority A scheme in 2006. This meant that Council could now apply for funding to expand the CWMS in Port Vincent through the CWMS Program; however, at that time there was no funding available.

In 2011-12 Port Vincent made it to the top of the list; however, at that time limited funding was able so only preliminary designs and cost estimates for the expansion project were prepared.

Since 2019 funding has been available to expand the current CWMS in Port Vincent to a whole of township system.

This funding is currently quarantined for Port Vincent; however, it will be diverted to another project, like Stansbury this year, if this project does not go ahead and there is no guarantee that funding will be available in the future.

The timeframes for the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) – Round 5 are also a catalyst for the project needed to be decided now.

The more detailed background timeline following below has been provided by the LGA:

- The Local Government Association (LGA) of South Australia administers the CWMS Program. The purpose of the CWMS Program is to provide CWMS subsidy funding to councils to provide equity between council and SA Water customers. The CWMS Program has been operating since the 1980s and maintains a Priority List of CWMS projects, with funding allocated based on a number of factors, including public health and environmental risk.
- Port Vincent was included on the CWMS (previously STEDS) Program Priority list in 1991. At this time, 35% of the towns on-site wastewater systems were inspected and approximately 95% of these were discharging to soakage wells, which are no longer an approved method of effluent disposal. Approximately 7% of these had insanitary conditions in winter when the inspections were undertaken. The Caravan Park was discharging wastewater directly into the ocean.
- In 1998 Council undertook a project to investigate the provision of a Skeleton CWMS to address the discharge of wastewater from the Caravan Park to the marine environment. At the time, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) was discouraging the discharge to the marine environment and the oyster lease was proposed.
- A preliminary design for a Septic Tank Effluent Disposal Scheme (STEDS) system for the whole township, part-funded by the CWMS Program, was completed in 1999; however, did not go ahead. Instead, a Skeleton CWMS was constructed in the late 1990s enabling the Marina and Vincent Rise to be developed. The Caravan Park was connected into the skeleton system at this time.
- An application for capital funding was submitted to the LGA CWMS Program by Council in June 2002; however, funding for Port Vincent was unavailable at this time. Issues identified in the application included:
 - Low lying areas in the town had a depth to the water table of 1-1.5m meaning that septic tanks had the potential to contaminate the ground water.
 - The Environmental Health Officer at the time identified that over the holiday periods there was an increase in the number of complaints regarding offensive odours as a result of failed trenches and homeowners pumping septic tank effluent onto the ground.
- A 10 year funding agreement was secured by the LGA in 2006 and Port Vincent was included on the Priority List. This was supported by the EPA who identified that a CWMS would help address the risk of environmental harm in the gulf.
- Funding for a preliminary design for a whole township system was provided to Council in 2012. Unfortunately, funding for capital works was unavailable from the CWMS Program at this time.
- A second 10 year funding agreement was secured between the LGA and the state government in 2016 and councils were asked to resubmit expressions of interest for future scheme funding. Port Vincent was included by Council as a high priority.
- Further funding to update the 2012 preliminary design was provided to Council from the CWMS Program in 2018.

Q. What were the selection criteria for BBRF – Round 5?

A. There were 4 section criterion for BBRF – Round 5, including criterion that focussed on economic development and social benefits.

Q. Why is Council making a decision about this project prior to any federal funding being received?

A. Council has tried to make this process as simple as we can. The Federal Government will not back a local government project that local government does not back. The timeframes are such to ensure that Council can let the Federal Government know if we will not be proceeding with the project before they announce the outcome of the funding.

Q. If Council are unsuccessful in their application to BBRF – Round 5 will the special rate of \$301 per year for 10 years apply in addition to the annual service charge of \$525 per year meaning that for the first 10 years affected property owners will be required to pay \$826 per year for the first 10 years?

A. Yes, as Council has to borrow more funds and repay the same. However, if Council are successful in their application to BBRF – Round 5 **there will be no special rate.**

Q. If the special rate needs to be applied will this be paid by everyone?

A. No. The special rate will only apply to properties that could connect to the CWMS system. The special rate will not apply to properties in Vincent Rise and the Marina as these properties are already connected to the CWMS system.

Q. If the treatment plants need to be updated due to age why doesn't everyone have to pay the special rate? Why don't we decrease the size of the treatment plant to only cater for those who are here and make the developer pay for any future expansion?

A. Those properties that are already connected to the system pay the annual service charge (currently \$525). The special rate for new connections to a new upgraded CWMS would only apply to properties not currently connected to the CWMS if Council was not successful with its application to BBRF – Round 5, meaning Council would have increased borrowings to make the project happen. The special rate covers the cost of repayment of these increased borrowings.

The existing treatment plant has been in place for 20 years and is being depreciated (Depreciation – a reduction in the value of an asset over time, due to wear and tear). It still has life and existing properties connected to the existing CWMS are paying for the existing infrastructure. They are paying their way now, so if Council was to also make them pay the special rate it would be double dipping.

The reality of the situation is that Port Vincent's population swells to up to 4 times its normal population during holiday periods and with this comes increased waste, which needs to go somewhere. The existing CWMS cannot cater for these increases in population without expanding.

The designers are catering for this peak in the new plant.

If the new plant needs to increase in size or be augmented to cater for new development, the developer will pay for that expansion.

Q. What is the difference in volume at the treatment plant between non peak and peak times?

A. The current volume is 25kL per day during non-peak times and 90kL per day during peak times.

Q. Is the annual service charge (currently \$525) payable forever?

A. Yes, as it covers the cost of providing the service for the long term.

Q. Will the full service charge be charged to all ratepayers in unit complexes?

A. This is ultimately a policy decision of Council; however, across Australia the consensus is that each unit pays a full service charge, as each unit is a separately rateable property that pays its own rates. As part of the design process it was determined that each rateable property is the equivalent of 2.6 persons. It may seem unfair when not all properties are occupied permanently; however, this is about having access to the service.

Q. How many surveys have been sent out?

A. A total of 604 surveys have been sent to affected property owners/ratepayers. This does not include property owners within the Marina or Vincent Rise as they are already on the CWMS and are not affected by the proposed expansion.

Q. If 604 surveys have been sent out does this mean that we need 302 yes responses?

A. Not necessarily. The minimum number of yes responses required to proceed with the project will depend on the number of surveys that are returned.

Q. Will this information be made available to the public?

A. Yes. A summary of the total responses received, and other relevant information, will be included in the report that will be presented to Council in June 2021. The Council report is public document that will be available on Council's website. Interested parties are more than welcome to attend this Council meeting.

Q. Does the current system take liquid waste and solid waste?

A. Yes. Solid waste is taken from the Marina.

Q. Why can't a whole of town sewer system be implemented?

A. For a whole of town sewer system to be implemented you need to design it and have different grades. The fall needs to be steeper, which means deeper trenching. This becomes more expensive, with the estimated construction costs being \$1.5 million more than those to expand the current STEDS system. Additionally, a wastewater treatment plant servicing a full sewer system is more expensive to run than one which services a STEDS system. A full sewer wastewater treatment plant is more complex as it needs to separate solids from effluent and separately treat both.

In the Options Report prepared by WGA and dated 10 October 2019 full sewer was compared to STEDS.

The report summarised the advantages and disadvantages of a full sewer system versus a STEDS system. Such is shown below.

On the back of a comparison between the advantages and disadvantages, as well as costs, the report recommended a STEDS whole of town wastewater collection and treatment system.

System Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Full sewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple connection of the property. • No land is taken on property by the septic tank, no setbacks are needed. • Less risk of wastewater overflow on property. • No need to undertake tank pump out. • No need to maintain tanks in working order. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection system and treatment system cost more due to the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Large volume of solids must be managed at the WWTP. Screens are necessary. ○ Larger and steeper gravity drains are required. ○ Pipes and pump stations are deeper due to pipe steeper profile. ○ More maintenance holes are required. ○ Pump units generally wear out faster when pumping sewage compared to effluent. ○ More frequent blockages due to solids.
STEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller and flatter pipework can be used for gravity drains. • Less access chambers are required. • Less risk of blockages. • Treatment is simpler and less expensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Septic tanks must be desludged every 4 years. • Sludge from septic tank must be safely disposed/utilised. • Existing septic tanks, which are to be reused may be in poor condition and may require replacing. • If septic tank is located far back in the property it may be difficult to connect to the system. • Survey to locate existing septic tanks and outlet levels is required as a design input.

Q. What are some of the issues that you might experience with a full sewer system?

A. Full sewer systems require:

- steeper installation grades;
- larger collection pipes;
- more inspection and cleaning chambers; and
- more maintenance, particularly with the invention of flushable wet wipes as these cause issues, including blocking pipes and wearing out pumps more quickly.

Q. Are any of the issues above currently being experienced in the Marina?

A. Yes. Council is having to undertake more maintenance at the Marina Pump Station as the pumps are currently struggling and experiencing more breakdowns.

Q. Does the current system with the Caravan Park, Marina and Vincent Rise connected struggle in peak times?

A. Yes. The proposed new plant will benefit everyone.

Q. How many properties will the proposed new plant service?

A. 806.

Q. Will the new system cater for expansion?

A. Yes. The new system will cater for 2,500 residents. The volume of the new treatment plant will allow for some expansion. The existing system cannot be expanded as the buffer zone is not sufficient.

Q. What are the benefits to the environment?

A. The benefits to the environment are intangible and are not costed; however, we know from studies undertaken by the EPA that failing and/or high density of onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems are placing increased pressure on the Orontes biounit.

This was stated by the EPA in the [letter of support](#) they provided for Council's application to BBRF – Round 5 and is supported by the data contained in the [Orontes Nearshore Marine Biounit 2017 Aquatic Ecosystem Condition Report](#).

Further to this it is the responsibility of any person who owns or occupies premises at which a septic system is installed to ensure that waste from the septic system is not discharged into any waters or onto land in a place from which it is reasonably likely to enter any waters (including by processes such as seepage). Failure to do so is an offence under the [Environment Protection \(Water Quality\) Policy 2015](#).

The expansion of the CWMS to a whole of township scheme mitigates the risks to the environment presented by wastewater leeching into the ocean and groundwater through failing soakages.

Q. Is the proposed location of the treatment plant the best location? What about the look coming into Port Vincent? Why was this location chosen?

A. Council has had negotiations with the land owner of the proposed location and land requirement of the treatment plant. Whilst the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) could be located further away from the town, like adjacent to the highway, such would translate into a higher cost for the overall project. Wherever Council ultimately settles on, Council has to consider the needs of the current landowner, the scope for possible future expansion, and the need to ensure a 350m buffer zone.

Whilst Lime Kiln Road is a key entrance into Port Vincent, and under certain weather circumstances odour from the presence of a WWTP might be perceived by passing traffic, this is something that can be minimised visually from tree buffering and good management of the plant with minimal mechanical aeration. Council will consider screening this location with appropriate landscaping and suitable plantings.

Q. Is there a point that Council will agree that the cost to connect is too onerous? \$20,000? \$30,000?

A. Council has not had this discussion yet. Discussions have been had with some affected property owners to this effect and they have been advised to speak to their plumber about what the best solution for their property may be (e.g. an aboveground pipe between their septic tank and Council's collection pipe).

Q. What if you choose not to connect?

A. This is a policy decision for Council; however, it is normal in local government to charge the annual service charge regardless of whether or not a ratepayer is connected to the CWMS. This is because the community/Council has to pay for the fixed costs of the service and associated infrastructure whether or not people connect.

Q. Will your septic tank still be pumped?

A. Yes. Once every 4 years.

Q. How long will people have to connect after the whole of town system is installed?

A. Property owners with aerobic systems will have 2 years to connect.

There is no timeframe for other property owners to connect; however, you will be charged the service charge from the time the system is installed regardless of whether or not you choose to connect to it.

Q. What happens if the project costs more than the current estimated budget? Will ratepayers have to pay more?

A. No. The purpose of the CWMS Program is to promote equity between council water customers and SA Water customers. The CWMS Program will cover any variations to the project cost to a reasonable level. Council and its ratepayers will not be expected to pay for these variations.

Further to this, the project has been costed by WGA and, more importantly, reviewed by consultant quantity surveyors (QS) who have updated the likely project costs and itemised contingencies. Council is working with the QS project estimates.

Q. Why is the Council not conducting a vote?

A. Council is undertaking this public consultation process in accordance with its obligations under the *Local Government Act 1999* (SA) and in line with its Community Engagement Policy (PO057) (refer Section 5 Consultation of the [Report for Proposed CWMS at Port Vincent](#)).

The survey has been sent out to every affected ratepayer in Port Vincent. The survey has not been sent to residents in Vincent Rise or the Marina as they are already connected to the system.

Q. Does the survey have to be returned by Tuesday 18 May 2021?

A. Yes. All surveys need to be received by Council by **COB Tuesday 18 May 2021**.

Q. How do we know that avoided effluent disposal costs is \$2.2 million?

A. When the application to the BBRF – Round 5 was being prepared an Excel spreadsheet of assumptions was used to determine these figures. These figures have been well researched.

Q. How does the expansion of the CWMS improve health outcomes?

A. CWMSs improve health outcomes for people as it removes the risk of untreated effluent lying around when soakages fail. When this occurs people become sick. This has happened in other places without a CWMS.

Q. If the project goes ahead how will Council meet its October 2021 start time?

A. The project will be split into 2 parts, the earthworks of the treatment plant and the remainder of the system. Should Council receive federal funding and the project goes ahead Council's tender timeframes are such that earthworks at the treatment plant can commence within 12 weeks of Council's receiving the funding. The start of project within 12 weeks is a requirement of the BBRF – Round 5.

Q. Who benefits from this project?

A. This project benefits the environment and the entire township of Port Vincent, particularly those people not currently connected to the CWMS. It has the potential to open the town up for development (subject to approval), which has the potential to increase the town's population, visitor numbers and presence of businesses.

Q. What sort of noise do pump stations make?

A. Pumps at current and future pump stations are submersible and make minimal, if any, noticeable noise, as can be seen in existing below ground pump stations. Below ground pump stations have a concrete cover which acts to shield noise. All that is observable above ground is an electrical switchboard located in front of your property.

Q. Plumbers cost vary greatly. Will Council have a list of suggested suppliers and rates in place for plumbers?

A. No. Right now Council does not have a preferred suppliers list for plumbers; however, it may be possible to establish one using Council's VendorPanel. Should this occur Council will make information available on its website.

Q. Can I take the shortest route and connect to the existing CWMS and pump station?

A. The current CWMS is over taxed during holiday periods and Council are reluctant to add new connections to existing infrastructure as part of this system.

Q. 14 months ago I built a new house. At that time my application to Council to install a septic tank was rejected and I had to install an aerobic tank. Will Council reimburse me for the cost of this tank?

A. Council has received a number of enquiries to this affect. At the time that these developments were approved an aerobic system was the most appropriate system to install. Aerobic systems need to be inspected each year (refer to <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/public+health/water+quality/wastewater/wastewater+products> for further information). This is carried out at the property owner's expense. CWMSs are better overall as the water is treated.

Should the whole of town system be implemented you will not have to stop using your aerobic system.

If there is connection of existing aerobic system outlets to a CWMS, aerobic system owners will save themselves the \$300+/annum fee they pay third parties to inspect their system.

Q. The majority of properties in Buttfield Avenue have an aerobic system, will this need to be replaced?

A. Refer to answer above.