

Menlo Park's first recycled water system to keep golf course green

by [Kate Bradshaw](#) / Almanac

A project by West Bay Sanitary District to build the first recycled water system in Menlo Park could enable the district to pump between 400,000 and 500,000 gallons a day of recycled water to one of the city's top water users: the Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club.

The sanitary district is also in talks to expand the system in a second phase of the project to provide recycled water to SLAC – another of the city's biggest water users – and possibly homeowners' associations in Sharon Heights.

In 2011, the country club used about 164,000 gallons of potable water a day, according to city staff. But the plan is to provide capacity for up to about 400,000 gallons daily to the golf course during the dry season, according to Phil Scott, manager of the sanitary district.

Today, wastewater – water that's passed through household and commercial water systems, including via toilets – generated in the West Bay Sanitary District gets collected and sent to a pump station in Bedwell Bayfront Park. From there, it is distributed to Silicon Valley Clean Water in Redwood Shores, where it's cleaned up and pumped into the Bay, Mr. Scott said.

The new system will instead collect wastewater generated mostly in Menlo Park households and funnel it through a pump station in western Menlo Park using pipes set to be installed along Sand Hill Road. The pump station, set to be built near the intersection of Sand Hill Road and Oak Avenue, will be underground and won't appear different from what's there now, Mr. Scott said.

From there, the wastewater will be pumped to a treatment center to be built off the side of Sand Hill Road and eventually up to the Sharon Heights Golf Course. At the treatment facility, the water will be passed through a "membrane bioreactor" that cleans it up to a level at which it's safe to be used for irrigation. Odor "scrubbers" will also be used to neutralize the smell, he said.

"If we can get the golf course to use recycled water – water that was just going to be sent out to the Bay anyway – it makes sense to have (the golf course operators) use that, so they're not using up the potable water," he said.

At a presentation to the Menlo Park City Council on Dec. 5, Dave Richardson, senior water resources engineer at the West Bay Sanitary district, announced that the district is hoping to secure state funding and award a contract to a team to design and build the project.

According to the timeline, design work will be completed by June, with some overlap for construction to start in April. Work to build the pipeline along Sand Hill Road would take about four months, and the whole project would be completed in June 2019.

The agency plans to avoid construction during peak hours in order to reduce traffic impacts on Sand Hill Road, Mr. Richardson said.

A partnership

According to Mr. Scott, the project will be funded by the golf course and a revolving fund loan from the state. Ratepayers won't have to pay for it, he said.

The golf course for years had been trying to figure out a way to get water from other sources than the Hetch Hetchy water system, which is the main water supplier in Menlo Park. In 2011, a [proposal](#) was made to dig a well beneath city property at either Nealon Park or Jack Lyle Park and pump public groundwater to the private golf course.

The proposal was initially opposed by some residents near the parks; opposition was renewed in [2014](#).

The origin of the alternate proposal to use recycled water is unclear. Talks about the project started around 2014, Mr. Scott said, and both the sanitary district and golf course claim it was their idea.

"So far it's turning out to be a great public-private partnership," he noted. "Anything we can do to help save our water we think is a good thing."

Initially, the cost of the recycled water will be higher than for potable water, Mr. Scott said, but the expectation is that the cost of potable water will go up and, over time, it will become more cost-effective to use the recycled water.

Using recycled water will also give the golf course more stability in times of drought, he said. There's always a chance that golf courses will face tougher water restrictions, he said, since drinking water is being used for the main purpose of keeping grass green.

"Is that our best use of our drinking water?" he asked.