

OWTS Ad Hoc Committee Charter

Approved May 26, 2022

Background

State law mandates the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopt standards for regulation of onsite waste treatment systems (OWTS) commonly known as septic systems. The State Water Board, through its OWTS Policy, has required local jurisdictions to submit OWTS programs to the appropriate Regional Water Board for review and approval.

The OWTS Policy establishes five risk-based tiers from Tier Zero to Tier Four. Tier Zero is for existing and properly functioning systems. Tier One establishes statewide standards for new and replacement systems. Tier Two allows local agencies to establish different standards than Tier One, provided they create comparable protections. Tier Three establishes standards for impaired water bodies and provides three options. Tier Four sets standards for systems in need of corrective actions.

Permit Sonoma created a Tier Two Local Area Management Program (LAMP) for review and approval by the RWB. Permit Sonoma presented the LAMP and accompanying OWTS Manual to the Board in several meetings. In the fall of 2019, the Board authorized staff to submit a revised LAMP and OWTS Manual to the RWB for consideration. In early 2020, the RWB denied the 2019 LAMP and OWTS Manual as submitted and provided direction on required amendments.

Permit Sonoma has been working on producing a revised draft of the LAMP and OWTS Manual. In 2020 and 2021, Permit Sonoma convened a small Technical Advisory Committee of four local designers and worked through many of the technical issues and concerns. In early 2022, Permit Sonoma released a revised draft to the Land Use Advisory Panel (LUAP) as a larger Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to Permit Sonoma staff on septic related matters. Over three hundred comments have been received. Staff are in the midst of reviewing and commenting on the LUAP comments.

Committee Purpose and Goals

At the February 1, 2022, Board of Supervisors Strategic Planning Retreat, the Chair formed an OWTS Ad Hoc Committee for the purpose of exploring updates to the County's OWTS policies. Based on stakeholder input, the OWTS Ad Hoc will identify policy areas within the existing OWTS policies for potential updates to meet the following goals: protect health and the environment, coordinate with state regulatory agencies, support local development, provide reasonable and balanced regulations, and seek innovative technologies.

Committee Members

David Rabbitt, Second District

Lynda Hopkins, Fifth District Supervisor

County Department, Resources

Tennis Wick, Permit Sonoma Director

Nathan Quarles, Permit Sonoma Deputy Director

Alex Rosas, Permit Sonoma Engineering Division Manager

Darla Pimlott, Permit Sonoma Supervising Environmental Health Specialist

Barbara Lee, County Administrator's Office

Robert Pittman, County Counsel

Verne Ball, County Counsel

Alegria De La Cruz, Office of Equity

Subject matter experts (SME's) from Permit Sonoma, state regulatory agency or community members as needed.

Committee Duration

The OWTS Ad Hoc Committee will convene for a limited term. Quarterly meetings will continue (August and November) as needed and as directed by the Ad Hoc to address changes to the LAMP and OWTS Manual.

Outcomes

The desired outcomes will be to explore the County's OWTS policies and identify policy areas within the existing OWTS policies for potential updates to meet the following goals: protect health and the environment, coordinate with state regulatory agencies, support local development, provide reasonable and balanced regulations, and seek innovative technologies.

Public Input Process

The main purpose of the public input process is to gather input from various community partners and other key stakeholders in order to assist the Ad Hoc Committee members in exploring OWTS policy recommendations.

Deliverables and Timeline

During August and September, Permit Sonoma will meet with the public and stakeholders such as NorBar, The Farm Bureau, and North Coast Builder's Exchange, seeking their input and answering questions. October 14 is the day established as a cut-off for comments, after which Permit Sonoma staff will publish responses to all comments. During November and December, staff will prepare final updated Manual for Board presentation, which is scheduled for January 2023.

Comments can be sent to: PermitSonoma-OWTS@sonoma-county.org or Nathan Quarles.