

OWTS Ad Hoc Committee Quarterly Update

July to September 2022

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) Ad Hoc is to consider input and recommendations received from OWTS stakeholders, including other public entities (e.g., water quality control boards, fish and wildlife agencies, etc.) and community members regarding the OWTS regulations. Received input will be reviewed for compliance by Permit Sonoma staff and County Counsel to: (i) revise the Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) regulations; and (ii) evaluate options for allowing composting toilets. Permit Sonoma anticipates bringing the revised Manual to the Board of Supervisors in January 2023. Unanticipated delays have changed this date to May 2023.

Ad Hoc Members

Supervisor Hopkins
Supervisor Rabbitt

Assigned Staff

Tennis Wick: Lead
Barbara Lee, CAO Climate Deputy
Nathan Quarles, Deputy Director
Michael Makdisi, Analyst/Ombudsman

Meetings Held

07/05/22 – The Ad Hoc met with the Land Use Advisory Panel (LUAP), which is comprised of a group of local professionals including Registered Environmental Health Specialists, Licensed Realtors, Civil Engineers, and General and Water Well Contractors.

08/25/22 – The Ad Hoc met with the Lower Russian River Citizen's Advisory Group (LRRACAG), a volunteer group created to inform property owners about efforts to develop sustainable and affordable wastewater solutions for lower Russian River communities. Regular members include Septic System Consultants, Architects, Civil Engineers, Local Water District Representatives, and Inter Agency Team Members.

8/31/22 – The meeting scheduled for this date was postponed to November 22.

Status

The Ad Hoc did not meet during the quarter but did engage with the above stakeholder groups to obtain input on the draft OWTS Manual and to hear other policy considerations. Topics conveyed during each of the above meetings will be further discussed at the next Ad Hoc meeting. At the committee's direction, additional staff analysis of specific issues and concerns may then occur.

Also, during the quarter, the CAO added a Clean Water Analyst and Ombudsman to support County staff implementing programs in response to the new state Total Maximum Daily Load standards for the Lower Russian River. Requirements for OWTS are an important part of that response. Michael Makdisi participates in meetings of the LRRCAG, the Inter Agency Team, and other forums to build understanding and collaboration on implementation approaches and is working with the state and regional water boards to develop financing options for property owners to comply with new OWTS standards.

County staff is in the process of updating Sonoma County Code to allow for composting toilets. Hearings for the code adoptions are scheduled for November 1 and December 6 for an effective date of January 2023.

Upcoming Meetings

08/31/2022: Cancelled

11/22/2022: Next quarterly meeting

03/2023: Meeting of the Ad Hoc