

Water Infrastructure Concerns – Water Supply Tanks Not Meeting Standards?

The current agenda includes the first water infrastructure projects associated with an actual water infrastructure assessment in 20 years. Issuing a list of projects without the background and insights into the full plan is not the ideal process. The public and more importantly the city council have little or no real understanding of the water system. Putting out a list of projects without the full study can only lead to uninformed council discussion, opinions and ultimately poor decisions. Let this public comment be the first uninformed opinion. My reaction is one of alarm over the condition of our critical water supply tanks.

Items 9-11 are projects related to water tanks. Sebastopol's three water tanks are responsible for creating the water pressure which delivers water to our homes and is equally important to fire hydrants.

The concerning statements can be found in the project rationales for those three proposed projects:

- Based on a site visit it was found that the tanks do not have anchorage to the foundation which is not as per the standards (presumably seismic).
- The operation level of the tank is lower than the design liquid level suggested in the plate for respective tanks hence it is needed to determine the actual structural condition of the tank beyond visual inspection.
- (Inspection) Required now because previous inspections (2022) were only visual and do not meet U.S. standards for structural diagnosis.
- Benefits: ensures safety, compliance, and informs seismic retrofit design. The tanks lack proper anchorage and do not meet seismic standards.
- (These are verbatim from the CIP Table only corrected for typos in the report).

These descriptions by the consultant and presumably subject matter expert should be raising alarm bells for anyone providing “oversight” to the Enterprise Funds.

First a simple visual inspection showed “the tanks lack proper anchorage and do not meet seismic standards”.

- Seismic standards are not new. Seismic risk in the area is a serious concern. When was the decision made not to address the issue, by whom and based on what rationale?

Second it appears the last “proper inspection of the tanks was done in 2012, nearly 15 years ago. NFPA 22 requires interior inspections every 5 years for tanks used to provide water for firefighting. This includes dual purpose tanks that also provide drinking water.

- The inspection that was done (2022) is described “as not meeting U.S. standards for structural diagnosis.”

Third the comments on tank operation levels below design liquid level are a concern.

- Does this mean at some point Dante decided the tanks conditions were degraded such that he reduced the allowable level of water in the tanks? If so, how has that impacted the ability of the city to supply water and fight fires?
- How was this limit documented?
- Why does the consultant not have an explanation and now needs a study?
- Much of this may be explained in the full study, but we don’t have that yet and maybe we shouldn’t wait.

It is alarming that the core of our water supply, the water tanks, has not been inspected properly and has not been constructed to meet seismic standards.

- It is also a concern that CIP #9 - perform an inspection followed by painting and relining of the tanks is considered a low priority? This suggests a continued lack of focus on critical infrastructure on the part of staff making this recommendation.

Residents trust that the city is managing water and wastewater infrastructure responsibly. Rate payers are paying nearly \$2 million annually for oversight from city staff and city council. The new Oversight Committee is limited in the creation documents and description to “financial oversight” and two meetings a year. It is clear that operational and financial oversight is needed if the city council chooses to continue ignoring the Enterprises

As the water master plan nears completion, **the city council should ask the consultant for an assessment of operating practices, policies and procedures and deficiencies.** They might offer advice on how to structure oversight to avoid issues in the future.