



County of Santa Cruz

Department of Community Development and Infrastructure

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Policy Regarding CZU Rebuild Permitting in the Big Basin Sewer Service Area

As of 4/3/2023, the County of Santa Cruz will cease issuing pre-clearance approvals, building permits, and certificates of occupancy for projects within the Big Basin sewer service area. Please see below for additional information, including exemptions for those currently sending wastewater to the Big Basin wastewater treatment plant.

Notice of Violation

On 11/10/2022, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (hereinafter “Regional Board”) notified Big Basin Water Company of alleged violations at its Big Basin Woods Subdivision Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), including unauthorized discharges of untreated wastewater that pose an imminent threat to water quality and public health and safety. The notice of violation directed Big Basin Water Company to not allow additional connections to the sewer system until the WWTP is fully operational and can appropriately treat wastewater in compliance with their Permit.

Interim Operations

Since the initial Notice of Violation was issued in November 2022, the County of Santa Cruz Department of Community Development and Infrastructure (CDI) has been working with both the Regional Board and Big Basin Water Company to develop an interim plan to allow the County to implement improvements to get the WWTP operational and facilitate re-establishment of sewer connections, and will be presenting options to allow public operation of the WWTP at a meeting in late May. It should be noted that all options for public operation will require those in the sewer service area to (a) petition the County to perform such actions, and (b) vote to fund needed improvements to the WWTP via parcel assessments in a majority vote. The final cost of needed improvements will be provided at the meeting in May and will number in the millions of dollars.

Water Board Request to County

On 1/17/2023 the County received a written request from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board requesting that the County cease issuing any additional occupancy permits until the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board determines that wastewater is being disposed of in a manner that does not threaten water quality or create nuisance conditions that result in public health impacts.

Big Basin Water - Receivership

On Wednesday 3/29/2023, the County received notice that the Central Coast Regional Board will consider referring Big Basin Water's case to the Office of the Attorney General of the State of California for judicial civil enforcement, which may include appointment of a receiver to facilitate bringing the WWTP into compliance with their Water Board Permit. The Central Coast Water Board will consider this action at a public hearing on 4/20/2023 at the Watsonville City Council Chambers (275 Main Street – 4th Floor, Watsonville).

Santa Cruz County Policy

Currently there is no viable method of sewage disposal for those in the Big Basin sewer service area. Given the significant environmental and health impacts of continued discharge of untreated sewage into adjacent waterways and the uncertainty of the path and timeline for WWTP compliance, the County of Santa Cruz will no longer be issuing septic pre-clearance approvals for parcels within the Big Basin sewer service area.

Projects with issued permits that are currently in construction will not pass final inspection or be issued a certificate of occupancy, and building permit applications currently in-process will not be issued, until the until such time as the Central Coast Regional Board has determined that wastewater is being disposed of in a manner that does not threaten water quality or create nuisance conditions that result in public health impacts.

Those that were sending wastewater to the Big Basin sewer system prior to the 1/17/2023 Water Board Request to the County, including those with a temporary occupancy permit, are not considered "additional" connections for the purposes of final inspection.