

We can't leave central Reno sewer customers on the hook for two treatment plants | Brekhus

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This opinion column was submitted by Jenny Brekhus, candidate for Ward 1 on the Reno City Council. Her campaign website is www.jennybrekhus.com.

Thank you, RGJ, for the invitation to write about my candidacy. Rather than narrating my accomplishments, I will refer Ward 1 voters to www.jennybrekhus.com. Instead, I wish to take this opportunity to discuss a pressing issue and provide voters insight into my priorities.

The issue is the mounting cost of providing sewer service to our growing community. Over the eight years I've been on the City Council, residential sewer rates have increased about 34%. This is due to rate increases adopted by a prior Council to catch up on deferred maintenance.

As background, Reno and Sparks co-own the Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Plant (TMWRF). Reno also owns the smaller Stead plant. Washoe County operates a south valley plant. In addition to the treatment plants, Reno has collection and storm water systems to maintain with revenue collected from sewer bills.

From 2015: [Sewer rate hike coming: Reno Council rejects effort to cut increase in half](#)

With recent North Valleys growth, the Stead plant is at capacity. In 2018, I called for a building moratorium so the City could devise plans to address the Stead plant and flooding resulting from high water levels in Swan Lake, where the City discharges treated effluent from the Stead plant. My proposal was rejected and building continued.

The City recently approved \$55 million in debt to enlarge the Stead plant, the first such debt since I've been on the City Council. This is only a starting point because it does not include the project costs for effluent disposal. In fact, scientists are still studying how to do that because additional effluent cannot go into Swan Lake. The most feasible options are a \$90 million reservoir, or injecting effluent into the ground. Both might be required.

In summary, the City has embarked upon expansion of the Stead plant without knowing how it will dispose of additional effluent. This makes the price tag unknown. One thing is certain: Under current rates, Stead sewer customers will not generate enough revenue to afford this expansion, so the City plans to use fees paid by TMWRF users, including Ward 1 residents. South Reno residents that are Washoe County customers are not on the hook. As the Ward 1 Council Member, I have opposed this plant expansion because project planning is incomplete and costs are spread inequitably.



Reno City Councilwoman Jenny Brekhuis is running for a third term. *(Photo: Provided by Jeff Ross)*

Ward 1 has unmet infrastructure needs, including irrigation ditches that carry storm water and expanding the collection system to neighborhoods still on septic tanks. As TMWRF is going to soon need some improvements, it is important that central Reno sewer customers aren't carrying the cost burden for two treatment plants. I am asking Ward 1 voters for a third term so that I can advocate on your behalf as decisions are made regarding these major investments.