



MAPLETON WATER DISTRICT



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MAPLETON, OR 97453



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March 12, 2025

RE: Legislative Support for Mapleton Water District to Obtain Sanitary Authority

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Owens and Finger-McDonald, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water,

As you may know, Mapleton is a small, unincorporated community of Lane County in District 9 on the Siuslaw River. Mapleton Water District (MWD) is a special district publicly owned utility established in 1951 to provide drinking water to our community.

After 70+ years in service, our drinking water service was at risk of failure, but a concerted effort led by Regional Solutions, various agencies, nonprofit organizations, and our board is underway to replace infrastructure and build our financial and organizational capacity to ensure continued drinking water service to our community. While Mapleton's drinking water service is turning around, our wastewater service is now at a critical risk of failure but is unable to access the financial support MWD and other special districts can.

Mapleton's Wastewater Crisis

The Mapleton Commercial Area Owners Association (MCAOA) was established as a 509(a)2 public charity to provide wastewater service to a small subset of MWD's service area - the Mapleton downtown business district and neighboring mobile home park. This service allows our historic downtown core to exist as on-site wastewater treatment is not possible there. This past year, a piece of equipment broke that resulted in untreated effluent being discharged into the Siuslaw River for many months. While the part has been replaced, the MCAOA has \$0 left and several other pieces of equipment are about to fail. As a public charity with less than 25 hook-ups, MCAOA is unable to access federal grants and loans (i.e.: CWSRF) and cannot generate sufficient revenue to replace its failing infrastructure.

Under existing state statutes, the fastest way for MCAOA to be able to obtain public funds to fix the system would take more than two years. A new special district would need to be stood up for sanitary service; the new sanitary district could then merge with MWD as it would not be financially solvent alone; and then finally the MCAOA would dissolve and transfer its assets to the newly merged MWD. This two-year timeline is unacceptable to the public health and environmental risks we face when the system breaks down again. HB 3910 and the forthcoming- 1 amendment will support the merge of the special districts in Mapleton and across the state to better manage our resources and serve our communities.

We Need Your Help

A small legislative change to ORS 264.335 (public health) would be a much faster way to solve our sanitary treatment crisis.



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The MWD Board approved looking into the possibility of taking on sanitary services and is engaging with government and community partners around what that process would be. Without this change, there is no legal path for the MWD to provide sanitary services as such mergers are only allowed due to an urgent public health emergency or for communities recovering from the 2020 wildfires (i.e.: Blue River). The legislative change would allow the water district to also have sanitary authority. MCAOA could then dissolve and transfer its assets to MWD as early as this summer.

Lane County has drafted policy change language to allow this and MWD is in full support of the proposed change. It would help Mapleton's businesses and affordable housing keep their access to required wastewater service, lower operating costs for these services in the community, and most importantly, protect people in our community as well as Florence, Cushman, and Point Terrace, and native wildlife, from illnesses related to untreated effluent flowing into the Siuslaw River.

We think this small legislative change is imperative to the survival of our community, and protecting people and wildlife in the community and downstream. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 541-999-9778. Thank you for considering this request from the MWD.

Sincerely,



Vanessa West

Chair, Board of Commissioners
Mapleton Water District

