Understanding the Process

Your Input Matters

Both NASA and the City of Pasadena recognize the importance of public input into the decisions about groundwater cleanup activities being proposed in your community. What you have to say matters in the many steps involved in reviewing the proposed project.

NASA recently distributed a Proposed Plan having two elements to clean up groundwater in the Monk Hill Subarea off-site from JPL. NASA is proposing to: (1) fund the construction and operation of a treatment system for groundwater from the four City of Pasadena drinking water wells located just east of JPL near the Arroyo Seco and (2) continue to fund treatment of groundwater from two Lincoln Avenue Water Company drinking water wells at the existing treatment facility. This fact sheet describes a number of opportunities for the public to provide input on the treatment system for the City of Pasadena.

NASA's Proposed Plan

NASA's Proposed Plan describes how the groundwater treatment plant would work, using a liquid-phase granular activated carbon system to remove volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and an ion exchange system to remove perchlorate. The Proposed Plan outlines what other cleanup options were considered, and why NASA selected this preferred alternative for meeting the cleanup objectives. An accompanying Technical Memorandum describes the various locations considered for the proposed treatment plant, the criteria used to evaluate them and why the Windsor Avenue location was preferred. You can read the Proposed Plan and Technical Memorandum at local information repositories or on our website at http://jplwater.nasa.gov.

Next Steps for NASA

NASA held a public meeting on May 3 to receive input from community members on the Proposed Plan. Some people questioned whether other sites had been considered for the treatment plant. (The proposed site is on City-owned vacant land next to the Windsor Reservoir, at 2696 Windsor Avenue.) Others wanted to know how all the pieces fit together and how local residents could have input into the review process. In response, NASA extended the public comment period on the Proposed Plan until July 7, 2006. This extension allowed the public more time to ask questions and learn more about NASA's preferred alternative for the groundwater cleanup described in the Proposed Plan.

After considering all input received during the Proposed Plan public comment period, NASA will publish a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will summarize all of the comments NASA received and how these comments were considered in shaping the final decision. If NASA decides to proceed with the proposed treatment plant, NASA would then provide technical assistance and fund the City of Pasadena to build the plant and operate the treatment system.

Next Steps for the City

The City of Pasadena would have a number of steps to take for the project to be permitted and for construction to begin. One permit needed is called a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). A CUP is required for certain land uses that might be approved with specific conditions to ensure compatibility of the use with the surrounding area. The City of Pasadena Water and Power Department would prepare and submit a CUP application to the City's Planning and Development Department. A CUP also requires an environmental review and public hearing. The environmental review must occur before or during the CUP review (not afterwards) in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

California Environmental Quality Act

The CEQA environmental review process is conducted to determine if a proposed project would have any adverse effects on the environment. The City would prepare an Initial Study on the proposed groundwater treatment plant - evaluating a set of sixteen factors including noise, traffic, aesthetics, air and water quality and cultural resources. One of the following three possible determinations would result from an Initial Study:

- A Negative Declaration: No significant environmental effects are identified;
- Mitigated Declaration: Some significant environmental effects are identified and can be mitigated or avoided, usually accompanied by conditions; or an
- Environmental Impact Report: Further study is needed and an EIR is prepared to identify the significant environmental impacts and the extent to which these could be monitored and managed.

The CEQA environmental review determination is published by the City and the document is made available to the public for comment prior to City approval.

Additional Opportunities for Input

The City Hearing Officer would hold a public hearing as part of the CUP review process. Public hearings are opportunities for members of the community to give their opinions and provide comments that can influence aspects of a project to be compatible or consistent with neighboring properties. These details may include access (traffic, fences), design (height, setback) and operation (noise, dust). Some specifications on the proposed groundwater treatment plant would depend on the vendor and cleanup technologies selected by the City through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Members of the public may be notified of the availability of the City's RFP by calling (626) 744-4486. During the RFP process, the staff's recommended vendor would be presented by the City Manager to the City Council for authority to enter into a contract with the selected vendor. If there were no need for or request from a councilmember for discussion, the item could be placed on the Consent Calendar portion of the agenda for approval of the staff recommendation without discussion.

Only after soliciting public input and completing the environmental review and receiving approval of the CUP could the City take the next steps toward design and construction of a plant.

Public Hearing Process

At least 20 days before the CUP public hearing with the Hearing Officer, a public notice would be mailed to all neighbors in both the City of Pasadena and in Altadena within a 500-foot radius of the proposed site's boundary. At the hearing, the City's recommendation would be presented, followed by comments from the public. The public could provide comments in person at the public hearing held by the Hearing Officer, or in writing (mailed or delivered) to the Hearing Officer. The Hearing Officer's decision would include written findings as part of the decision to approve the project, approve the project with conditions, or deny the project. The decision of the Hearing Officer would be appealable to the Board of Zoning appeals within ten days of the decision.

The City's Design Review

The City would need a building permit for construction to begin. Design Review by the Design Commission is one step in the application process for a building permit. The Design Review process provides opportunities for public input on the project's appearance such as landscaping, perimeter fencing, security lighting and paint color of an above ground structure. The City's Design Review would occur after the CUP process and after the vendor contract is signed to ensure that details on the treatment plant and site layout are available for review and comment. The public could provide comments in person at the public meeting held by the Design Commission, or in writing (mailed or delivered) to the Design Commission.

Before operation of the plant could begin, the City would apply to the Department of Health Services Drinking Water Program for a 97-005 permit. This approval process also includes a public hearing. If approved, the permit would allow the City to provide the treated water for domestic use.

These are some of the many steps to take before a proposed groundwater treatment plant located in the City of Pasadena could proceed. Both NASA and the City of Pasadena take these steps seriously and are committed to an open public process.

For more information about the Proposed Plan:

Merrilee Fellows
NASA Groundwater Cleanup Manager
for Community Involvement
(818) 393-0754
mfellows@nasa.gov

Para más información en español llame a

Gabriel Romero
NASA JPL teléfono: (818) 354-8709

For more information about the City of Pasadena permitting requirements:

Lanny Woo
Planning and Development Department
(626) 744-6709
lwoo@cityofpasadena.net

Information Repositories

La Cañada Flintridge Public Library
4545 Oakwood Ave., La Cañada Flintridge, California 91011
(818) 790-3330

Pasadena Central Library
285 E. Walnut St., Pasadena, California 91101
(626) 744-4052

Altadena Public Library
600 E. Mariposa Ave., Altadena, California 91001
(626) 798-0833

JPL Library, Bldg. 111
(JPL Personnel Only)
(818) 354-4200