

Austin Wastewater Treatment Facility

Summary of draft permit on public notice from April 5, 2021 to June 4, 2021

The city of Austin (City) Wastewater Treatment Facility (Facility) is located at 1205 South Main Street in Austin, Minnesota, in Mower County. This southern Minnesota city is proposing to replace its existing treatment system with a more modern one. The City is upgrading its system because the existing Facility, built in 1938 with upgrades in 1987 and 1997, has reached the end of its design life.



The City of Austin in Mower County is proposing to replace its wastewater treatment system, last upgraded in 1997.

This construction will not change the location of the Facility nor the location of the discharge of treated wastewater to the Cedar River. The Facility will increase its design flow in order to provide room for future city growth in population and industry. The average wet weather design flow will increase from 8.475 million to 10.59 million gallons per day.

Under state rules, the discharge of treated wastewater to the Cedar River requires a permit from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The MPCA issued the Facility's current permit on Feb. 20, 2019, and this permit is set to expire on Jan. 31, 2024. The expansion requires changes to the permit, which is now on public notice, meaning interested parties may comment on changes to the permit. Despite the increase in wastewater being treated, the modified permit will not allow an increase in the pollutant load discharged to the Cedar River.

The modified permit calls for a new limit on total phosphorus, a nutrient that can cause excessive growth of algae that harms aquatic life and hinders recreation. The current permit has no limit on total phosphorus, and the Facility discharged an average of 88,000 pounds of phosphorus per year to the Cedar River from 2015 to 2020. To prevent water quality problems downstream, the modified permit would limit total phosphorus at 1.0 milligram per liter May through September. Under this new limit, the MPCA estimates the Facility would discharge about 7,000 pounds of phosphorus per year (May through September), a decrease of 81 percent from the 29,000 pounds discharged on average in the past from May through September.

Construction schedule

The draft modified permit includes a construction schedule for the proposed facility improvements. The improvements would include replacing some buildings and several processes with upgraded facilities, as well as adding equipment. Construction is expected to start in 2022 and last about three years. The city of Austin will continue to use the existing Facility during construction.

Public comment

The draft modified permit is on public notice for 60 days, beginning April 5, 2021 and ending June 4, 2021. The MPCA encourages interested parties to send correspondence to the agency electronically, so staff can respond more efficiently. Please submit comments to nancy.heskett@state.mn.us or:

Nancy Heskett
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
7381 Airport View Drive Southwest
Rochester, MN 55902

Please note that because this is a modification of the current permit, only comments on the proposed construction project and new phosphorus limit will be considered since these are the only parts of the permit that are being changed.

In order to be considered in the final permit decision, written comments must include:

- Your interest in the permit application or the draft permit.
- The action you wish the MPCA to take, including specific references to the section of the draft permit you believe should be changed.
- The reasons supporting your position, stated precisely to allow the MPCA to investigate the merits of the position.

The draft permit is available on the MPCA public notices webpage at www.pca.state.mn.us/publicnotices (scroll to April 5, 2021). More information on the procedures for public participation are also in the public notice document.

Additional information

For more information about the permit, contact Nancy Heskett at nancy.heskett@state.mn.us or 507-206-2605. Spanish speakers may contact Jose Luis Villasenor at joseluis.villasenor@state.mn.us or 651-757-2575.