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Enchanted Heights Sewer Project Dedication

City of Perris elected representatives joined with their regional and state partners Thursday to formally dedicate the \$15 million Enchanted Heights sewer project, culminating a 12-year effort to replace leaking septic tanks with a state-of-the-art plumbing system.

"This is a great day," said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch. "We were able to address an unacceptable and intolerable situation and vastly improve the quality of life for some of our most disadvantaged residents. That's really what this project is all about—quality of life."

The Enchanted Heights project required determination and patience, Busch said.

The numerous obstacles to ultimate success included convincing sometimes skeptical homeowners to allow construction crews onto their property, completing the project on rocky and uneven terrain, overcoming community-activist opposition and securing adequate funding to avoid the projected \$5,000-per household connection fee.

"We as a City could not allow a large financial burden on our Enchanted Heights residents," Busch said.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch speaks during the June 5 dedication of the Enchanted Heights sewer project—"This is a great day."

Perris officials also made sure all the streets with new sewer lines were repaved.

The City partnered with Riverside County, Eastern Municipal Water District, the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Department of Public Health.

The bulk of the funding--\$10 million--came from the Department of Public Health to complete mainline sewers while \$5 million from the State Water Resources Control Board covered the costs of onsite work and connection fees. The City's community outreach effort was hailed as a model by the League of California Cities and the National League of Cities.

Busch thanked the City's consultant, Maria Elena Kennedy, who spent countless hours walking through Enchanted Heights contacting homeowners individually and in small groups to convince them of the need to allow construction to begin. Kennedy befriended many property owners, the majority who are Spanish-speaking and that close relationship proved invaluable during the outreach and construction phases of the project, Busch said.



Construction of the sewer system required persistence by the City of Perris and its partners and patience from Enchanted Heights residents. Here, a bulldozer works on a street in 2012.

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough said completing the sewer project was a personal as well as professional milestone. His family lived in Enchanted Heights for years. Half of the 446-residence community lies within the Perris city limits while the other half lies in unincorporated Riverside County. Enchanted Heights began as a haven for retirees but over time, more and more families moved in, placing an ever-increasing strain on septic systems.

Talk of replacing those septic tanks began in 2002 but it wasn't until heavy rains in 2010 sent raw sewage into the streets that momentum built for new sewers. Construction began in late 2012.

"If you work in a positive manner, you can bring about all sorts of good things," Yarbrough said. "We were able to overcome some unique challenges and do our job as elected officials by responding to the needs of the community."

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley said Enchanted Heights represents a "collaboration in which everybody figured out how to solve this problem—and then solved it.

"It worked because everybody worked together," Ashley said. "This is one of those great days you look forward to if you're involved in public service."



Enchanted Heights resident Marnie Palmerin chats with City Councilman Mark Yarbrough prior to the dedication ceremony. Perris Assistant City Manager Ron Carr stands in the background.

Paul Jones, EMWD general manager, said conditions in the Enchanted Heights community were "pretty unimaginable" when septic tanks overflowed, flooding the streets with untreated sewage that made its way into the groundwater. He called the sewer-system installation an "incredibly important project in a small community that had been frequently overlooked."

Ron Sullivan, a member of the board of directors at EMWD, called Thursday's dedication an "auspicious moment" and praised the partnering agencies for their determination in seeing the project through to completion. He singled out the City of Perris for administering grant funding. He thanked Enchanted Heights residents for "enduring two years of construction" while sewer installation was under way.

"Now see the results of that patience," he said.

Enchanted Heights resident Marnie Palmerin, in comments made after the dedication ceremony, thanked Perris elected officials and administrators for bringing "an amazing project to our community."

"The City stepped in and did everything possible on our behalf," Palmerin said. "I love being part of the City of Perris. It's a great City."

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org



Perris City Hall
101 N. D Street
Perris, CA 92570

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