

Opposition to PURE Funding
September 2022

Dear Mayor Castor and members of Tampa City Council,

We represent citizens who are concerned about the safety and cost of PURE, which is estimated at \$3.4 billion or more over the next 30 years. As proposed by the City, the project would use 50 million gallons of highly treated wastewater per day to: (1) mix with our drinking water in the Hillsborough River Reservoir; (2) use it for Minimum Flows, i.e., “freshwater” released into the Hillsborough River during much of the year, when water does not naturally flow over the dam; and (3) inject it in the aquifer for use. This wastewater, produced by Tampa’s sewage system, is currently treated to a lower level and released into Tampa Bay.

A list of questions presented by citizens to Mayor Castor and city staff in March remain unanswered (see attached). Although Council approved \$1.2 million in February to research alternative options for beneficial uses of the wastewater, and to educate the public and receive feedback from citizens, none of this has occurred. There has been no accounting as to how the initial funds allocated to the PURE project have been spent. Instead, the Administration is seeking an additional \$1.1 million in funding..

We say NO to any additional PURE funding until there are answers to basic questions:

1. How are you going to treat the water so that it will be **safe**?
2. Is PURE **necessary**? What are the **other alternatives**?
3. How much will it **cost**? How much will utility bills go up to pay for it?

Safe, affordable drinking water must be a priority for the City of Tampa. We are opposed to putting treated wastewater into the aquifer or into the Hillsborough River without scientific proof that it will be safe for wildlife and humans. Until PURE is shown to be needed, safe and affordable, funding for it must be stopped. We therefore ask the Mayor and Council to oppose further funding.

Regards,

Friends of the River
League of Women Voters Hillsborough County
Sierra Club Tampa Bay Group

ATTACHMENT

OUTREACH INFORMATION THAT THE PUBLIC NEEDS FROM THE CITY OF TAMPA REGARDING THE PROPOSED “PURE” PROJECT:

As part of the Outreach that the City is now beginning to explain the PURE Project and to formulate what it will consist of, the following information needs to be transparently shared with the Public and posted on the City’s PURE website for access by the Public:

1. What remains in the wastewater after it has been treated (now)? What are the levels of chemicals, metals, PFAS, PFOA, hormones, pathogens and nutrients that are presently contained in and remain in the wastewater after it has been treated at the wastewater treatment plant (and presently discharged into Tampa Bay)?
2. What are the “water quality standards” that will be selected by the City for treatment of the wastewater under PURE? In other words, what are you going to remove (and not remove) from the wastewater in the treatment processes used under PURE before: (a) putting any of the treated water in the aquifer for storage and recovery; (b) putting any of the treated water in the Hillsborough River below the dam; (c) putting any of the treated water in the Reservoir above the dam; or (d) using the water for direct potable supply?
3. What are the water treatment methods that will be utilized under PURE to meet the “water quality standards” referenced above in item 2 above?
4. How much will PURE cost? Specifically, what are the projected: (a) Construction costs; and (b) Operating and Maintenance costs for the next 40 years?
5. How will PURE be paid for? Will customers utility bills be increased, and if so, by how much, and when?
6. What kinds of studies will be conducted to determine the effects and impacts of aquifer storage of 50 MGD of treated wastewater and who will conduct those studies? Will there be independent expert review of those studies before implementation of aquifer storage of 50 MGD?
7. What kinds of studies will be conducted to determine the effects and impacts of discharging treated wastewater in the lower Hillsborough River below the dam (to meet Minimum Flow requirements)? Who will conduct those studies? Will there be independent expert review of those studies before implementation of using the treated wastewater for Minimum Flows?
8. What kind of prototype testing will be conducted to ensure that there will be no damage to the aquifer, the Hillsborough River, or human health from reuse of this treated wastewater?
9. What would be the cost of treating the wastewater as it exists today, to remove the nitrogen to make discharge of the water into Tampa Bay more beneficial to the Estuary?
10. What are the projections for growth of the population within the City of Tampa’s utility service area in the next 10, 20, 30 and 40 years?

11. How much water (average per day) will the City of Tampa need to plan for the future population growth (and meet Minimum Flow requirements for the lower Hillsborough River) described in item 10?
12. What does “Drought Proofing the Reservoir” mean in measurable terms, and how does the City propose to use treated wastewater for “Drought Proofing the Reservoir?”
13. What other sources of drinking water does the City of Tampa have in times of drought when the Hillsborough River Reservoir is too low to use to create drinking water?
14. What are the costs of obtaining the water needed in times of drought from those other sources as described in Item 13?
15. How does the cost described in item 14 compare to the cost of PURE?
16. Will the City join with other municipalities to request that the Legislature extend the 10-year deadline imposed under the current state law, to allow sufficient time for the studies that need to be done in order to implement PURE safely?
17. Will the City join with other municipalities to request that the Legislature provide funding to implement the costs associated with SB 64 so that the cost will not have to be borne by City Utility Customers?

Concerns of the Public to be addressed:

Public safety is the top priority. There are things in wastewater that are not present in the Hillsborough River (the City’s primary source of drinking water). How will the City show the public that PURE will be safe? (i.e., not harm people who drink or bathe in it, and not harm the aquifer or the river).

Drinking the treated wastewater, or mixing the treated wastewater with our existing drinking water supply should be a last resort, absent a clear and present established urgent Need. Clarify the Need.

Clean and safe drinking water should incorporate the best treatment methods available. Cost containment should not be the main driver. Using the best technology to obtain the best quality water should be the driver. We want the safest water, not the cheapest.

The Floridan Aquifer is the primary source of drinking water for most of the state of Florida (and other states north of us). How can you assure the public that storing up to 50 MGD of treated wastewater under PURE will not damage the Aquifer or potable wells in the area where the water will be injected?

The Hillsborough River is the City of Tampa’s primary source of drinking water. How can you assure the public that pumping treated wastewater into the Reservoir above the dam, or pumping it into the lower Hillsborough River below the dam, will not damage the River?