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JOHN SPRAGGINS, Utilities Director

MEDIA RELEASE

City of Phenix City Addresses Chattahoochee River Water Quality Concerns

Phenix City, Alabama – June 7, 2024 – The City of Phenix City is addressing a Facebook post recently made by the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) and a subsequent article in the Ledger-Enquirer regarding signs of undertreated sewage flowing into the Chattahoochee River near the Phenix City Wastewater Treatment Plant outfall. The articles report that CRK measured elevated levels of E. coli bacteria in the river downstream from the City’s treatment plant.

The City assures the public that the Phenix City Wastewater Treatment Plant is staffed with experienced operators certified by the State of Alabama. The department recently installed a professional utilities engineer with 18 years of experience in utilities engineering and operations to head the City’s Utilities Department. Additionally, the department has expanded its team with qualified and certified personnel in wastewater collection and treatment management.

John Spraggins, Utilities Director stated, "The health and safety of our community and the protection of our natural resources are of utmost importance. We are committed to resolving any issues promptly and ensuring our waterways remain clean and safe."

The City has taken the following actions and steps to address and improve the wastewater treatment process:

Substantial Upgrades and Investments:

- In 2022, the City began extensive upgrades to the Wastewater Treatment Plant, including new electrical controls, new grit system piping and pumps, new aeration basins, additional secondary clarifiers, grinding equipment for the reduction of solids, and a complete reconstruction of the distribution arms of four large trickling filters. This project cost was \$12.3 million. The trickling filters were all back in service on June 5 of this year.
- In 2023, the second phase of the project was bid for the upgrade and improvements to the plant's four primary clarifiers, which includes the demolition and replacement of significant portions of the clarifiers at an estimated cost of \$2.15 million.
- An additional \$439,000 was spent to replace one screw pump, and the City is currently upgrading the grit removal system.



Challenges During Upgrades:

- Repair and replacement of the facility's major components require these components to go offline, sometimes for extended periods. During these outages, the plant has worked to treat the wastewater to the best of its ability, but achieving permitted levels was not always possible.

Compliance and Reporting:

- Since 2023, the City has been in constant contact with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and has completed all required reports. In November 2023, ADEM issued a notice of violation regarding elevated levels of ammonia, E.coli, and TSS. The City, along with Ardurra, the engineering firm retained to aide in completing the upgrades, responded fully to ADEM.
- The City believes that the reactivation of the four trickling filters will bring the facility into compliance regarding permitted ammonia and E. coli levels within the next thirty to forty-five days.
- The City anticipates all improvements will be completed and that it will meet ADEM permit requirements by the first quarter of 2025 after all processes are brought back online.

Future Improvements:

- The City is currently working on additional plans to improve the facility's effectiveness, including the rehabilitation of the chlorine contact basin and improvements to the grit removal system and primary screening process.
- Significant investments have been made in studies to identify areas of high inflow and infiltration within the collection system, which will drastically improve the facility's ability to treat influent when remediation work identified by the studies is performed to eliminate the sources of inflow and infiltration.

Collaboration with Stakeholders:

- The City has met with CRK staff to report on and discuss the status of the wastewater treatment plant's ongoing upgrades. The City will continue to work with the ADEM, CRK, and other relevant organizations to ensure the quality of our effluent is safe for the river.

The City of Phenix City continues to seek funding through federal and state agencies and is conducting a cost of service study to identify and secure funds for further improvements. The



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City appreciates the vigilance of organizations like CRK and the cooperation of our community as we work to address this important issue. The City is committed to the continued improvement of its wastewater collection and treatment systems, and remains dedicated to maintaining the integrity of our natural resources and ensuring a safe and healthy environment for all residents.

For media inquiries, please contact:

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