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Apple Campus 2: Massive recycled water project approved

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An updated rendering depicts Apple's Campus 2 under construction in Cupertino. (Courtesy of the City of Cupertino)

Apple's futuristic new campus got a little greener Tuesday night as the Santa Clara Valley Water District voted to approve a \$17.5 million project that will channel more recycled water to the parched South Bay.

The water district board gave a final stamp of approval to a plan to boost the flow of recycled water in Sunnyvale and introduce the repurposed H₂O to neighboring Cupertino through Apple's new campus, which is under construction on Wolfe Road.

Funded in part by the iPhone maker, the project underscores local tech companies' drive to stay green as they dramatically expand their footprints in the Bay Area, following a recently announced investment in solar energy by Apple and wind energy by Google. Apple catalyzed talks among the various water stakeholders in the area, making plain its desire to use recycled water on its new campus, said Katherine Oven, deputy operating officer of the water district.

"Apple drove this project," she said. "It really is a true partnership of both public and private agencies."

As the California drought intensifies, recycled water -- sewage that is filtered and disinfected -- has become an increasingly popular option, particularly on golf courses and other landscapes that require extensive irrigation. Apple Campus 2 will join a variety of sites in the South Bay using recycled water, including Levi's Stadium, which uses recycled water to flush toilets and keep the playing field green. More corporate campuses will likely follow suit, said Heather Cooley, water program director for the Pacific Institute in Oakland.

"As we look to the availability of supplies in California, we know we've really exhausted in many areas our surface water and also our groundwater," she said. "We will certainly be seeing more of these projects."

As part of the project, workers will lay 13,300 feet of recycled water pipeline to funnel water from the city of Sunnyvale's water recycling facility to new locations, in addition to constructing a booster pump station to increase the water pressure for sites at the end of the line, like Apple.

The new pipeline will eventually have the capacity to pump up to 10 million gallons per day, project manager Debra Butler said. That would work out to about a quarter of the recycled water expected to flow through the South Bay, with the exception of cities like Gilroy and Morgan Hill, she added.

About 3 percent of the pipeline's capacity will be devoted to Apple, which is the only company so far that has committed to the project, Butler said. The company is contributing \$4.8 million to the project, with the rest of the more than \$17 million tab footed by the city of Sunnyvale, the California Water Service Company, the Department of Water Resources and the water district.

More than 157,000 gallons of recycled water will flow to Apple's new campus under the proposed project, Cal Water announced in February.

Apple has not disclosed how the water will be used on its new campus, but landscaping, cooling towers and plumbing are common applications. By investing in recycled water, the company can ease the demand for water in Cupertino, which would otherwise be using drinkable water to meet the tech giant's needs, said Frank Loge, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at UC Davis.

"Apple is essentially creating a new water supply for the city," he said. "Now that water is available to the city to repurpose in some other way."

The water district expects to award a construction contract this summer and begin construction in August. Service would begin in October 2016. Apple's new campus is expected to be completed in late 2016.

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