

# Addressing Wastewater Challenges in Wenden, Arizona



Wenden, Arizona

Many homes in Wenden rely on aging/poorly functioning septic systems (underground wastewater treatment structures). Failing systems impact community health, the environment, and home values. Septic systems need space and the proper soils to treat waste. However, approximately 233 septic systems in Wenden are on lots less than a quarter-acre in size. Fixing or replacing septic systems on lots less than a quarter acre may be challenging due to state rules. Without a proper wastewater system, lots may not be habitable. Many of the septic systems in town are at the end of the typical lifespan (30 years). Wastewater problems can worsen if the septic tanks are not pumped regularly.

## Why Does This Matter?

Fixing Wenden's wastewater infrastructure is an investment in our future. Wastewater improvements:

- **Protect public health and water resources.** A community-wide solution will eliminate issues like raw wastewater surfacing on the ground, reducing health risks and protecting local groundwater and drinking water quality.

- **Encourage community revitalization.** New wastewater infrastructure creates opportunities to support reclaimed water use for community facilities like Pioneer Community Park.
- **Expand opportunities for business and tourism.** Reliable wastewater systems help preserve Wenden's rich cultural and natural heritage, supporting outdoor recreation and cultural tourism. This can boost local businesses and attract visitors.
- **Support present and future generations.** Modern wastewater infrastructure ensures that families in Wenden receive, today and in the future, safe and sustainable service.
- **Improve property value.** A public wastewater utility will shift some responsibilities from the homeowners managing their onsite septic systems to the utility. The utility will be responsible to the state of Arizona for proper wastewater treatment and compliance. As a result, residential properties will have the confidence of regulators and financiers offering predictability and stability protecting the community from potential declining values associated with failing septic systems.

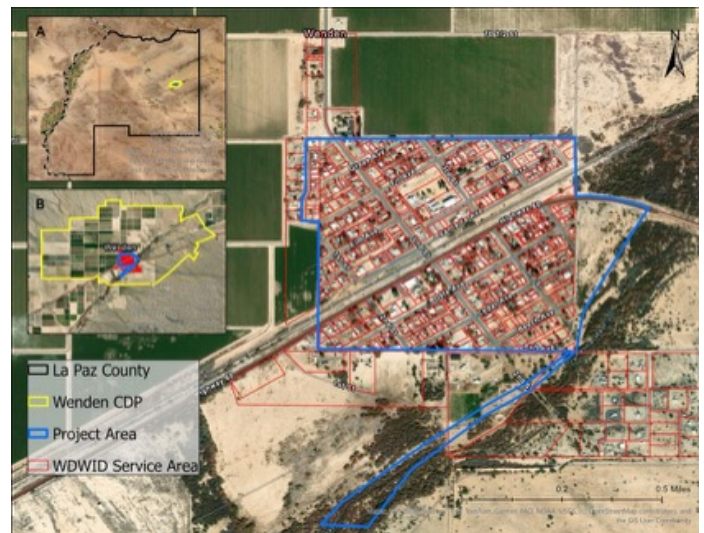


Figure 1. Map of the proposed project area.

## What Is Being Done?

Wenden Domestic Water Improvement District (WDWID) is working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to identify wastewater solutions for Wenden. State requirements for septic systems on small lots poses challenges to the future of the community, impacting population and economic growth. The solutions outlined below ensure residents can remain in their homes and protect the environment. This effort is part of EPA's Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Initiative, which provides no-cost technical assistance to help rural communities identify affordable options to improve their wastewater infrastructure.

WDWID and EPA are actively engaging residents, board members, engineers, and representatives from state and federal agencies to assess existing conditions, evaluate options, and support sound decision-making for the future sustainability of wastewater management in Wenden.

WDWID, with support from technical assistance providers, is evaluating five solutions for Wenden's wastewater infrastructure:

- **Option 1:** Centralized wastewater treatment plant using gravity piping.
- **Option 2:** Pre-treated wastewater from existing septic tanks to centralized treatment plant using low-pressure piping.
- **Option 3:** Multiple community drainfield treatment systems using septic tanks and low-pressure piping.
- **Option 4:** Hybrid approach by location. Option 2 to the south and Option 3 to the north of the highway.
- **Option 5:** Baseline (continuation with use of residential onsite septic tanks and residential drainfields) – may not be sustainable because of the failing condition of the existing septic systems and small size of parcels.



Wenden Domestic Water Improvement District

Engineers are finalizing a report that considers costs, funding scenarios, and non-monetary factors, like the impacts on residents.

## How Will This Be Funded?

WDWID qualifies for wastewater grant and loan programs with the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority of Arizona, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. WDWID is actively seeking additional funds for infrastructure improvements in Wenden.

Cost estimates for building and maintaining the proposed infrastructure are currently being developed in the engineering report. Final project costs and funding details will be shared with the community once the evaluation is complete in Spring 2026. Documents will be available to the public online or in person at the WDWID office.

Additional materials will be available for residents that help understand operating costs for the wastewater solutions above.

## Next Steps

WDWID and the CAWAG team are requesting feedback on the proposed options. As more information is developed towards solutions, community understanding, involvement and support will be crucial as the project moves forward. Feedback and considerations will be incorporated into the finalized engineering document. The CAWAG team and local technical assistance providers will assist with applying to funding agencies to see how much grant support can be provided to the WDWID.

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