

Monte Rio/Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project & Feasibility Study Update

Community Meeting - Summary

Introduction

On November 29, 2023, a community meeting was held to discuss the Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project for the lower Russian River area of Monte Rio and Villa Grande. Approximately 60 community members participated in the meeting held at the Monte Rio Community Center. Several agencies participated in the meeting including the Sonoma County Administrator's Office Division of Climate Action and Resiliency, Permit Sonoma, Sonoma Water, and the State of California's North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss emerging state regulations to mitigate water quality impacts to the Russian River through improvements of wastewater disposal on properties within the watershed. The objectives of the meeting were to re-introduce the Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project for Monte Rio and Villa Grande, to present the scope of the technical study by consultants Brelje & Race, and to answer questions from the community. The meeting was facilitated by MIG and included interactive live polling questions that participants answered using their smartphones.



Welcome and Opening Remarks

Sonoma County Supervisor Lynda Hopkins joined the meeting via Zoom. She explained the importance of the project and the history of earlier efforts. She discussed the role of the Citizens Advisory Group (**CAG**) and lauded their efforts to assist in formulating solutions and in mobilizing coordinating efforts between the agencies involved.

Re-introduction to Wastewater Efforts in Monte Rio / Villa Grande

Sonoma Water Deputy General Manager Michael Thompson presented on the history, background, and context of the Wastewater Solutions project. He explained the overarching need to reduce the presence of pathogens in the Russian River, the emergence of the Total Maximum Daily Load (**TMDL**) plan that the Regional Water Quality Board is required to create, and the ongoing interagency collaboration. He explained that local property owners would have 15 years to get their septic systems to comply with regulations. If the community decided to pursue a community wastewater system a 20-year compliance period would apply.

The overview presentation was based on eight key points that included:

- Consistent Community Efforts – Monte Rio and Villa Grande members spent decades working on solutions for their communities.
- River Health – Pathogen levels in the river require the Regional Board to develop plans to reduce the levels.
- Long-term Compliance – Up to 15 Years for Individual Compliance and 20 Years for Community System Compliance.
- Community/Agencies Collaboration – Agencies and the CAG are working towards wastewater solutions with an initial focus on Monte Rio and Villa Grande.
- Dedicated Funding – A state grant is currently funding a feasibility study for Monte Rio/Villa Grande wastewater solutions.
- Long Term Process– The pilot project is progressing thoughtfully, incrementally, and deliberately, and will likely take a couple decades to complete.
- Early Phases of the Process – The pilot project is near the beginning and alternatives are now starting to be considered.
- Best Practices – Everything being done respecting the Pilot Project is following best practices that make for successful projects.

Study Area Analysis Presentation – Feasibility Study Update

Senior Principal Dave Coleman and Project Engineer Sophia Grubb from the firm Brelje & Race presented an overview of the overall scope of work of the Feasibility Study for the Monte Rio/Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Pilot Project. The scope includes:

- Study Area Analysis
- Alternatives Development & Analysis
- Project Feasibility & Preliminary Design Report
- Conceptual Design

Their work is in the first phase, and they provided the emerging findings from the Study Area Analysis. The objectives of the Study Area Analysis were to analyze demographics, evaluate study area characteristics and existing facilities, develop planning criteria, and introduce alternatives.

The review will include single family, multi-family, commercial, and agricultural properties. They explained that key features of the analysis will include parcel size, topography, soil type, flood zone proximity, surrounding vegetation, public road network, and age of existing facilities. The feasibility study will look at these features collectively and will not focus on or report on a single property.

Potential Wastewater Solution alternatives were described as potentially being under three broad categories:

- Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems – These include upgrades or replacement to onsite septic systems at individual residences and businesses, potentially including implementation of alternative types of toilets.
- Community Wastewater Treatment Systems – These include a septic tank for each individual residence or home with effluent pumped to a community leach field shared by a small cluster of adjoining properties.
- Connection to a Regional Wastewater Treatment – This includes the construction of a centralized collection system, including pipes and pumps that convey wastewater to a regional treatment plant.

The study will refine which alternatives are feasible given regulatory concerns, costs, financial impacts to property owners, long term management and governance.

Resource Panel – Q&A Session

Agency representatives provided a resource panel to answer questions from the community. The panel included:

- Michael Makdisi, Ombudsman, County of Sonoma Office of the Administrator
 - Nathan Quarles, Permit Sonoma
 - Charles Reed, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
 - Dave Coleman, Brelje & Race
 - Sophia Grubb, Brelje & Race
- The questions and answers from this portion of the meeting will be made publicly available in a separate written format. You may access this session immediately through the video recording.

Next Steps

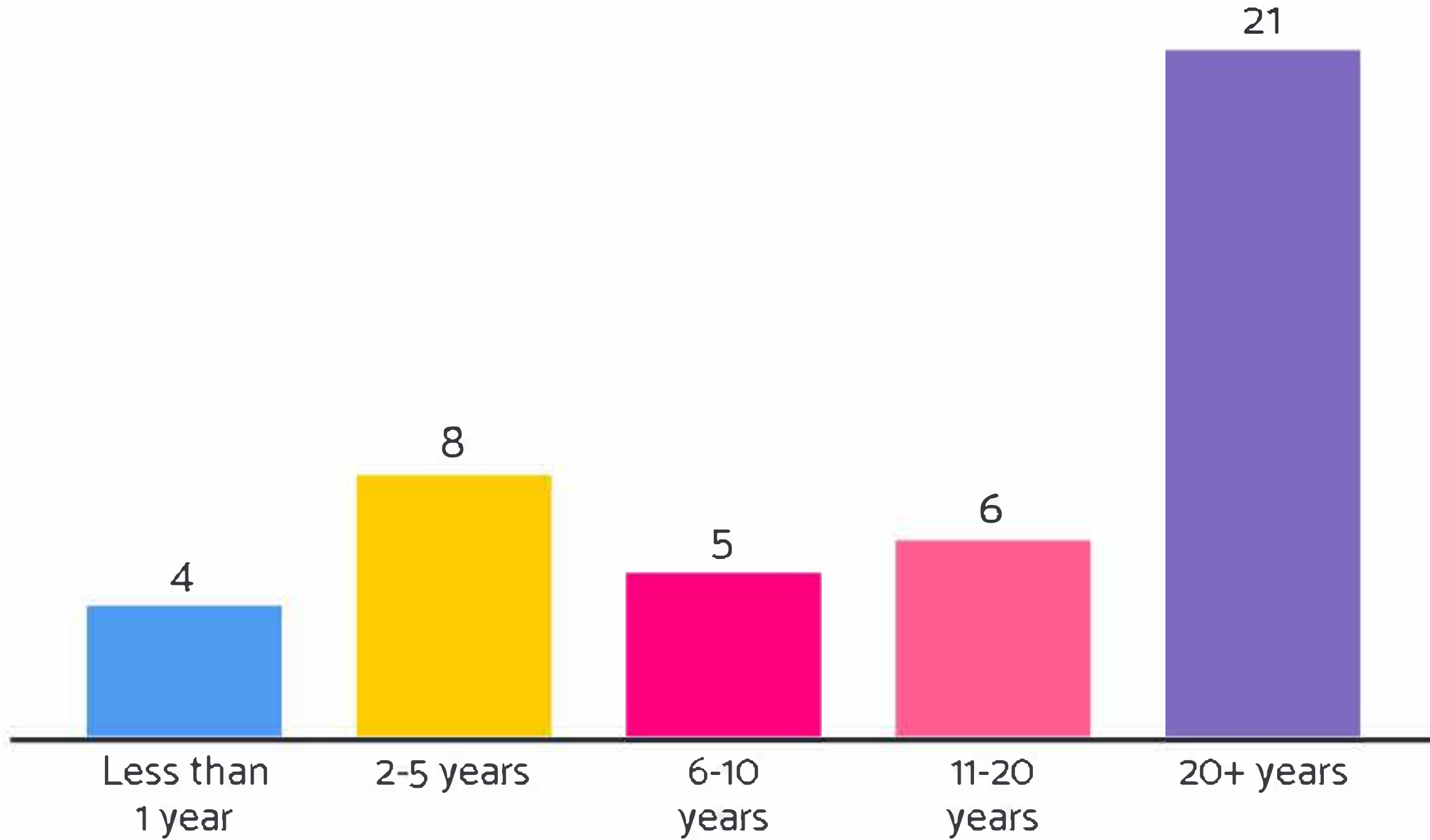
The Ombudsman, Michael Makdisi, introduced himself and provided an overview of his role. If you have questions or concerns about this meeting, about the topics discussed, how to participate in a CAG meeting, or about your property's septic systems situation or next steps, he is available to you. He will be holding office hours at the Monte Rio Community Center on Jan. 9 & 23 and Feb. 13 & 27 from 2-6 p.m. You can either walk-in or make an appointment.

The Ombudsman also mentioned a few anticipated events on the horizon, identified available resources and support, and suggested a few ways to get involved or take action. He reiterated that individual and community wastewater solutions are being studied through the pilot project, announced that a second community meeting would likely take place in the middle of 2024, and mentioned that the new and revised County regulations would also be coming in 2024.

Polling Results

Participants were polled over the course of the meeting through the online tool Mentimeter. Participants scanned a QR code on the screen and responded to questions directly on their phone. The following are the summary charts.

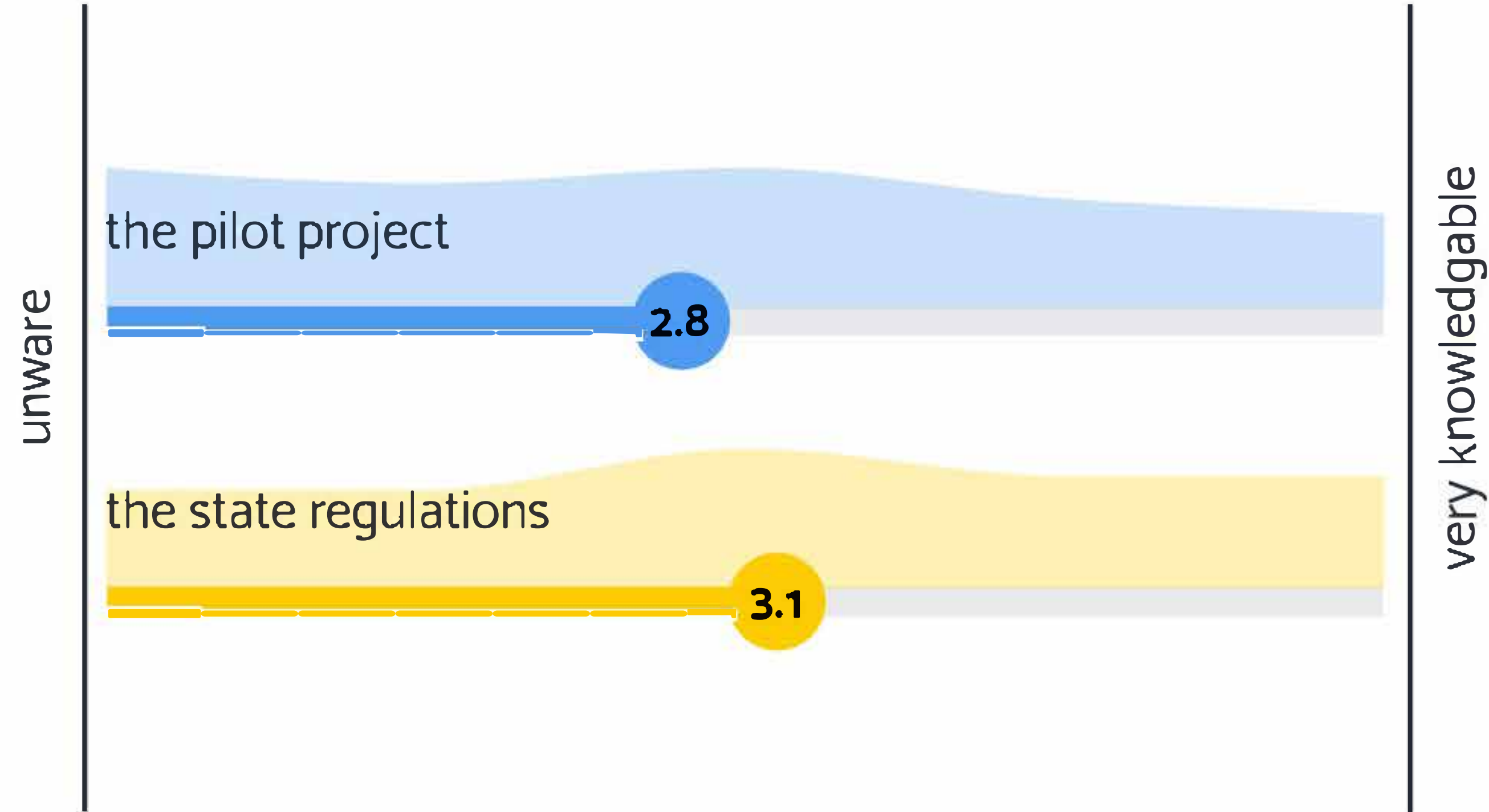
How long have you lived in Monte Rio or Villa Grande or West County?



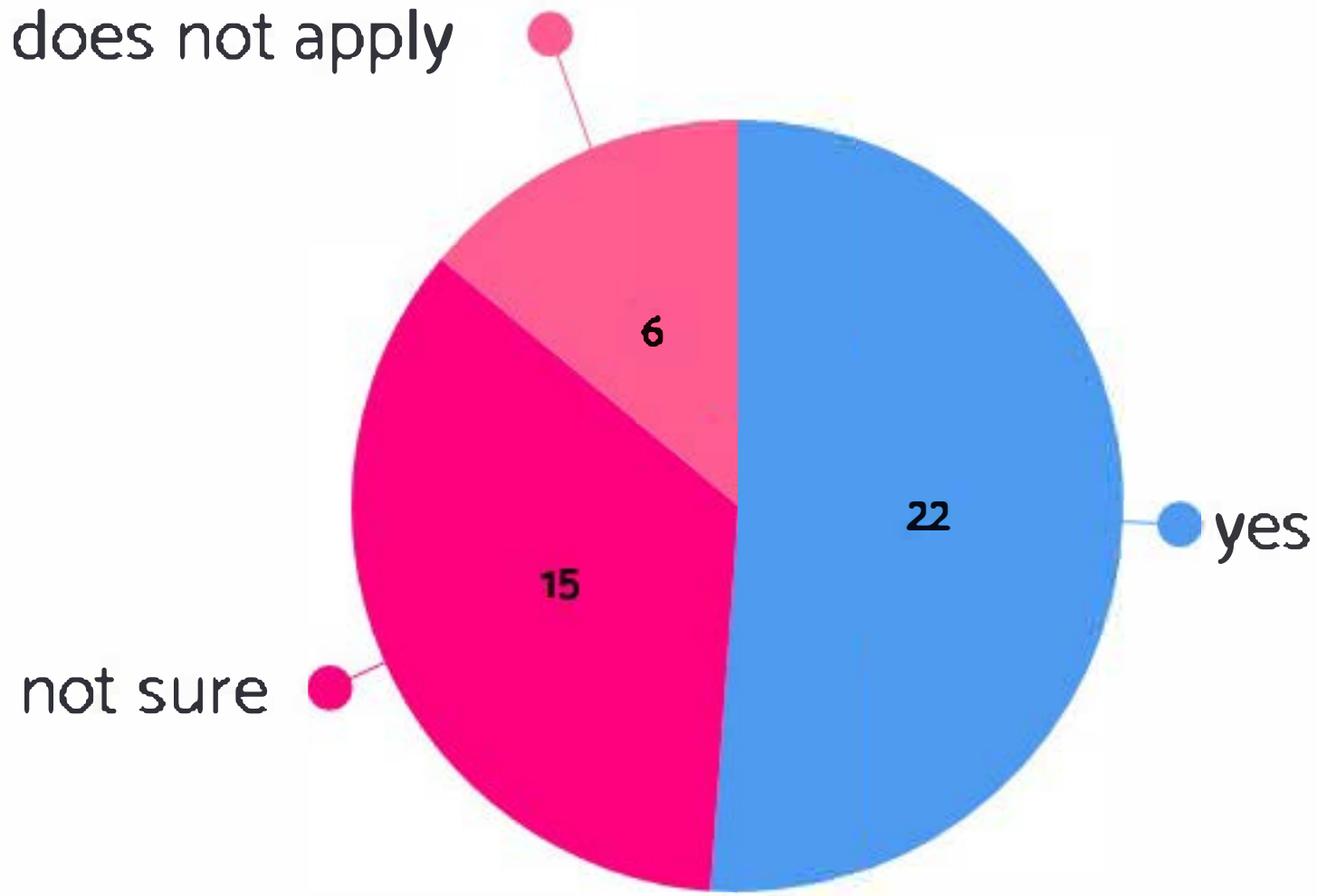
What is your interest in participating in this workshop?



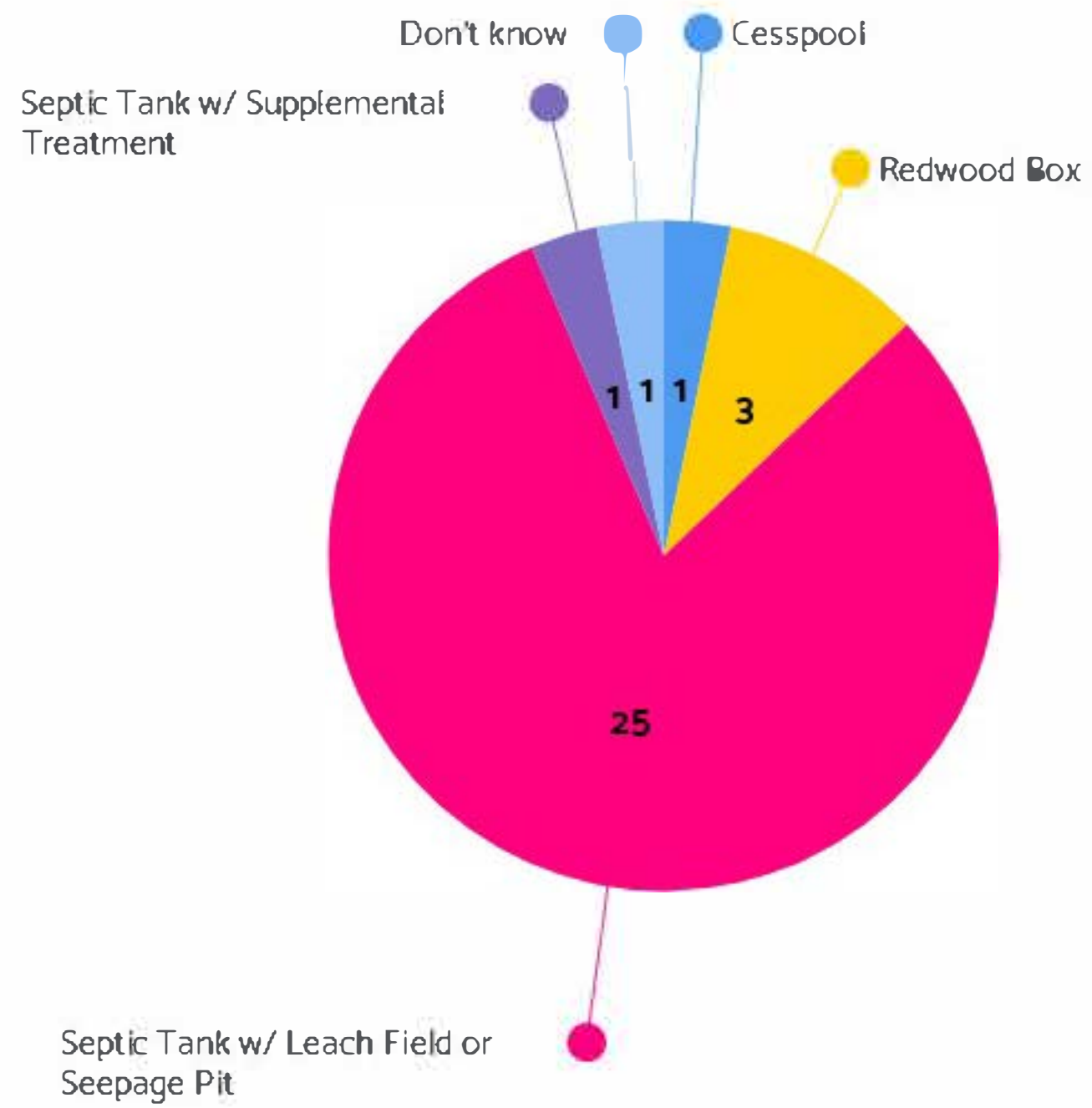
On a scale of 1-5, to what extent were you aware of...



For those in the study area, will the property you own need to comply with the potential new state regulations?



For those in the study area, what type of wastewater system do you have on your property?



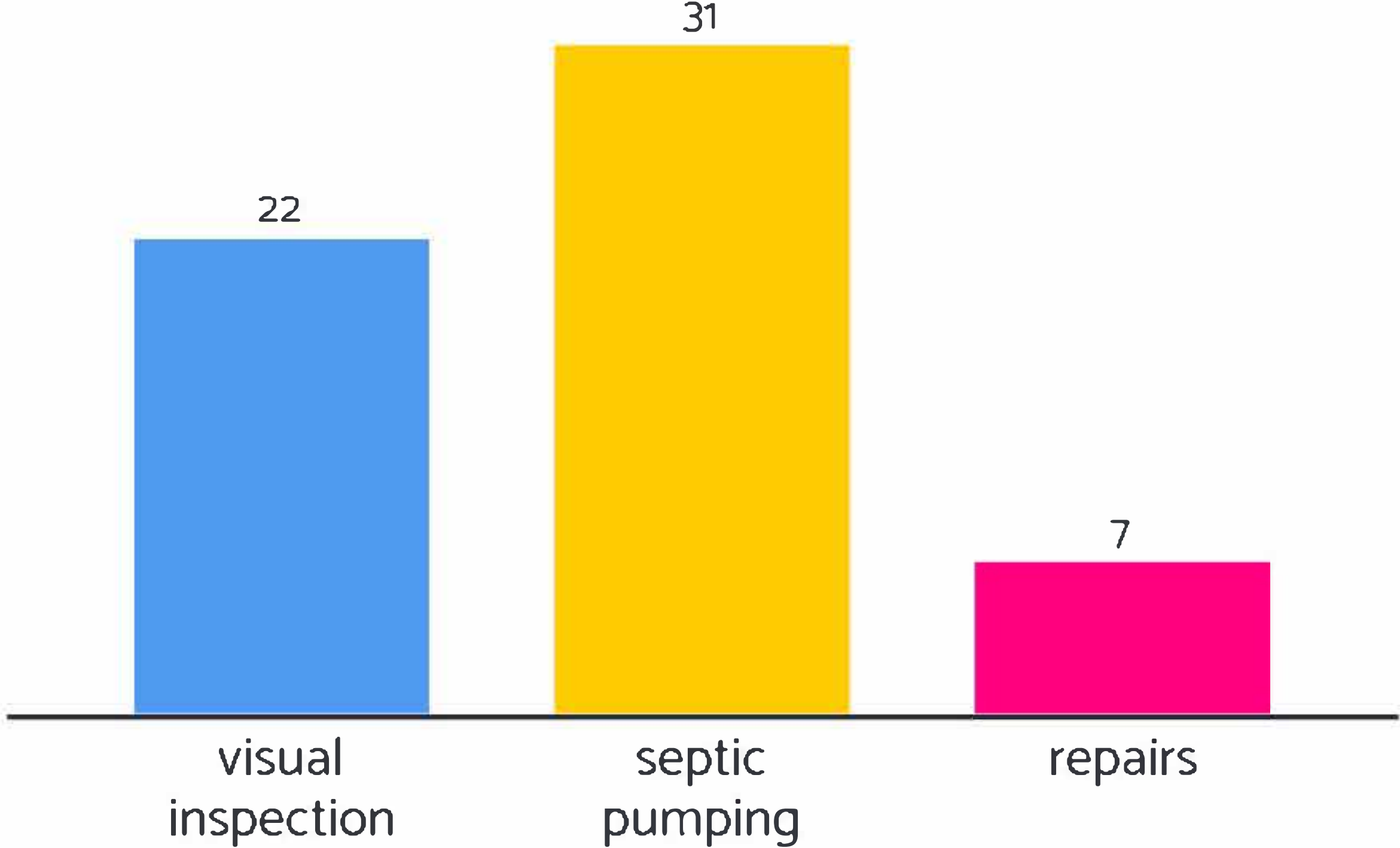
For those of you in the study area, does your system operate properly (not surfacing, not backing up into home)?



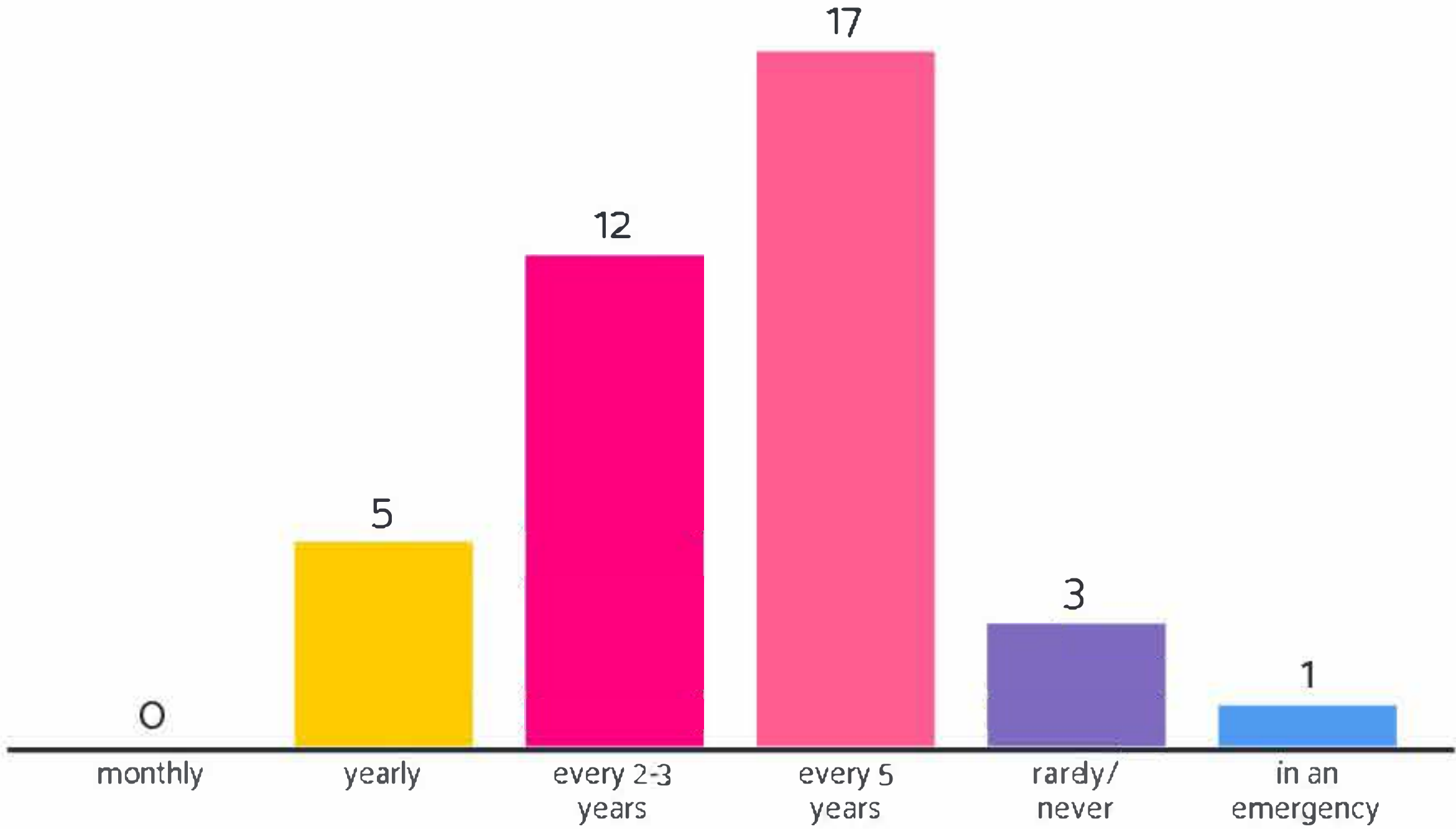
Do you know of any systems in your neighborhood that are experiencing issues or are failing?



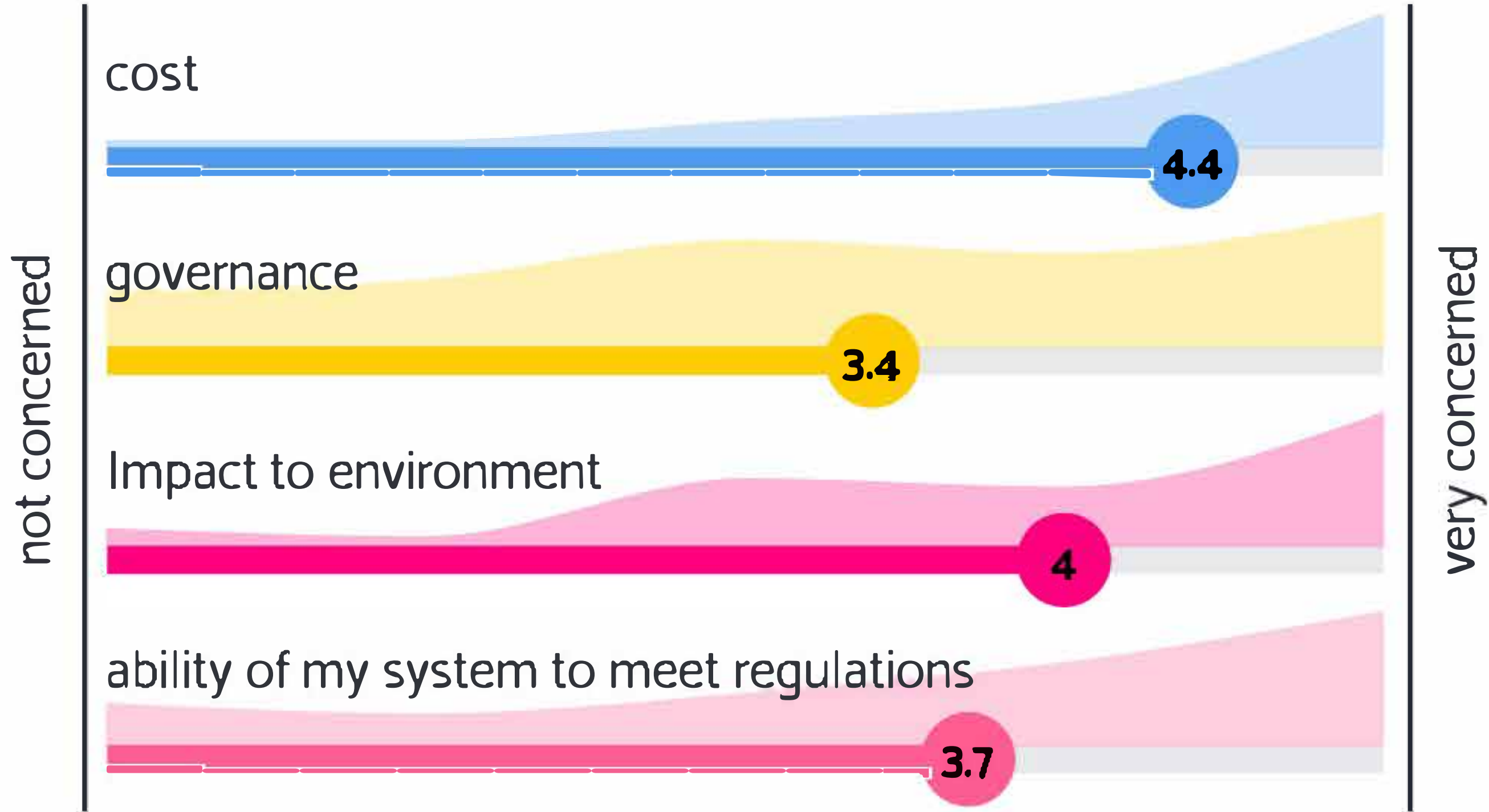
What type of maintenance are you doing on your system?



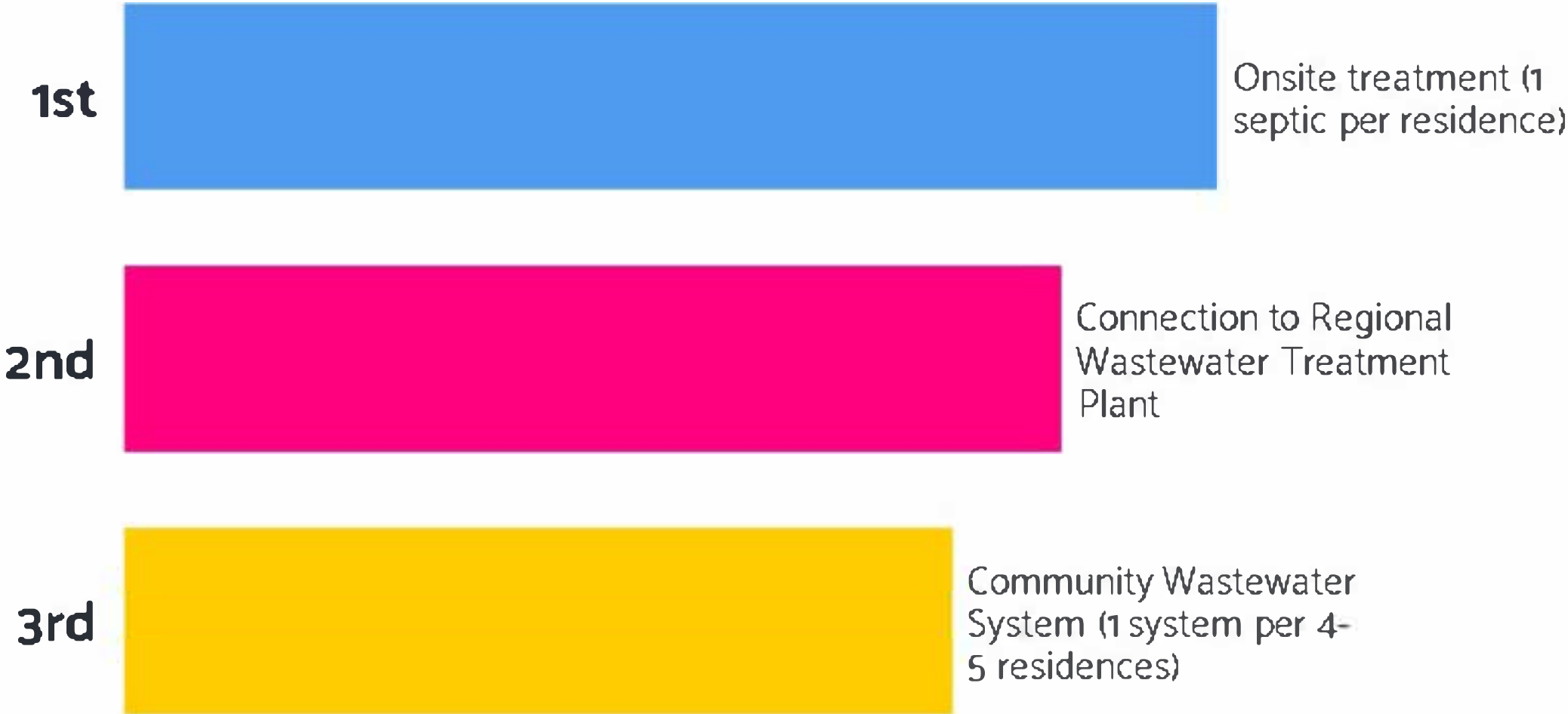
On average, how often are you maintaining your system?



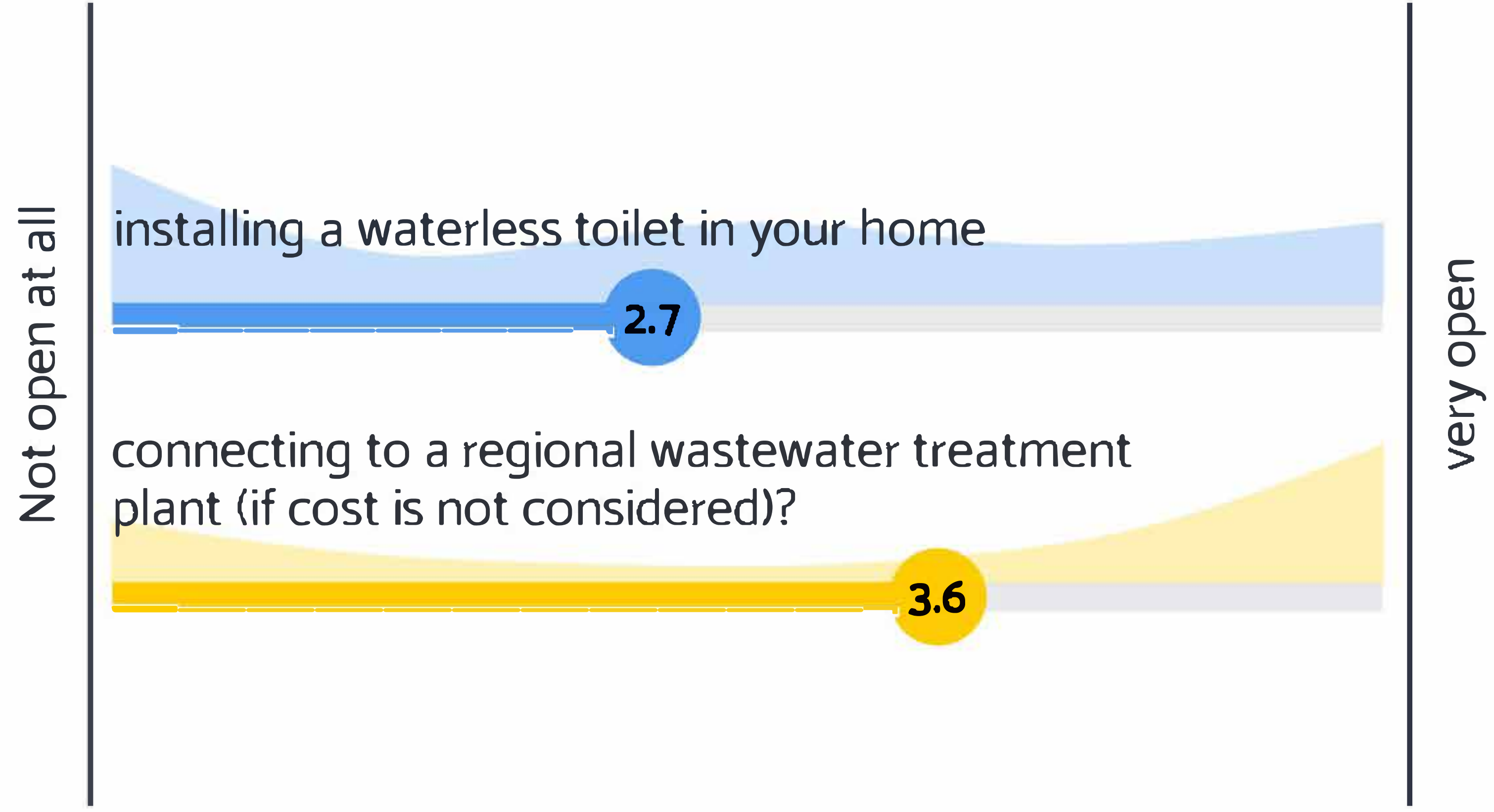
How concerned are you about the following elements of the pilot project...



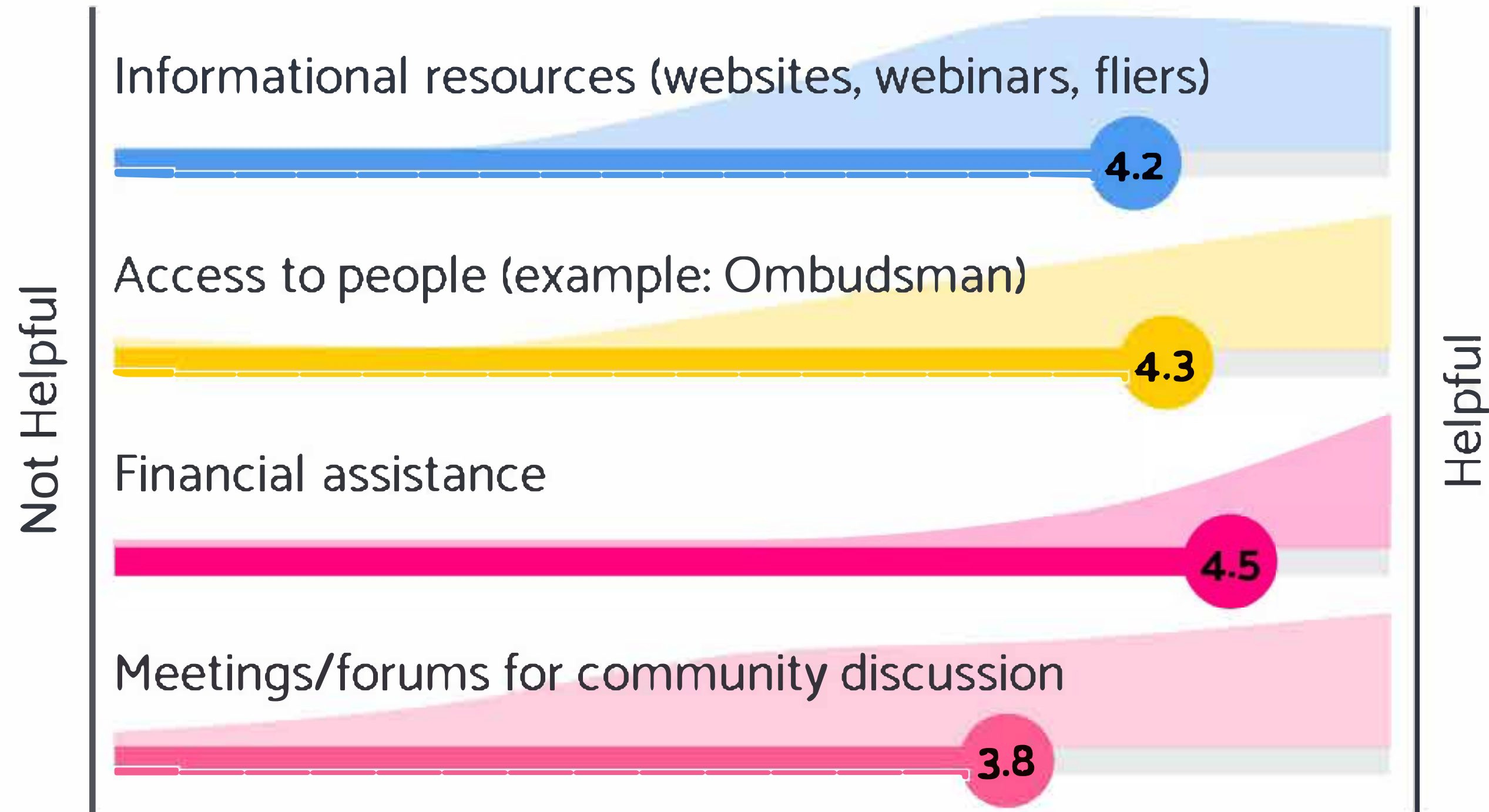
Based on what you have learned today, what emerging solution is currently most appealing to you?



On a scale of 1-5, how open are you to...



What types of resources would be most helpful?



What information are you most interested in learning about?

