



City of Seattle

May 5, 2026

Councilmember Sarah Perry
Chair, King County Council

Councilmember Claudia Balducci
Chair, Regional Water Quality Committee

Re: Proposed 2027 King County Sewer Rate and future projections

Dear Council Chair Perry and Regional Water Quality Committee Chair Balducci,

We are writing to express the City of Seattle's serious concerns about King County's proposed sewer rate increase of 12.75% for 2027 and the projected double-digit rate increases through 2032. If enacted, these increases would more than double the monthly wastewater treatment bill in the next five years, from \$62.66 to \$125.36. This cost significantly adds to the affordability challenge already facing households and local businesses in our region. More needs to be done to reduce these proposed increases.

We know you share our concern that the proposed sewer treatment rate adds to our regional affordability problems and we appreciate the County's leadership in bringing the region together for this discussion. We particularly want to acknowledge Councilmember Balducci's leadership on the Regional Water Quality Committee to champion affordability, transparency, and accountability and look forward to supporting this ongoing effort.

We urge the King County Council to address both the rate for 2027 and the proposed rate path and projected rate increases through 2032. Recognizing there are costly demands on the system, we believe the County Council should support a 2027 rate of no more than 10.75%, at least 2% below the proposal of 12.75%. This number is in line with the 2026-27 King County Budget Proviso that required the Wastewater Treatment Division to provide rate options, including one that is at least 2% less than the Executive proposed rate. We recognize that this rate would not meet all the system asset and capacity needs beyond 2027. We also acknowledge that even a 10.75% rate increase would heavily impact ratepayers, who are already facing significant affordability challenges.

Our priority is to make Seattle an affordable city for people of all income levels and for local businesses to thrive. Utility costs are an important part of our affordability agenda. The proposed 2027 regional sewer system rate and rate path place an unsustainable burden on our ratepayers, and this increase is only one of many rising costs impacting our region. The County's proposed rate also impacts Seattle's ability to invest in our own sewer system. With Seattle's commitment to three-year rate paths for our residents and utilities, we end up absorbing the County's rate increases, forcing us to delay meeting our own planned infrastructure needs. The compounded rate forecast will make this an ongoing issue.

As a public utility owner, the City of Seattle understands the complexities and challenges that King County must manage to operate and maintain the regional sewer treatment system. We face the same challenges of navigating costly regulatory requirements, rising construction costs, and investing in aging infrastructure and growth. In Seattle, we require Strategic Business Plans from our utilities, which provide predictable rate commitments and strategic planning over a 6-year period, with rates locked in every 3 years. This approach helps Seattle provide predictable rate path and commitment for our residents and utilities. We urge King County to require a similar type of planning and prioritization for the Wastewater Treatment Division before approving large rate increases. Until this type of planning is completed, we strongly recommend that annual rate increases be carefully constrained to what is necessary and realistically can be accomplished for the coming year.

The City of Seattle also strongly encourages King County to develop and implement a proactive strategy for regulation-driven projects. Regulatory requirements are driving much of the rate increases and we recommend continued discussion of the rate impacts of regulation-driven projects and rate affordability with the three regulatory agencies. We appreciate our partnership with King County on this work and are committed to continuing to work closely with you on the timing and substance of these conversations. Environmental stewardship is a core value of the communities we serve, and we must work hard to achieve the best value for our customers.

We strongly support the sound advice from the Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee (MWPAAC). Our region needs transformational change in the ways sewer treatment rates are set. We concur that a forecast of this magnitude needs extended review to allow sufficient time to evaluate alternatives, understand tradeoffs, and reach informed policy decisions.

As elected officials with members on the Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC), we also want to emphasize the points in the RWQC letter to Executive Zahilay. We support more substantive, timely progress toward pursuing state regulatory flexibility to address water quality needs, implementing a multi-year rate to improve rate predictability, improving transparency in the capital planning process, and advancing the independent review of the capital program with a goal of ensuring projects are prioritized and delivered on time and within budget.

In addition, Seattle appreciates our partnership with King County and the work of the Wastewater Treatment Division to improve transparency and collaboration with member agencies. Our agencies have a productive relationship that has provided more efficient, cost-effective solutions for our

ratepayers. More strategic, collaborative planning will further enhance the value for our region. We look forward to working together on these issues and on regional affordability.

Sincerely,



Katie Wilson
Mayor, City of Seattle



Joy Hollingsworth
Council President, Seattle City Council



Eddie Lin
Councilmember, Seattle City Council



Alexis Mercedes Rinck
Councilmember, Seattle City Council



Maritza Rivera
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Dionne Foster
Councilmember, Seattle City Council

CC: Girmay Zahilay, King County Executive
John Taylor, Director, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Kamuron Gurol, Director, King County Wastewater Treatment Division
Andrew Lee, CEO/General Manager, Seattle Public Utilities