

Guiding Principles – DRAFT RWQC RESOLUTION

Draft Prepared by WTD for Discussion at RWQC Workshop 9/4/24

A RESOLUTION adopting guiding principles for the update to the Regional Wastewater Services Plan and associated policies.

WHEREAS, the regional water quality committee recognizes the critical importance of maintaining and enhancing its wastewater utility services to ensure public health, environmental protection and operational efficiency, and

WHEREAS, a comprehensive long-range plan for wastewater services is essential to effectively address current and future needs, including infrastructure improvements, regulatory compliance, affordability of long-term rates and sustainable practices, and

WHEREAS, the council adopted the Regional Wastewater Services Plan (“RWSP”) in November 1999 through Ordinance 13680, subsequently codified in K.C.C. chapter 28.86, and

WHEREAS, the RWSP, a supplement to the King County Comprehensive Water Pollution Abatement Plan originally adopted by the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, serves as the primary framework for guiding the future of the county’s wastewater utility and regional infrastructure, and

WHEREAS, the RWSP identifies projects and programs needed to provide wastewater treatment capacity for homes and businesses in the wastewater treatment division (WTD) service area through 2030, and

WHEREAS, the RWSP provides policy direction for the operation and continued development of the wastewater system and its capital improvement program, including financial policies to guide financial forecasting and budgeting, debt financing and borrowing and collection of revenue to support the implementation of the RWSP, and

WHEREAS, the RWSP must be updated and the associated policies in KCC 28.84 (Water Pollution Abatement) and 28.86 (Wastewater Treatment) must be examined to ensure investments in the wastewater system continue to improve water quality, ensure system performance, and to mitigate the impact of increasing sewer rates over the long term, and

WHEREAS, the wastewater treatment division has initiated the process to update the RWSP and review associated policies, and

WHEREAS, the regional water quality committee has a strong interest in ensuring the steps taken to update the plan are well coordinated and effective, and

WHEREAS, the plan update will benefit from guiding principles to ensure alignment with the community’s values, legal requirements and best practices in wastewater management, transparency and accountability in the planning process, and a clear basis for evaluating decisions and actions, and

WHEREAS, guiding principles will support engagement with interested and affected parties by ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in the planning process, and

WHEREAS, wastewater treatment division has developed these guiding principles in consultation with the regional water quality committee, and

WHEREAS, these guiding principles were also informed by comments and input received from component agencies and interested parties during the Clean Water Plan outreach process, and

WHEREAS, these principles will help ensure that King County updates the plan in a collaborative and responsive way to guide future investments for decades, and

WHEREAS, the regional water quality committee has reviewed and considered the proposed guiding principles to steer the development and content of the long-range plan;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the King County Regional Water Quality Committee that the following Guiding Principles are adopted as follows:

1. The process to update the RWSP and associated policies should:

1.1. Establish clear and transparent processes, roles, and decision-making responsibilities and authority. The RWSP update process will establish and clearly communicate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority for all steps of the process. Roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *RWQC* will review and provide input on proposed RWSP policy changes and provide recommendations on policy amendments to the council.
- *The Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee* should review technical analyses, provide feedback on WTD work products and proposals and may present their recommendations for the Executive, WTD, and regional water quality committee's consideration.
- *WTD* will lead the RWSP Update planning effort, using these guiding principles and input from interested or affected parties to develop a vision, policies, and a plan to guide the future of the Division.
- *The King County Executive* will propose the vision, policies, and plan.

1.2. Engage diverse voices and foster inclusive participation: The process will ensure that community members have equitable opportunities to contribute to and inform the wastewater utility planning process. WTD will actively reach out to underrepresented groups and consider their needs and perspectives when creating the plan. Engagement will be guided by King County's Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.

1.3. Listen to and respect all input: The process will meaningfully reflect the input, ideas and feedback heard from participants throughout the wastewater planning process. This includes revisiting and re-engaging with individuals and groups who previously contributed to the Clean Water Plan, as well as reaching new interested parties. WTD will regularly solicit community feedback and integrate it into decision-making. The process will work to ensure that voices are heard and report back how input is considered and used.

1.4. Understand the challenges and opportunities facing the regional wastewater system. The process will develop a shared understanding of the key challenges or "drivers" for the planning process and the opportunities or range of possible future directions for the regional wastewater system over the next several decades. Having this common understanding will be an important foundation for developing a vision, and will inform the scope of work, policy analysis, investment plans and financial strategies.

- 1.5. **Develop a shared vision for the future.** The process will engage regional audiences to develop a long-term vision for future wastewater services, as well as identify high-level goals to achieve that vision, both of which will be included in the final RWSP update. The vision will be consistent with WTD's mission to protect public health and the environment by collecting and cleaning wastewater while recovering valuable resources for a healthy and resilient Puget Sound.
- 1.6. **Develop policy updates and a plan that aligns with the vision.** Guided by the vision and high-level goals, WTD will develop, evaluate, and select strategies that will guide WTD's investments into the future. WTD will collaborate with RWQC and MWPAAC to review and refine policies. WTD will also engage with interested and affected parties to collect feedback on the draft plan and ensure that proposed strategies are aligned with the high-level regional vision.
2. **The content of the update to the RWSP and associated policies should:**
 - 2.1. **Focus on wastewater services.** Focus on wastewater system issues and policies. Coordinate with and describe the relationship to the region's investments in stormwater, drinking water, and other water quality programs.
 - 2.2. **Protect and promote equity and social justice.** In 2010, King County Council adopted ordinance 16948, requiring the principles of equity and social justice to be included in all strategic planning, comprehensive planning and policy decisions at King County. These principles are outlined in the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan and will be embedded as an element of the plan.
 - 2.3. **Address affordability.** Evaluate trade-offs and investment sequencing to mitigate the impact of increasing sewer rates in the region. Evaluate and consider rate-relief approaches to improve affordability for those who struggle to pay their sewer bill.
 - 2.4. **Commit to meet regulatory obligations.** The plan will meet current and anticipated future regulatory obligations.
3. **Implementation and review:** The regional water quality committee shall periodically review and update these guiding principles to reflect evolving needs, conditions and best practices during the update of the RWSP and associated policies.