Policy (RWQC)

Operational/Technical (WTD/PSD)

Major Policy Questions for Regional Wastewater Services Plan Update

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

King County has identified several major decisions regarding the future of our regional wastewater system that will need to be made in this process of updating the Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP). To build, maintain and operate our large regional wastewater system, WTD has a long and growing capital project list in the coming decades, with significant forecasted costs. In making these investments, King County needs to consider many issues like the age of our wastewater system, population growth, future regulations, water quality goals, energy and resource conservation and recovery, affordability, and climate change. The update to the RWSP does not include stormwater planning for the region but will instead include how to address stormwater entering the wastewater system.

The proposed policy questions shown in the table below have been grouped into major topics/themes that WTD has identified as known challenges and opportunities for the wastewater sector. Though a question is identified under one topic, it may also intersect with other topics in the table.

Challenges and Opportunities – Topics/Themes	**Major Policy Questions to be Analyzed in RWSP Update**
Regulatory Landscape CSO, nutrients, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other contaminants of emerging concern (CECs), current and existing requirements, new and anticipated requirements, opportunities for larger regional partnerships to address water concerns, requirement to comply with future Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDLs)	What types and levels of treatment should be planned for? What assumptions should be made about future nutrient permit requirements, regulations related to CECs such as PFAS, or other future regulatory changes? What upstream or source control actions should the region undertake to prevent contaminants and reduce cost?
Capacity Demands Infiltration and Inflow (I/I), population growth, conveyance and treatment capacity demand, including onsite septic systems in urban areas,	What is the future capacity needed for growth and when, where and how should we address that need? Beyond the required capacity needed to meet current regulatory and contractual obligations, what level of capacity should be planned for? When addressing capacity, should capacity increases within existing facilities be maximized over acquiring new sites, where possible? Should the region continue to provide a centralized approach or consider decentralized options? How should I/I be managed? How much of the additional projected flow is coming from I/I versus population growth? Should I/I policy change to reduce the capacity needed for I/I? How should the conversion of onsite septic systems to sewers in the service area be managed and what planning assumption should WTD

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Challenges and Opportunities – Topics/Themes	Major Policy Questions to be Analyzed in RWSP Update
	use about the conversion rate?
Infrastructure Resiliency Asset management, maintenance, improvements, renewal, replacement, labor and supply chain disruptions, natural hazard resiliency.	How and when should WTD decide to refurbish or replace aging infrastructure? What level of resiliency should WTD plan for regarding seismic and other natural hazards? What level of risk tolerance should WTD accept? What level of redundancy of critical systems should WTD have?
Equity and Social Justice Distributional equity, WTD role in safeguarding public health	What actions should WTD take to increase equity and social justice for the regional wastewater system (Should include definition of equity and social justice).
Climate Change Mitigation - green building, eliminating/reducing fossil fuel use, energy and water efficiency, renewable energy, materials management, tree planting, etc. Adaptation – sea level rise, more extreme heat, increased storm intensities, wildfire smoke, increased river flooding, etc.	What climate experts and data should WTD use to inform planning? HOW SHOULD WE PLAN FOR CLIMATE CHANGE? How should WTD reduce energy use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions? How should WTD prepare and adapt to climate impacts in line with the Strategic Climate Action Plan? What level of climate impact risk tolerance should WTD plan for?
Resource Recovery Recycled water, biosolids, energy capture MOTION 14383 – ★	Energy production and heat recovery – Should WTD be expanding its efforts to capture energy and heat? If so, at what level of effort? Biosolids – Should WTD further expand its efforts to develop Class A biosolids? What changes are needed to biosolid recovery policies and processes? Recycled water – Under what circumstances should the region expand the use of reclaimed water? Which uses (e.g., environmental benefits, groundwater recharge, industrial uses, irrigation) are most appropriate?
Finance / Affordability Cost structure and equity, capital financing and debt management, financial planning and revenue sufficiency	Is there a better rate structure for the sewer rate? *(Note WTD has identified a work plan to further evaluate the residential customer equivalent conversion factor of 750 cubic feet per month.)* Will WTD maintain a single uniform sewer rate per RCE (Robinswood "one for all, all for one"), or consider alternative cost recovery rate structures to reflect other system impacts?

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Challenges and Opportunities – Topics/Themes	Major Policy Questions to be Analyzed in RWSP Update
ALREADY CODIFIED	Should WTD update the rate structure for the capacity charge to align with current industry standards? *(Note the capacity charge rate structure was updated in 2021. A capacity charge methodology study is in progress.)* What other rate relief approaches should WTD implement to improve affordability for those who may struggle to pay their sewer bill?