



City of Bellevue

City Council

May 20, 2025

King County Council
516 Third Ave, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: King County's Wastewater Rates and Long-term Planning

Dear Chair Zahilay and Councilmembers:

The City of Bellevue shares King County's goals to protect public health and the environment through the efficient collection and treatment of wastewater. We value our relationship with the Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) and thank Director Gurol for presenting to the City Council on May 6. On behalf of the Bellevue City Council, I am sharing our comments and priorities regarding the 2026 rate proposal, the long-term financial forecast, and the Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP) update.

We appreciate that WTD has extended its financial forecast to 20 years, which improves long-term planning and helps cities like Bellevue make strategic infrastructure investments. However, due to the uncertainty in the outyears, it is not yet a reliable tool for rate setting.

Bellevue is concerned about the proposed 2026 sewer rate of 7.5 percent, and even more so the year-over-year increases that are projected in this rate model, resulting in dramatic cost increases for ratepayers in ten and even just five years compared to today. We recognize the high cost of maintaining sewer systems and the region's ongoing affordability challenges, but these projections raise serious concerns. To meet regulatory requirements, the County is proposing to triple the size of its capital program in the next four years, which would be extremely difficult and likely unachievable. We request that WTD develop realistic assumptions for increasing the capital delivery program, build on existing capital delivery levels, and present a range of rate scenarios that explore how to deliver such a large program, including alternatives to reduce long-term rate increases, and an outline of funding needs for each option.

Bellevue asks WTD to update the RWSP to guide future infrastructure investments and wastewater priorities. The plan should include actual usage data and outline how King County will address population growth in innovative ways. WTD should clearly explain how it is working to ease the burden on ratepayers, increase resource recovery, and explore new, sustainable technologies.



In addition to our work with the Regional Water Quality Committee and the Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee, we ask the King County Council and WTD elevate the following guiding principles in evaluating progress:

- **Propose measures to address costs and affordability:** Offer ways to mitigate and reduce rate impacts. The region shares a growing concern about increasing unaffordability in day-to-day expenses for all types of families and individuals.
- **Modern, sustainable infrastructure:** Pursue modernization of the system to include sustainable infrastructure.
- **Provide clear and robust public outreach and education:** Communicate and educate members of the public on what services WTD provides and what drives utility rates.
- **Work toward generational equity:** Ensure everyone who benefits from the system pays equitably for the system.
- **Share changes to rates and forecasts early and clearly:** Share information early and transparently with partners to avoid surprises. WTD should share best practices and acknowledge the expertise within each of our agencies to inform more accurate long-term forecasts.
- **Continue to refine methodology:** Evaluate the accuracy of assumptions based on past performance and adjust to make the right assumptions. The City expects a clear understanding of rate drivers, costs, and what can feasibly be achieved.
- **Plan based on what can reasonably be achieved:** Consider new approaches to implement what is realistic. Forecasts should factor in existing and emerging risks and obligations, including state and federal regulations, consent decrees, and other concrete rate drivers.
- **Prioritize asset management:** Conduct regular assessments of existing assets and plan for consistent investments throughout their expected life. WTD should plan to maximize the lifespan of existing assets, thus reducing rate pressures over time.

Bellevue is an eager partner and leader in advocating alongside WTD for external funding. WTD should continue to seek external funding, including state and federal resources, and maximize opportunities to utilize low-interest loans through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA). In addition, we would like to see WTD engage assertively with agencies across the Country as we tackle complex issues, including PFAS, nutrients, and other contaminants of emerging concern.

Thank you for your consideration of Bellevue's comments and concerns. We look forward to working with WTD to update the RWSP.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lucy Liu at 425-452-4445.



City of Bellevue

City Council

Sincerely,

Lynne Robinson, Mayor

CC: Bellevue City Councilmembers

Diane Carlson, Bellevue City Manager

Genesee Adkins, Bellevue Deputy City Manager

Nathan McCommon, Bellevue Deputy City Manager

Lucy Liu, Bellevue Utilities Director

Shannon Braddock, King County Executive

John Taylor, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks Director

Kamuron Gurol, Wastewater Treatment Division Director, King County Department of
Natural Resources and Parks

Regional Water Quality Committee Members