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May 22, 2026

ATTN: Metropolitan King County Council

Dear Chair Sarah Perry and King County Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Sound Cities Association (SCA), we are writing regarding Proposed Ordinance 2026-0103 2027 Proposed Sewer Rate and Capacity Charge. SCA is alarmed by the lack of affordability of the sewer rates proposed for 2027 and forecasted in the near-term. Ratepayers are facing the compounding impacts of multiple years of double-digit sewer rate increases and sharp rate increases from other utilities. This trend is unsustainable.

The 2027 proposed monthly sewer rate of \$70.65 is a 12.75% increase over the current monthly sewer rate of \$62.66. Currently, monthly sewer rates are projected to double by 2032 and triple over the course of the forecasting period. Because cities and sewer districts levy their own rate increases to address local system needs, we request that rate examinations not be siloed; local increases as well as increases to other utilities' rates, especially by the County, need to be annually factored into sewer rate discussions. Along these lines, due to shared affordability concerns, the SCA Public Issues Committee will also be discussing the solid waste rate at a future meeting.

Further, King County must also establish a more structured and ongoing engagement process with cities throughout the rate-setting cycle. Cities are on the front lines where ratepayers are impacted. Early, consistent collaboration is necessary to fully understand local constraints and avoid unintended affordability consequences. Without this level of engagement, it will be increasingly difficult to support this latest proposal or any future rate proposals of this magnitude.

There is an urgent need for a second affordability summit in 2026 to reassess initiatives that increase costs without clear benefits. With decisions looming that could add billions in expenses, like nutrient removal plans for Puget Sound, we must consider households struggling with essentials like food and healthcare. The key finding of the first Regional Utility Rate Summit is that a significant majority of the rate increases are caused by regulatory requirements. Pausing or rolling back these requirements should be the purpose of the second summit.

We are committed to the health of Puget Sound and the people living around it. We understand the importance of building and maintaining dependable, adaptable, and sustainable infrastructure to ensure the system continues to protect public and environmental health and acknowledge that rate increases may be necessary to do so. However, rate increases must be balanced with ratepayers' ability to pay—both today and in the future.

To address these concerns, we support the recommendations proposed in letters by the Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee (MWPAAC) and Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC). We therefore request the Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD):

- Continue the work on the Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan, including third-party capital program review and work towards multi-year rate options.
- Ensure future rate conversations include a focus on a longer-range view beyond the current 10- to 20-year window.
- Continue to consider and present information on the needs of the system and whether rates have kept up with those needs.
- Articulate steps WTD has taken to find savings across its categories of expenditure and then communicate the amount of those savings.
- Provide clear reporting on how WTD has aligned with its adopted policies and the quantifiable impact on rates for each affecting policy. While we appreciate the inclusion of multiple rate scenarios in this year's process, exact policy levers available to affect sewer rates remain unclear, as does how policy choices made thus far have contributed to rate growth.
- Work with the RWQC to determine policies regarding rate affordability for future cycles.
- Collaborate with regulators to develop a data-informed regulatory approach to achieve meaningful environmental outcomes. Alternative pathways and the feasibility of a pause on regulatory capital projects should be considered to provide relief from the stacking of expensive projects.
- Advocate for increased state and federal investment, including grants or low-interest funding, to support local sewer agencies and reduce the reliance on ratepayers and comply with federal regulatory mandates.
- Collaborate with regulators and legislators to make sewer charges more equitable by switching from a uniform charge for each property type to a rate based on property values.
- Continue collaboration on the planning of the second affordability summit.

Thank you for your increased transparency during this year's sewer rate development process and for your continued partnership. We look forward to continuing to collaborate on ways to address the growing affordability crisis for our ratepayers.

Sincerely, on behalf of the Sound Cities Association Board of Directors,



Armondo Pavone
President, Sound Cities Association
Mayor, City of Renton

Cc: Girmay Zahilay, King County Executive
John Taylor, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Kamuron Gurol, Director, Wastewater Treatment Division
Sharman Herrin, Government Relations, Wastewater Treatment Division
Regional Water Quality Committee Members