

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

As a regional government, King County is responsible for serving the multiple needs of its residents and businesses such as public health and safety, housing, transportation, education, economic growth, infrastructure, and environmental protection. The King County Council and Executive must consider public values and available funding when making decisions on the level of service provided to the community for each of these needs.

One of these complex issues is water resource management. Residents describe water resources as one of the most important features of the Puget Sound region. But managing water resources is more complicated than it was in the past.

Today, water resources are managed over entire watersheds. Problems such as wastewater overflows, flooding, developing additional water supply, declining fish populations, and stormwater pollution are far reaching and interrelated.

This document, the *Executive's Preferred Plan*, acknowledges these relationships. Although the plan focuses on managing one element of water quality—wastewater—it also ensures that wastewater decisions are made with all regional water resource issues in mind. In this way, the *Executive's Preferred Plan* will play an important part in this region's efforts to provide high quality water for people, wildlife, and fish well into the next century.

Wastewater Management—a Regional Need

Many of us do not realize that our everyday activities generate a significant amount of wastewater. Over one million people in King County's service area take showers, wash clothes and dishes, and flush toilets. Collectively, these activities generate more than 200 million gallons of wastewater each day—enough to fill the Kingdome more than twice each week.

Where does all this wastewater go? In the past, it flowed largely untreated into Lake Washington and Puget Sound, where it significantly degraded water quality. In 1958, active citizens rallied to clean up these waters, which led to the develop-

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ment of a regional system to collect and treat wastewater.

This regional system has helped protect water quality and public health in King County for nearly 40 years, but now this system is running out of capacity. Forecasts of population growth between 1990 and 2030 predict that 1.1 million new people will be living and working in King County's wastewater service area, generating an additional 93 million gallons of wastewater each day by the year 2030². At this rate, population growth will exhaust available capacity in the existing wastewater treatment system by the year 2010.

²In response to comments received on the draft RWSP, King County modified its methodology for estimating population growth after 2020. See Appendix A for details.

To protect our region's water quality, King County must act quickly to build the capacity to collect and treat this additional wastewater, meet applicable state and federal regulations, and satisfy contracts with local sewer service providers. Accomplishing this task is the goal of King County's Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP).

The Regional Wastewater Services Plan

In May 1997, the County released the *Draft Regional Wastewater Services Plan* (RWSP), the *Draft Regional Wastewater Services Plan Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS), and the *Draft Regional Wastewater Services Plan Financing Plan* for public review and comment.

The draft RWSP described two general approaches to wastewater management for the next 40 years and beyond. One approach was to maximize the existing system by expanding existing treatment and conveyance facilities. The other was to add a new treatment plant in an area of rapid population growth. The draft RWSP also described two alternative strategies under each approach and fourteen options that could modify the level of service provided under each strategy. Options included water reuse and alternative design standards.

Public Preferences

To help elected officials decide on a strategy, King County conducted a public involvement process in summer 1997 after the release of the draft RWSP. As part of this process, the County provided information about the RWSP and solicited public opinion about wastewater issues. We compiled public opinion from two primary sources: (1) focus groups and a telephone survey of more than 700 randomly selected residents,

and (2) written and verbal comments on the draft RWSP, EIS, and financing plan from 75 citizens, tribal governments, agencies, and other interested parties.

A comprehensive review of all public comment revealed the following preferences:

- Continue King County's commitment to clean water, public health, and safety
- Maintain the current level of service provided to customers
- Distribute costs and facility impacts equitably
- Meet all applicable regulations and projected growth estimates
- Maintain consistency with the King County Comprehensive Plan
- Provide continued opportunities for public involvement
- Accommodate changes in population, regulations, technology, and public opinion

Based on these public comments and other considerations, the Executive decided that a three-plant system based on Service Strategy 3 featuring a new treatment plant located in north King or south Snohomish County would provide the best means of meeting these needs now and in the future.

Next Steps

The release of the *Executive's Preferred Plan* and the final environmental impact statement marks the beginning of deliberations by the King County Council that will likely continue through summer and fall of 1998. Following deliberations, which include significant opportunities for public comment, the Council is expected to adopt a final plan by the end of 1998; implementation is expected to begin in 1999.