
CHAPTER EP-3

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

This section summarizes public comments gathered during the formal 90-day comment period for the Draft RWSP and Draft EIS, and from public opinion research conducted from June through September, 1997. The full text of comment letters and public hearing testimony is contained in the *Public Comments and Responses* appendix to this Final EIS. The public opinion research is described in detail in the *Public Opinion Summary* (King County, 1997).

Public comment on the Draft RWSP, Draft EIS and Draft Financing Plan included letters, hearing testimony, and mailback forms from 75 commenters including cities, state and federal agencies, citizens, tribes, environmental/community groups, business interests, sewer and water districts, and other organizations.

The public opinion research first involved focus groups with 68 residents representing a cross section of the King County population, followed by an extensive telephone survey with 736 randomly selected residents from King and Snohomish Counties.

The public opinion research respondents were selected to represent a cross section of citizens in King and Snohomish counties. Most respondents had no previous experience with or interest in wastewater issues. Respondents were asked very specific questions in focus groups and in a telephone survey. These questions were designed to gauge community attitudes about wastewater issues. Because of the method used to select respondents, their comments can be assumed to reflect the attitudes of the general population in the service area.

The commenters addressing the RWSP documents include citizens, agencies, and other organizations with significant expertise and interest in wastewater issues. Commenters wrote or testified on their own initiative; they spoke directly to the strategies and options presented in the draft plan, and to the potential outcomes and consequences of different decisions. Their comments are not necessarily considered to be representative of the entire King County population.

Key Findings

Following are the key findings from the public comments and the public opinion research organized under major headings pertinent to the RWSP. For each category, a bullet highlights the key findings interpreted from each source of public opinion: a diamond (◆) represents findings from the public opinion research, and a dot (●) represents findings from the formal comments about the RWSP documents.

Water Quality

- ◆ A majority of respondents in both the focus groups and telephone survey expressed significant concern about water quality in this region; fifty-six percent of respondents said they would be willing to pay higher sewer rates to prevent water quality problems.
- Commenters felt overall that King County should work to preserve and improve water quality in Puget Sound and other waterbodies.

Treatment and Conveyance

- ◆ Forty-six percent of respondents said that areas with existing wastewater plants should not have to accept additional negative impacts of expanding those plants; about 38 percent support the idea of expanding existing plants.
- Commenters supported the three-plant strategies with specific support of Service Strategy 3, which adds a third treatment plant and forms the basis for the Executive's Preferred Plan.
- Several commenters questioned the feasibility of expanding the West Treatment Plant within the constraints of the West Point Settlement Agreement.

Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs)

- ◆ Over 75 percent of respondents said King County should prevent the release of diluted raw sewage into Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes, even if it cost \$1.50 more per month in sewer rates.
- Commenters showed only limited support for reducing efforts to meet the CSO control goal of one event per location per year; tribes and state/federal regulators were strongly opposed to any reduction in efforts to meet this goal.

Biosolids

- ◆ Eighty-four percent of respondents supported some level of biosolids recycling; 46 percent said we should continue to recycle biosolids as soil amendments, and another 38 percent felt we should invest funds to treat biosolids to a higher degree for wider recycling opportunities.
- There was general support among commenters for biosolids recycling with sentiment for maximizing economic return on biosolids to benefit ratepayers.

Water Reuse

- ◆ Sixty-one percent of respondents either strongly support (22 percent) or somewhat support (39 percent) discharging treated water to Lake Washington to offset the amount of water used to operate the Ballard Locks.
- Many commenters expressed interest in reclaimed water and a desire to further investigate potential projects or uses.

Inflow and Infiltration

- ◆ Nearly 60 percent of respondents said that we should all pay to bring older pipes up to standard; thirty-three percent said the local sewer agencies should fix their own pipes.
- There was broad support among commenters for inflow and infiltration control; many advocated an aggressive inflow and infiltration reduction program.

Costs

- ◆ Thirty-eight percent of respondents felt that costs to upgrade the system should be paid primarily by residents of new homes and businesses; forty-five percent support a surcharge of “a little more” for new residents and businesses.
- ◆ Commenters supported the concept of “growth paying for growth” and to increase the county’s capacity charge, but they were not in consensus on how this should be done or how much the charge should recover.

g:\epcommon\rwsp\comments\pulsesum.doc