

Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD's) Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan to Continue to Improve Engagement, Transparency, and Accountability – March 4, 2026, Status Update

Note: Changes from the last month's update are in bold, blue font.

Major Recommendations from RWQC Letter	Wastewater Treatment Division Tasks	Working Timeline	Status
<p><b>1. Meaningful and Timely Engagement in Development of Sewer Rate.</b> For the 2027 rate process and on-going, Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) should implement an updated rate process that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Regular discussions throughout the year with the Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee (MWPAAC), Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC), and King County Council at the relevant level of detail for each body on key factors and assumptions affecting the rate and forecast. This includes transparency on capital improvement program assumptions.</li> <li>b. Time for more in-depth review and understanding of costs, discussion of specific rate scenarios/options, and effects during rate discussions with MWPAAC, RWQC, and other stakeholders, at the relevant level of detail for each body.</li> <li>c. Ensure that the long-term rate forecast methodology requested by Motion 16449 is used to develop scenarios to evaluate options.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote meaningful and timely engagement, WTD will host regular meetings with MWPAAC and/or its subcommittees to review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10-year Capital Improvement Program.</li> <li>• Project prioritization, including transparency on how decisions are made and policy drivers of capital prioritization.</li> <li>• Timely updates on changes in large project costs that may impact rates as information becomes available.</li> <li>• Expenditure forecast assumptions and impacts to different types of projects across the capital program.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Work with King County Executive's Office to schedule early 'look ahead' presentations on known and potential factors affecting the 2027 rate proposal and forecast.</li> <li>• As part of the 2027 rate proposal, include options for multiple rate scenarios, including those that offer various capital portfolio options. Scenarios should detail tradeoffs and associated risks and benefits. This should include a discussion about the level of service WTD is able to deliver under each option.</li> <li>• The report on long-term forecasting model required by Motion 16449 was presented to RWQC in September 2025. To increase transparency and credibility in the long-term forecasting model, WTD will work with a MWPAAC work group to identify the model details that should be shared and further refined in order to improve understanding of the assumptions, formulas, data sets, and policy implications embedded in the long-term rate model and allow for informed questions. The MWPAAC work group should identify areas of improvement to continue to align with industry best practices to inform suggestions for improvements.</li> </ul>	<p>Q4 2025 and ongoing</p> <p>Q1/Q2 2026</p> <p>Q2 2026</p> <p>Q3 2025 and ongoing</p>	<p>Briefings provided on WTD's capital project prioritization process and key capital projects impacting the rate in Q3/Q4 2025.</p> <p>"Look Ahead" briefings to MWPAAC scheduled for Q4 2025 and Q1 2026. WTD briefed MWPAAC on 1/28/26 on the rate strategy for 2027 and assumptions. <b>WTD provided a preliminary sewer rate and capacity charge briefing to MWPAAC on 2/5/26 and 2/25/26.</b></p> <p>Work is underway for WTD to provide multiple rate scenarios in Q2 2026 as part of the 2027 rate adoption process. <b>WTD presented preliminary scenarios for illustrative purposes to RWQC on 2/4/26 and MWPAAC Rates and Finance Subcommittee on 2/5/26.</b></p> <p>An independent consultant selected by MWPAAC members briefed MWPAAC on 1/28/26 and a video of the presentation can be found <a href="#">here</a>. Further briefings on implementation of the long-term forecasting model will be provided to MWPAAC with an opportunity to suggest any further improvements to align with industry standards.</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with MWPAAC Executive Board member(s) to develop a process for members to observe WTD Capital Portfolio management staff meetings while not hampering WTD's process and progress.</li> </ul>	Q1/Q2 2026	WTD is engaged with MWPAAC's Executive Board to provide an opportunity to observe the Definition and/or Delivery Board meetings in the Portfolio Management process beginning in Q1 2026. MWPAAC's Executive Board selected two representatives to attend WTD Capital Portfolio management meetings beginning in April 2026.
<p><b>2. Early visibility and transparency on large project planning.</b> Develop mechanisms for MWPAAC and RWQC to engage in the planning and development process for large capital projects prior to decision-making to improve knowledge and confidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a process for MWPAAC and RWQC (as requested) to review a limited number of large capital projects selected by MWPAAC that substantively affect the rate. These reviews will happen at key phases in the development of these selected projects, including concept definition, alternatives analysis, alternative selection, and final design. Each engagement will create an opportunity to influence outcomes by collaboratively discussing comments and questions with WTD before a decision in each phase identified above is finalized.</li> </ul>	Q1 2026	MWPAAC representatives at WTD Portfolio management meetings will help inform MWPAAC members regarding WTD's process for project prioritization and decisions. The topic of alternatives analysis for selected projects will be revisited at the next MWPAAC Executive Board in spring 2026.
<p><b>3. Improve multi-year rate predictability.</b> Develop options and implement a mechanism to improve rate predictability to help partner agencies better plan and lessen large changes in rate proposals, especially for the first three years of the rate. A multi-year rate would provide more time for an in-depth review and understanding of costs and how investments are prioritized, and discussion of options and tradeoffs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare and deliver options for multi-year rate predictability, including options for a multi-year rate commitment. Options should be prepared in discussion with MWPAAC's Executive Board and partner agencies and in coordination with King County Executive's Office and county budget process. Any multi-year option should include a process for WTD to update the rate if there are significant changes that impact the rate forecast.</li> </ul>	Q3 2025 – Q2 2026 (Options identified by end 2025 and multi-year rate implementation by end of Q2 2027 for 2028 and 2029 rates)	WTD began discussions with MWPAAC's Executive Board and King County's budget office in Q3/Q4 2025 on options for rate predictability. MWPAAC received an initial briefing and provided feedback on potential options at its 12/4/25, Rates and Finance Subcommittee meeting.
<p><b>4. Evaluate regulatory requirements and develop options to address financial sustainability.</b> Evaluate consent decree and permit deadlines for major projects and investments associated with multiple and concurrent requirements and identify options to address financial sustainability while optimizing water quality benefits and maintaining permit compliance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the costs/benefits of seeking regulatory changes to improve the environmental and financial sustainability of the regional system.</li> <li>Coordinate on outreach plan with local agency partners, to state and federal government. The outreach plan should address regulatory issues and funding availability from state and federal agencies.</li> </ul>	Q3 2025 – 2026  Q3 2025 – 2026	WTD's Planning team is meeting in Q1 2026 and will coordinate with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and County Executive's Office to evaluate potential regulatory changes.  WTD is initiating outreach with its local agency partners on a federal/state outreach strategy.

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<p><b>5. Independent, third-party oversight.</b> Provide for independent third-party review for WTD's capital program, including <i>mega</i> capital projects such as the Mouth of Duwamish Combined Sewer Overflow Program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a proposal in coordination with MWPAAC's Executive Board for review by the Executive's Office to procure an independent consultant to review WTD's capital program, including large capital projects.</li> </ul>	<p>Q4 2025 – Q2 2026</p>	<p>WTD provided an opportunity for MWPAAC's Executive Board to review the scope of work to procure an independent third-party consultant. The King County Auditor's Office has agreed to serve as the Project Representative. MWPAAC has selected a representative from its Executive Board to participate in the consultant proposal and interview process. <b>The advertisement for the independent consultant contract opened on 2/10/26 and closes on 3/11/26.</b></p>
<p><b>6. Regional Utility Affordability Summit.</b> In partnership with local municipal leaders, prepare a multi-jurisdictional summit to address affordability and access to essential utilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with RWQC, Sound Cities Association, Seattle, and sewer districts to bring a wastewater perspective to the development and planning of the regional utility affordability summit.</li> <li>Identify and implement resources to execute follow-up steps agreed upon at the summit.</li> <li>Develop public engagement strategy for rate payers in coordination with local contract agencies to explain why wholesale WTD rates are increasing and provide opportunities for public engagement.</li> </ul>	<p>Q3 2025 – Q1 2026</p> <p>Q4 2025-Q1 2026</p> <p>Q1 2026</p>	<p>The Regional Utility Rate Summit was held in SeaTac on November 14, 2025, with approximately 150 attendees.</p> <p>WTD participated in the Staff Committee and Steering Committee for planning the Summit and as a participant presenting at the Summit.</p> <p>Follow-up will be coordinated with participants, including a potential second summit in 2026.</p> <p>WTD held two sessions in January 2026 with local agency public information officers and similar staff to gather feedback. The sessions included discussion of what local agencies are hearing from customers, more information on current outreach efforts, and ideas for coordination with WTD on rate messages. This feedback will inform WTD's communications strategy development in Q1/Q2 2026.</p>