



KING COUNTY

1200 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Signature Report

Motion 16900

Proposed No. 2025-0327.1

Sponsors Balducci

1 A MOTION requesting the wastewater treatment division
2 implement a sewer rate and capital work plan to continue to
3 improve engagement, transparency, and accountability.

4 WHEREAS, the wastewater treatment division protects public health and the
5 environment by collecting and treating wastewater, and

6 WHEREAS, King County charges a sewer rate to the contract agencies that
7 deliver wastewater to King County for treatment and discharge, and

8 WHEREAS, sewer rate revenue is the wastewater treatment division's primary
9 funding source, and

10 WHEREAS, the monthly sewer rate revenue collected by the county goes to
11 support all wastewater treatment division expenses, including operating costs, debt
12 service, and capital expenses, and

13 WHEREAS, while rate increases are necessary to maintain and improve the
14 system, increases must be balanced with affordability for ratepayers, and

15 WHEREAS, the sewer rate increase is projected to be 12.75 percent in 2027 and
16 in 2028, and 13.5 percent in 2029, 2030, and 2031, and

17 WHEREAS, the council is deeply concerned that the projected rate increases will
18 no longer be affordable, including and extending beyond low-income ratepayers, and

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19 WHEREAS, as the cost of living in the Central Puget Sound region continues to
20 outpace the national average, as utility bills grow, and income disparity increases, many
21 utility customers struggle to pay bills, and

22 WHEREAS, the process of setting sewer rates should be transparent, equitable,
23 data-driven, and reflective of both current system needs and long-term infrastructure
24 investment, and

25 WHEREAS, independent, third-party oversight of the wastewater treatment
26 division's capital improvement program can promote transparency and identify
27 opportunities for improvement, and

28 WHEREAS, the King County council passed Motion 16410 requesting the
29 wastewater treatment division research and identify methodologies to forecast the long-
30 term costs of its capital improvement needs, and

31 WHEREAS, the King County council passed Motion 16449 requesting the
32 wastewater treatment division develop and maintain a long-term financial and sewer rate
33 forecast, and

34 WHEREAS, the wastewater treatment division continues to improve the
35 methodology and the long-term capital forecasting related to the sewer rate, and

36 WHEREAS, decision makers desire information from the wastewater treatment
37 division to facilitate informed discussions on the policy decisions related to the sewer
38 rate, and

39 WHEREAS, in accordance with RCW 35.58.210 and K.C.C. 28.82.510 the
40 function of the metropolitan pollution abatement advisory committee is to advise the

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41 King County council on matters relating to the performance of the water pollution
42 abatement function, and

43 WHEREAS, the metropolitan pollution abatement advisory committee, regional
44 water quality committee, and cities of Bellevue, Kirkland, and Seattle have submitted
45 comment letters in response to the 2026 sewer rate and capacity charge to the King
46 County council, identifying significant concerns about affordability and transparency,
47 and

48 WHEREAS, the wastewater treatment division, in consultation with the regional
49 water quality committee, has developed the attached work plan to improve the rate
50 development process in response to the comment letters submitted in response to the
51 2026 sewer rate, and

52 WHEREAS, in accordance with Section 270.30 of the King County Charter and
53 K.C.C. 1.24.065, the regional water quality committee developed this motion to be
54 proposed to the King County council;

55 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

56 A. The wastewater treatment division is requested to implement the work plan,
57 included as Attachment A to this ordinance, to continue to improve engagement,
58 transparency, and accountability in the sewer rate-setting process.

59 B. The wastewater treatment division is requested to provide briefings to the

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- 60 regional water quality committee on the status of the implementation of the work plan by
61 January 2026 and July 2026.

Motion 16900 was introduced on 10/7/2025 and passed by the Metropolitan King County Council on 11/4/2025, by the following vote:

Yes: 9 - Balducci, Barón, Dembowski, Dunn, Mosqueda, Perry,
Quinn, von Reichbauer and Zahilay

KING COUNTY COUNCIL
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Signed by:

Girmay Zahilay

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Girmay Zahilay, Chair

ATTEST:

DocuSigned by:

Melani Hay

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Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council

Attachments: A. Wastewater Treatment Division Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan to Continue to Improve Engagement, Transparency and Accountability

Attachment A. WTD’s Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan to Continue to Improve Engagement, Transparency, and Accountability

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Major Recommendations from RWQC Letter	Wastewater Treatment Division Tasks	Working Timeline
1. Meaningful and Timely Engagement in Development of Sewer Rate. For the 2027 rate process and on-going, Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) should implement an updated rate process that includes: 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. 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. c. Ensure that the long-term rate forecast methodology requested by Motion 16449 is used to develop scenarios to evaluate options.	- To promote meaningful and timely engagement, WTD will host regular meetings with MWPAAC and/or its subcommittees to review: 10-year Capital Improvement Program. - Project prioritization, including transparency on how decisions are made and policy drivers of capital prioritization. - Timely updates on changes in large project costs that may impact rates as information becomes available. - Expenditure forecast assumptions and impacts to different types of projects across the capital program. - 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. - 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. - 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	Q4 2025 and ongoing Q1/Q2 2026 Q2 2026 Q3 2025 and ongoing

Attachment A. WTD’s Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan to Continue to Improve Engagement, Transparency, and Accountability

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Major Recommendations from RWQC Letter	Wastewater Treatment Division Tasks	Working Timeline
	informed questions. The MWPAAC work group should identify areas of improvement to continue to align with industry best practices to inform suggestions for improvements. • 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.	Q1/Q2 2026
2. Early visibility and transparency on large project planning. 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.	• 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.	Q1 2026
3. Improve multi-year rate predictability. 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.	• 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.	Q3 2025 – Q2 2026 (Options identified by end 2025 and multi-year rate implementation by end of Q2 2027 for 2028 and 2029 rates)

Attachment A. WTD’s Sewer Rate and Capital Work Plan to Continue to Improve Engagement, Transparency, and Accountability

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Major Recommendations from RWQC Letter	Wastewater Treatment Division Tasks	Working Timeline
4. Evaluate regulatory requirements and develop options to address financial sustainability. 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.	- Evaluate the costs/benefits of seeking regulatory changes to improve the environmental and financial sustainability of the regional system. - 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.	Q3 2025 – 2026 Q3 2025 – 2026
5. Independent, third-party oversight. 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.	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.	Q4 2025 – Q2 2026
6. Regional Utility Affordability Summit. In partnership with local municipal leaders, prepare a multi-jurisdictional summit to address affordability and access to essential utilities.	- 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. - Identify and implement resources to execute follow-up steps agreed upon at the summit. - 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.	Q3 2025 – Q1 2026 Q4 2025-Q1 2026 Q1 2026

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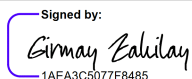
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Envelope Summary Events	Status	Timestamps
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Certified Delivered	Security Checked	11/5/2025 12:22:37 PM
Signing Complete	Security Checked	11/5/2025 12:22:46 PM
Completed	Security Checked	11/5/2025 12:22:46 PM
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