

## **Regional funding for a regional wastewater system**

Brightwater is a new wastewater facility that will serve parts of south Snohomish and north King counties. It is part of a regional wastewater system that has been protecting public health and the environment for more than 40 years.

Brightwater will be funded largely by a capacity charge on new connections and funds from monthly sewer rates throughout the wastewater service area, not just in the areas that Brightwater will directly serve.

### **Increased capacity throughout the service area**

Brightwater will be the third treatment plant in the regional wastewater system. The wastewater that will flow to Brightwater now flows to plants in Seattle or Renton for treatment. Building a new plant will free up capacity in these facilities. In this way, Brightwater serves the growing population in the entire service area, not just the areas it will serve.

Alternatives to building Brightwater were considered during a seven-year planning process known as the Regional Wastewater Services Plan. Some of the alternatives included expanding capacity at existing treatment plants and building new pipelines and tunnels through north Seattle and along the eastside of Lake Washington to get the wastewater to plants in Seattle and Renton. Decision-makers decided that the best solution was to build a new plant to meet the needs of the region.

### **Capacity charge: an issue of fairness**

When the need for Brightwater was established in the Regional Wastewater Services Plan, decision-makers from all over the region agreed that growth should pay for growth – using a capacity charge.

The root of the capacity charge issue is equity and fairness. Ratepayers who have paid the cost of past sewer investments should not also be burdened with the cost of building more capacity for a growing population.

The regional wastewater system was paid for by sewer rates from customers throughout the service area. Ratepayers in Kenmore, Bellevue, and Auburn paid for building large treatment plants in Seattle and Renton and the pipelines that connect to the local wastewater systems.

Later, as new facilities were needed for a growing population, a capacity charge (or hook-up charge) was developed for new customers throughout the region. Existing ratepayers have already paid to build the system and continue to pay for wastewater treatment service. New connections pay a set capacity charge in addition to their monthly rate for their share of the facilities and for ongoing wastewater treatment service.

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## **Regional funding for a regional wastewater system ...continued**

### **Regional system means lower rates**

Spreading costs over a larger customer base means lower rates for all. Small communities in rural King County that are not part of the regional system are struggling with how to make effective improvements affordable. Some are faced with having to make improvements costing local ratepayers hundreds of dollars per month in order to meet water quality standards.

With a regional system, the costs of improvements to the oldest parts of the system, such as rehabilitating aging facilities and reducing combined sewer overflows in Seattle, are shared by the entire region, not just the oldest communities.

### **Public health and the environment are regional concerns**

Regardless of where people live, everyone benefits from water quality. In the 1950s, Lake Washington was too polluted for swimming because of poorly treated wastewater flowing to the lake from numerous local sources. Recognizing that public health and environmental issues do not stop at political boundaries, local citizens voted to build a regional wastewater treatment system to clean up the lake. The system was designed around physical watersheds, or drainage basins, where water naturally flowed toward the lake. Thanks to this effort, Lake Washington is now one of the cleanest urban lakes in the world.

A regional system benefits everyone through increased wastewater capacity, lower wastewater rates, and improved public and environmental health. With a fair rate structure and capacity charge, everyone pays because everyone benefits from clean, healthy waterways.

### **For more information or to be added to our mailing list, please contact us:**

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