

Qualitative Assessment of Community Attitudes Toward Plans for Wastewater Treatment Plant Among Residents of North King and South Snohomish Counties

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Executive Summary

King County is planning to build new wastewater treatment facilities including a site in north King County or south Snohomish County in the next ten years. The site will be selected in a process over the next two and a half years. As a part of that process, King County is seeking input from residents of the various communities that might offer a potential site for the plant.

Norton-Arnold & Janeway is working with King County to develop an outreach strategy that will address issues of interest or concern to local residents. The research is needed to obtain feedback from the residents regarding their awareness of the siting of a wastewater treatment plant, perceptions of the problems that might need to be addressed, and suggestions for potential siting criteria.

King County and Norton-Arnold & Janeway contracted with Gilmore Research Group to conduct four focus groups among 22 residents of communities in the north King County and south Snohomish County target area. There was one focus group for each of the following areas:

- Bothell/Woodinville
- Kenmore/Lake Forest Park
- Edmonds/Shoreline
- Lynnwood/Mountlake Terrace/Brier

The purpose was to explore attitudes and test messages for an outreach strategy. Focus groups are qualitative and descriptive in nature, and results should not be projected to the total population. The following report includes our summary and conclusions as well as a detailed analysis of the results.

Highlights of the Findings

- Residents express more concern about the impact of growth on traffic congestion than on wastewater treatment.
- The thought of a wastewater treatment's smell, sludge, or spills came to mind and made some residents say they would not want the plant "in my backyard." Others realized these problems could be controlled through technology.
- Awareness of King County plans for a new wastewater treatment plant were low, but some had heard rumblings or rumors.
- Residents siting criteria for the main plant included geography, value of the real estate, cost considerations, multiple usage of land, and impact on the local community in terms of disruption or traffic.
- Siting criteria for the outfall location related more to preservation of the water into which the effluent is placed and minimal disruption from the pipes.
- Residents considered the four key messages presented to them vague and non-specific to a wastewater plant. The two ideas that made the facility sound more appealing were the concepts of multi-use and good neighbor.

- Education of the public was a main theme in the focus group discussions. Residents suggested that one goal should relate to informing residents about wastewater treatment requirements and involving them in the planning process.

Methodology

The Gilmore Research Group conducted a qualitative study consisting of four focus groups. The two groups were held at 6:00 and 8:00 pm on Tuesday, May 30th and Thursday, June 1, 2000 in the Gilmore Research Group focus suites in Seattle, Washington. The respondents were recruited from lists of registered voters in the zip codes of the communities targeted by the county.

Contacts in these communities were screened by telephone with questions to assure that there was a good mix of gender, age, income, and education. Another screening specification was that at least 75% of the respondents were required to be homeowners. A copy of the screening questionnaire is in Appendix B. A further description of the respondents is contained in the following section, “Sample Description.”

The discussion developed as follows:

- It began with background information about how residents perceive that growth will impact the area and how it should be handled in terms of services offered.
- Secondly, the respondents were asked about their general awareness of plans for building a wastewater treatment plant.
- The discussion then turned to the appropriate criteria for siting the plant as well as a second discussion about where the outfall should be located.
- Four key messages about the goals and values associated with the plant were tested.
- Finally, other ideas were solicited.

A copy of the complete discussion guide is included in Appendix A of this report.

Following completion of the focus groups, the audio-tapes of each session were transcribed and analyzed.

Sample Description

A total of 22 residents of North King County and South Snohomish County participated in the four focus groups: five in each group except the Kenmore/Lake Forest group, which had seven. There were eleven males and eleven females. Their ages ranged from 35 to 77 years, and the majority were in their 50s. Education levels included three respondents with only a high school education, seven with some college, seven college graduates, and five with post-graduate degrees.

The majority of respondents were homeowners. Only two of the 22 said that they rented. Respondents reported that they had lived in the area for 7 to 70 years. A mix of income levels was represented: three had annual household income of \$25K to \$49K, five had \$50K to \$75K, and thirteen had over \$75K. One refused to give an income level.

Caveat

Focus group discussions are a qualitative form of research and comprised of a limited number of respondents, who—although qualified—are self-selecting to some extent. Their purpose is descriptive and exploratory. It would not be statistically valid to try to project these results to the greater population, although the ideas presented by respondents may be indicative of trends in thinking among the general public. The findings are not quantifiable. Results are to be used as insight and guidance for further study of the issues.

Conclusions

The Gilmore facilitator, following the topic guide in the Appendix, presented the following subject areas to the participants. Based on discussions between the Gilmore facilitator and participants these are the conclusions about how the participants responded to the issues. The detailed findings included examples of comments heard as a basis for these conclusions.

Impact of Growth

When residents of local communities in north King and south Snohomish counties were asked what needs they anticipated in relation to the growth they are experiencing in this region, wastewater treatment was rarely mentioned without probing. Other concerns that came to mind more readily for residents included the following:

- Traffic congestion and the need for more roads and better public transportation topped the list for most respondents.
- The need for more schools to accommodate the population expansion was mentioned frequently in the various focus groups.
- Retention of some open land in the form of trees or parks was another concern for those who observed the high rate of development in their areas. Recreational areas were a priority for many.
- The medical emergency and police services were another need that respondents mentioned in conjunction with growth.
- When residents thought of water, they were mainly focused on the quality and safety of the drinking water available to them.

Attitudes about Wastewater Treatment

The associations that come to mind when respondents think about a wastewater treatment plant are smell, sludge, and spills. Someone in each group usually mentioned the reaction “not in my backyard,” although they realized that would be an unrealistic stance to take, because they create the wastewater that needs to be treated.

- Preservation of Lake Washington was on the minds of the Kenmore and Lake Forest Park residents, who live closer to that body of water and see the effect of runoff on that habitat.

- Several mentioned that there were ways of controlling smell and that improvements had been made to West Point and Edmonds plants so that they no longer had much, if any, odor.
- A few of the Lynnwood residents were aware that the Edmonds plant looked very attractive and was not usually recognized as a wastewater treatment facility.

Awareness of New Wastewater Facility Plans

A number of respondents seemed vaguely aware of King County's plan for a new wastewater treatment plant. Some said that they had heard rumors of potential use of certain sites. However, most of their comments did not seem well founded in terms of facts or sources.

Advice for Siting Plant

Some of the siting criteria respondents suggested were geography, value of the real estate, cost considerations, multiple usage of land, and impact on the local community in terms of traffic. The bullets below show their relative importance:

- Although cost was not usually mentioned first, in the final summary of importance, most residents ranked it as one of the top criteria.
- Making the land around the facility look attractive was key to many.
- Multiple use of land was very important to a number of people although different groups thought of it in different ways; e.g., parks, soccer or baseball playing fields, industrial sites (possibly vacated), swamplands, or park-n-ride lots.
- Environmental safety--or not destroying the habitat--was mentioned as most important by two or three residents in each group.

Advice for Siting Outfall

The criteria for siting of the outfall location were related most to preservation of the water receiving the outfall and the piping to that location. The most frequently mentioned criteria are listed below:

- Protection of public beaches used for recreation
- Protection of the marine ecology, especially shellfish
- Putting the outfall location far enough offshore and deep enough to have minimal effect on the environment both on shore and marine ecology.
- Good circulation of water due to currents and tides at outfall location
- Minimal disruption of land and neighborhoods for laying of pipes
- Some of the respondents were concerned that the plans to treat wastewater should call for the separation of storm or rainwater from sewage, in order to be more efficient.

Reaction to Key Messages

These are the four key messages that were presented to participants:

- The plant can be located with other facilities.
- The plant will be a good neighbor

- The plant will be environmentally-friendly
- Water conservation is important

All of the key messages presented for the residents' consideration were perceived as vague and no more fitting for a wastewater plant than any other type of industrial plant. However, the two ideas that made the facility sound more appealing were the concepts of multi-use and good neighbor. The residents' reactions are summarized below:

- The idea of multiple-use of the land was most appealing to local residents. However, they thought the concept should be stated more directly and explicitly.
- The good neighbor concept would be appreciated if it meant using the technology would control odors and noise. The landscaping would be important too.
- Both of the two statements mentioned previously could be combined under the umbrella of uplifting the community through the new facilities, which had broad acceptance.
- The environmental impact on people and ecosystems was important to respondents, but it was more of an expectation. The "friendly" descriptor did not seem strong enough.
- The message with the least strength was that of water conservation, because water is perceived as abundant in the Northwest. Conservation, however, was believed to apply more to the drinking water than to the treated wastewater.

Other Suggestions

Education of the public was a main theme in the focus group discussions. Residents suggested that one goal should relate to informing residents about wastewater treatment requirements and plans. Another goal recommended was involvement of communities and their residents in the decision process. Respondents had the following suggestions about educating the public:

- Keeping the public well informed so that they do not become suspicious. One resident said the County should "demystify" the process.
- The communication should be clear but include facts rather than promotional or political language.
- Residents would like direct mail and invitations to public meetings, if possible.

Detailed Findings

Each focus group was audio taped and transcribed. The Gilmore facilitator analyzed the discussions and drew conclusions based on the answers and comments from the participants. This section is the basis for the conclusions. A copy of the transcripts are available upon request from ____.

Impact of Growth

Respondents perceived one of the greatest impacts of growth in this area to be traffic congestion and the insufficiency of the transportation system. Respondents suggested that there are not enough roads and cross streets for the density of homes under construction in some parts of their communities.

“I live at the top of Juanita, and I do want Lake Point to be developed, but I am concerned that they also develop the transportation around it at the same time.” (Kenmore Group)

Residents in all of the groups would like to see more public transportation as well as improvement in the roads. Some suggested a rail transportation system using existing rails along the water. A number of people in several groups suggested that having sidewalks in their communities would make it possible for people to walk to more places locally.

A few of the respondents were opposed to having multiple dwelling buildings built in areas that had previously been single family homes. Residents would like to have more parks and recreational facilities to meet the needs of the growing population.

“Well, the public pool, to get your kid to swim lessons, you have to stand in line at 5:00 in the morning to try and do that, which is kind of ridiculous. And I know Edmonds is trying to work on getting a pool. Parks...having adequate play equipment.” (Lynnwood Group)

“There’s really no parks.” (Edmonds Group)

“They don’t have that many baseball fields.”

“Because my son played baseball. There were two fields—one field in Richmond Beach and another one, but I mean, we had to drive to Ballard or Ridgeview.” (Excerpt from Edmonds Group)

Preservation of open spaces and green belts was important to those who had lived in the area when it was more rural and had an abundance of trees.

Schools were another type of facility that residents thought would be needed as the population expands in next five to ten years.

“You can’t bring in another 500 families to one school and expect that school to absorb all the children that might be in the 500 families. An instead of throwing up apartment complexes and condo complexes for one school, if you’re going to do that you should have an alternative school that you can take part of the kids to or realign the districts.” (Bothell Group)

Emergency medical and police services were mentioned as well. Some respondents felt that these were adequate and others did not. However, they were sure that more would be needed for a greater population or that communities would have to cooperate to share services. At least one participant thought that regionalized services would reduce duplication and make them more cost effective.

Participants do not seem concerned about the availability of water, which they consider abundant in this region. However, some people expressed concern about protecting future water sources by avoiding destructive practices in construction of plants, spills into the rivers and lakes, or release of treated water into the natural waters of the Puget Sound area. Snohomish County residents believed they had less restriction in water usage than some King County residents:

“As far as water, from the Snohomish County side, there’s plenty of water because they get it from the Everett water system, and that was supporting pulp mills in Everett that are now closed, so there’s plenty of water on the Snohomish County side. On the King County side, they get it from the Seattle Water District, and there’s restrictions. There are summers where three blocks from us you can’t water, and we can. So the water is fine. It’s interesting that they haven’t tied the two systems together when they’re so close, but I figure that ‘ll be coming at some point.” (Bothell Group)

Water pressure also was an issue for some households. The supply of water in terms of pipes and pumping seemed to come to mind for most residents before any concerns about how to deal with wastewater.

Attitudes about Wastewater Treatment

When respondents are asked specifically about wastewater, they still indicated more concern about other types of service problems besides treatment of wastewater. One response is quoted below:

“Nothing touches me the way the traffic does.” (Bothell Group)

They often think of the run-off or drainage from rain and gutters before they think of sewage. They attribute some of the excess run-off to the fact that many trees have been cut down and building put in their places. There was some confusion about whether both types of wastewater are handled in the same system or separately. Some referred to the

“Metro” system as the regional entity responsible for handling decisions about wastewater. One concern was that the developers putting in the new homes and complexes should be paying into the fund for future wastewater treatment facilities. Some suggested that one way to keep costs down would be “*to expand existing plants.*”

Residents of the various communities thought of the various wastewater treatment plants that currently serve their areas. One thought of a facility in Carkeek Park. Another mentioned the plant at West Point. A respondent in the Edmonds/Shoreline group thought that there was currently a plant under construction on Elliot Avenue. The Lynnwood respondents referred to the huge settling ponds north of Everett as the way that community treats wastewater. A Shoreline respondent mentioned the Picnic Point treatment plant as part of the Alderwood Water District.

Another thought that came up in every group related to a need for wastewater treatment facilities was “not in my backyard.” They referred to this attitude as “NIMBY” and recognized that it was unrealistic, because the treatment of wastewater is a “necessity.” However, they still had concerns about where it would be built, as one woman explained:

“I think all of us are concerned with we’re going to be perhaps living next to something we really don’t want to be living next to. And I feel very helpless about those kinds of things. All of a sudden it’s announced that here is this plant going in or something else and we haven’t heard about it until it is already on the drawing board.” (Bothell Group)

The idea was that residents would like to be informed ahead of time and understand how the plant would address their concerns.

One of the words that comes to mind for many residents when they think of sewage treatment is “smell.” However, other respondents pointed out that they had not experienced any bad smells coming from the West Point plant in Discovery Park. A few of the Lynnwood respondents mentioned the waste treatment plant in Edmonds as having the smell drawback but an attractive appearance:

“I know there’s been problems with the one in downtown Edmonds. Flooding, smelling, and stuff. But I think that having it where it can be put on multiple use land, kind of like a park around the one in Edmonds. (Lynnwood Group)

“A lot of people don’t realize what it is, I don’t think.”

“But you can’t see the water. It’s totally covered up, isn’t it? (Lynnwood Group)

Another word that came to mind was “sludge.” A few respondents were aware that sanitized sludge was sold as lawn fertilizer in other parts of the country.

One Lynnwood respondent worried about whether the water coming out into the Puget Sound would be clean, especially if it were near a beach. A “spill” of untreated sewage was another concern, whether it was going into the Sound or some other body of water. Several thought there had been such problems with spills going into Lake Washington,

which necessitated beach closings.

A few respondents thought it would be wise to separate the gray water or rain run off from the true sewage because it should not need as much processing. In fact, several thought that the newer plants did separate the two types of water.

One or two respondents were concerned about toxic chemicals in the water. They thought that a tertiary treatment process would be necessary to remove these harmful substances from the wastewater and that it would be “very expensive.” A third respondent indicated that the tertiary treatment would remove a greater variety of bacteria than the secondary. When other respondents heard about tertiary treatment in the discussion, they indicated a preference to plan for the future by taking steps to include tertiary treatment in the next plant even if federal and state standards did not require it yet as the following comments indicate:

“If they go to tertiary treatment...they may be able to discharge it into the streams...Do we want to improve upon those standards? Are we going to require higher standards...”

“I think that’s what I’m coming down to, is are we going to build for the standards now or are we going to build for the proposed standards ten years from now?...they could build some of those in that might initially make the cost more up front but we wouldn’t be retrofitting it all the time.” (Lynnwood Group)

Finally, a few residents of various communities admitted that they rarely thought about wastewater treatment plants and did not know much about them. A number of residents did not seem aware of where the current plants are.

Awareness of New Wastewater Treatment Facility Plans

Most of the focus group participants said that they were not aware of any plans for a new wastewater treatment facility in the area. A few said that they had heard there might be one but did not know the details related to the plans. A few had ideas about what they had heard or thought they heard.

One of the Shoreline residents thought there were plans to build a new wastewater treatment plant at Point Wells where the “big Standard Oil plant” used to be in Richmond Beach. Some others in the group were uncertain about whether that was going to happen and who would vote on it if it were. Several referred to the Ronald Sewer District as taking care of Richmond Beach’s wastewater. Another Edmonds/Shoreline participant thought there was a wastewater treatment plant being built in Seattle:

“I thought they had started this one in Elliot. Maybe I’m wrong...It’s in Seattle. It’s closer to the City of Seattle. Western Avenue? (Edmonds Group)

Some residents of the Bothell area indicated that there were plans to build a storage vault

in Lake Forest Park or Kenmore:

“They just recently passed that. Instead of having another line into the lake, they did a storage vault that they’re going to do in Lake Forest Park to sort of meter the sewage down to the West Point [plant] is what I understand.”
(Bothell Group)

Some of the Kenmore residents also thought they had vaguely heard that the new plant was going to be in Kenmore. Other Bothell residents indicated they had heard about potential plans for a facility in the Bothell/Woodinville area at a city council meeting some time ago.

When respondents were asked how they would prefer to be informed about plans for new facilities, they mentioned newspapers as one of the first lines of communication, both the larger and the smaller papers. The *Seattle Times* and *P.I.* were named, and some said they read the Sunday paper. Community newspapers were perceived as a good source of information by many of the local residents, as one Kenmore resident explained:

“Well, ever since Kenmore became incorporated, I have been reading the Northshore Citizen and I think it’s very good the way they’re going to have more local control...They’re doing a really good job communicating through that paper. I know everybody doesn’t read it, because people have different opinions about reading local papers. I find it’s a really good way to get a pulse on the community.” (Kenmore Group)

A Bothell resident also referred to reading *The Citizen*. The local papers for the Lynnwood and Edmonds areas were called *The Enterprise* and several mentioned that name as well.

Several in the Edmonds/Shoreline group mentioned reading the *Shoreline News* and some referred to the *Richmond Beach News*.

Another means for local communication was the local access cable TV. Some residents reportedly watch the city council meetings on cable. However, for working people, that media seemed less viable. Regular network TV news was another way that some respondents said they get information about what is going on in the Seattle area.

A few suggested that the county send out direct mail to all the residents. However, they did not seem to realize the expense associated with that type of mailing or the fact that many residents would ignore it. Others thought the county could include the information about their plans in some utility bill such as the sewer bill or the water bill. Quite a few claimed to peruse such inserts. Whatever is communicated, some respondents stressed the need for plain and clear language with no legalese or politicized statements.

Public meetings were recommended although respondents realized that only a small percentage of residents show up for them. They acknowledged that the attendees were usually a small group of concerned residents or those that had a particular interest in the issue under discussion. One suggestion was to send out nice-looking invitations to the public sessions. Another was to make public service announcements on the radio. Particularly among some of the Snohomish County residents, there was concern about

how they could voice their input, if they could not vote for the County Council in King County:

“If they decide to make this a King County-controlled wastewater facility, treatment plant, and put it in Snohomish County, I think Snohomish County’s going to really want a voice, particularly the people north of the border there.”
(Bothell Group)

Websites were not seen as a very viable source of information by these resident groups, mostly because they thought one would have to know there was something happening before one would know to look up that site on the Internet. The main issue was that they were unaware of what was going on and would not think to look for the information.

Advice for Siting Plant

Regarding the location of a new wastewater treatment facility, many thought first of the geography. Some wondered if the new plants would have to be along the water to be more cost effective. However, respondents deduced that there would have to be the same length of pipe whether it was the raw wastewater flowing to the plant or the treated effluent being piped to the outfall location. Another concern seemed to be the natural flow of water due to gravity. Respondents did not think it would make sense to pump either type of water uphill.

The next concern seemed to be disruption of prime real estate. For this reason, some thought it would be inadvisable to put a huge plant right along the Puget Sound. These same respondents would not mind a beautiful park along the shores of the Puget Sound:

“It seems silly to take up prime waterfront property for something like that... Come to mind, it would be better just to put it in an open area rather than taking prime real estate that you could build a beautiful park or a marina. I mean, not to junk it up, but certainly you can come up with something more beautifying than a water treatment plant. So I guess I would have an opinion about that.” (Edmonds Group)

Some suggested use of swamp lands but realized that the county would have to overcome all of the environmental issues if they did build in that type of area. Some thought of a swampy area in Edmonds near the railroad tracks.

Many of the local area residents were concerned about disrupting the ecology of any of the areas natural resources. They wanted to be sure that the plant would be environmentally safe, particularly if there were spills. They wanted the location of the plant to take into consideration the potential for natural disasters, for example, an earthquake. In addition, they did not want the construction of the plant to be destructive:

“I’d actually consider minimizing disturbance to natural setting type property that still is available. In other words, kind of keeping ecosystems intact as much as possible.” (Kenmore Group)

Digging up streets or treed greenbelts was another concern. Respondents would like to

see minimal damage to the landscape. Making a tunnel was perceived as preferable to “making a big mess of the total environment.”

A further consideration was the truck traffic that would be present during both the construction and the removal of solid waste after the plant is in operation. Those who thought the new facility site might be Richmond Beach were especially worried about the impact of truck traffic based on previous experience:

“Well, as we were saying, Richmond Beach Road, 185^h, we used to have the oil tankers up and down. I mean, it would get treacherous. Those tankers were huge. And all these little cars, and Richmond Beach Road is real windy. And it was really dangerous... That would be a problem. That’s something I wouldn’t want.” (Edmonds Group)

Cost invariably came up in each discussion, although it was not usually mentioned first. One reason for the sensitivity to this issue is the recent cost overruns for other public facilities, Safeco Field, for example. As some of the residents of Shoreline discussed, cost covered both property for the site and the facility itself. In addition, they wondered whether it would cost more to carry the clean effluent to the Sound, if the plant were placed further inland:

“I don’t know much about it, though, if it would cost more if it were further away from the water than not. I guess you’d kind of have to justify that.” (Edmonds Group)

One suggestion was to put the plant in an open area where there are no homes at the present time. This would allow people to choose whether or not they wanted to live in that area after the plant was built. It seemed a more fair solution than having a plant impose itself as a neighbor unexpectedly:

“If they do it inland,...I would do it more where there’s no houses so when people do buy and build, they know what they’re getting into. Because I wouldn’t want to own a house and then all of a sudden say, ‘Oh, we’re putting a sewer plant in next door to you.’” (Edmonds Group)

Some other sites suggested were in industrial locations where there was already an unattractive facility. One was the defunct oil tank farm. Another was a concrete and asphalt plant in the Kenmore area. One resident of that Kenmore area thought there might be an abandoned gravel pit that could be converted as a site for wastewater treatment.

Some thought the area where the wastewater treatment facility would be built should be camouflaged. To some this meant attractive landscaping to hide the plant. A few respondents were able to think in terms of multi-functional usage of the land, before it was suggested as a potential goal. In one group, the residents spontaneously thought of the idea of having playing fields for soccer or baseball over the wastewater treatment facility. One mentioned a less attractive but useful option of a park’n’ride lot. Another suggested a golf course. Others would prefer parks as the following comment suggests:

“I’m assuming it will be our taxes that pay for it, so is that going to be presented to us in an understandable package, that it will look like a park with multiples uses if you’re willing to pay this amount of money, or it’s going to look like a smelly reservoir if you’re not going to cough up any money...Make it as gorgeous as possible and forget how much it’s going to cost.”
(Lynnwood Group)

Along this same line of thought, respondents in this area thought the facility, if done properly, would enhance the community and could be something the residents would be proud of. Public art was suggested for the facility as well.

When respondents were asked to summarize individually by writing down the two or three most important criteria for siting the plant, most residents ranked cost as one of the top criteria. Beautifying the land around the facility was key to many participants. Using the wastewater plant land for multiple functions appealed to many of the respondents. They thought of various ways it could be used such as for parks, soccer fields, or baseball fields. Recycling land that was formerly industrial but now vacant was another way of making the land multi-use. Environmental safety or having the least impact on the environment was mentioned as most important by two or three residents in each group.

Advice for Siting Outfall

Initially, respondents were as likely to think of Lake Washington being the proposed outfall location as they were Puget Sound. Most felt that Lake Washington could not handle any more wastewater, even if it were clean. However, after a brief discussion of that option, the moderator let respondents know that Puget Sound was the planned outfall destination. Then a number of other criteria for the outfall location were suggested.

Several respondents in different groups mentioned that they would not like the effluent to come out into the Sound where there was a developed or public beach.

“Well, we have a hard enough time with our developed beaches, and just the whole impact if there were a problem, I would like it to be where it would have the least impact on the daily use of the marine areas by people. And there are some areas that are not real well-developed that they could probably put it out through, if the geology wasn’t an overbearing cost.” (Lynnwood Group)

Other members of the groups were more reassuring about the fact that the release of effluent would be far enough out in the Sound that it would not affect any beaches, unless there were some unusual occurrence, such as the accidental discharge of raw sewage. One person from Lynnwood guessed that it should be 500 to 1,000 yards offshore. A Bothell resident said that it should *“be underground and buried in the Sound, so nobody should even know it’s there.”*

Another criteria suggested was that the release site be one where the currents are strong enough to mix the water and, thereby, cause the least impact on the marine ecology:

“I would like a good, natural water circulation.” (Lynnwood Group)

“I think the depth and the volume of water going through that part of the Sound.” (Bothell Group)

In one group, the residents focused more on keeping the water safe for the shellfish. Water temperature at the time of release was expected to be consistent with the body of water into which it would flow. As far as the depth and distance from the shore for the site, respondents thought that the experts involved in planning the treatment process would know best which site would meet their criteria.

A few of the respondents would like the county to assure the local residents would not have their backyards dug up to accommodate the pipes which carry the effluent to the outfall location. This concern seemed more an aversion to disturbance of the land than a concern about safety:

“You don’t want to destroy the aesthetic appearance of a neighborhood by running the pipe through it. You don’t want to have to cut out a lot of houses, you don’t want to have to cut down a lot of trees, that sort of thing.”
(Lynnwood Group)

“Well, the pipeline could be more of a project than the plant. The plant’s going to be on a given site, and the construction and the disruption’s going to be localized to building that...the pipe that would take all of the effluent from this plant to wherever it’s going into Puget Sound is going to be a major undertaking of itself. So if they can avoid using that by redirecting some of the existing infrastructure that already runs from north King and south Snohomish County out, that would--I’d think they’d be ahead.” (Bothell Group)

This element of the criteria was similar to the one for the plant itself. Here, too, the idea of an underground tunnel several hundred feet below the surface was recommended. Putting pipes along the side of a major roadway also was suggested. A third suggestion was to utilize or tie into existing pipes for outfall, so that not as much new pipe would need to be laid. These respondents realized that the pipes might need to be enlarged. An opposing view voiced in one group was that having multiple outfall locations would minimize the impact to the water in any one location.

Cost of construction for the outfall pipe system was mentioned as criteria for two of the focus groups. For that reason they thought that use of undeveloped land or laying the pipeline along an already utilized right of way might reduce the cost of the project.

In one group, a couple of respondents thought that, in long term planning, there should be a way to avoid any need for release of effluent. They explained that, if the water could be treated sufficiently to make it usable for drinking and other household purposes, it could be returned directly to the water supply and would not need to be put into the Puget Sound.

In summary, respondents were asked to pick the two or three most important criteria for the selection of an outfall location. The three most often mentioned criteria for the outfall location were that it be away from public use areas, in a place where it would not disturb the marine environment, and out far and deep into the Sound where tides and currents

will ensure a good mixing of effluent with the water. With regard to the pipe from the plant to the outfall location, there were some concerns about construction disrupting populated areas.

Reaction to Key Messages

Each group was presented with four statements about the siting process. Group members were asked to comment on whether or not the messages were effective in communicating key ideas.

The four statements by themselves were generally considered vague enough that they might be applied to almost any industrial location. The explanations associated with each statement did help to clarify them.

The most appealing concept was that of a multi-functional area which was stated as **“The plant can be located with other facilities.”** Although the statement itself did not intuitively mean multiple usage to respondents, some thought it meant to put the plant with other industrial sites in order to utilize what is already perceived as wasteland. However, the explanation of having a park or playing fields associated with the plant was attractive to the majority of respondents. A few had considered that idea beforehand as well. One group reworded the concept to say: *“Plant location may provide multiple desirable community uses.”*

“The plant will be a good neighbor” seemed somewhat inane to respondents. However the idea of using the “best available technology to control odors and noise” was very important to most respondents. In fact, it was what they would expect of the plant. The aesthetic appeal was likewise important. Landscaping had been one of the criteria the groups proposed. The park feeling seemed somewhat similar to the multi-use/park concept.

Most residents were concerned that **“The plant will be environmentally-friendly,”** although they might not state it that way. They would like assurances that King County would engage experts to study all phases of the plant construction and operation. The residents’ expectation is that the county would consider the environmental needs of the population as well as the land and marine ecology.

“Water conservation” is not considered important by the majority of the participants. They repeatedly mentioned that water is the one resource that the Northwest has in abundance. For this reason, the statement was not perceived as pertinent. It also was associated more with clean or drinking water than with wastewater. The explanation of using the recycled water for lawns and flowerbeds sounded more like water recycling than water conservation. The main drawbacks identified in the concept were the expense of getting the water back to those flowerbeds, the possibility of any bacteria remaining in the water, and the fact that individual homeowners would not get any use of it.

Other Suggestions

The main focus of the final comments seemed to be emphasis on educating the public and keeping the residents informed of the decision process and technology to be used for wastewater treatment. These residents would like to know that “state of the art” technology would be used. They are interested in seeing all the pros and cons of the various sites. In addition they would want to understand how the plant will meet the needs of the population and how long it will continue to do so. Some suggested that King County might show other facility examples to help the public understand the options or possibilities. Finally, they would like to be invited to participate and provide further input in the process.

Appendix A – Topic Guide

Introduction (10 minutes)

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explains:)

Purpose of the Focus Group:

The purpose of our discussion this evening is to learn what is important to the residents of local communities when it comes to community services in North King County and parts of South Snohomish County. The county is interested in understanding what issues are of most concern to residents and what they can do to answer common questions and communicate information that would be helpful to you. So first we'll introduce ourselves and then we'll go through some of these different topics.

Ground Rules/Disclosures:

- Some viewers/listeners
- Audio-taping
- Use first names only for anonymity
- Can only hear one at a time; speak up at same level as I am
- No right or wrong answers, want your candid opinions and suggestions
- We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions:

- First name?
- What part of the area you live in?

Whether you work, are retired, go to school, whatever do regularly

- How many in your household? Any children?

Probing for General Opinion (10 minutes)

What are the most important issues we face with increased growth in North King County and/or South Snohomish County?

What do we need to do in the next 10 years to handle growth?

What impacts have you already felt, or might experience, regarding services provided to you and your community (probe for water, electricity, garbage, schools)

What do you think, in general about wastewater treatment plants? What is their role in growth management? What kinds of words come to mind when you think about these kinds of facilities?

Why do you have those opinions about wastewater treatment plants? What kinds of experiences have you had that cause you to have those opinions?

Goal of this segment: Understand participant perspectives on growth and how wastewater treatment plays a role in those perspectives. Understand the images focus group participants have of wastewater treatment plants. Understand the positive and negative experiences that have contributed to those images. Probe for specific examples: e.g. other wastewater treatment plants and their positive/negative images.

Probing for General Awareness (20 minutes)

King Co. plans to build a new wastewater treatment facility, and we will briefly show you a map of the area in which it is likely that the plant will be located. The "system" of the plant includes the plant itself, the pipes that run to it, and the marine outfall pipe (graphic of a plant, conveyance, and outfall).

How many of you knew before you came in here tonight that King County is going to build a new wastewater treatment plant?

Whether you heard about it for the first time tonight, or previously, what was your initial reaction?

If you heard about it before tonight, do you recall where you heard, or read, that information?

Do you recall hearing anything about the plant specifically, for example, where it might be located – or what it might look like? Anything you recall?

And again, if you do recall hearing or reading something – do you remember where you heard or read it?

Goal of this segment: Measure overall awareness of issue. Determine the kinds of media that focus groups participants rely on for information about current events.

Advice for King County (Siting Criteria) (20 minutes)

So...if you were in charge of giving advice to King County on where to put this new plant, what do you think the most important factors would be in choosing the best piece of property for it?

1) If answers come as: “the property should be large,” “you have to make sure trucks aren’t going to block traffic,” “it can’t be somewhere where people can smell it,” the facilitator will begin making a list of the kinds of factors people believe the County should consider.

2) If the answers come as: “I don’t know,” the facilitator will suggest some factors that might be important to consider, such as “make sure it’s not too noisy,” “make sure traffic into and out of the plant can be handled,” and “make sure it doesn’t smell too bad.” The group will then discuss and continue listing the kinds of factors they think are important.

Make list on easel , then ask: Well, we’ve compiled quite a list here of important things to consider as we think about a piece of property for this new plant. Now I’d like you to review this list, and write down on your paper the top three most important to you. Just use a few words so we know which one you mean. For example, out of all of these items, what do you think is the most important one? Put that as #1. What is second most important? Give that a number #2. (and so on).

Now let’s share your lists. How did you rank these factors, and why did you rank them the way you did?

Wastewater will be piped from the plant and flow out into the Sound at a specific location If you were in charge of giving advice to King County on where to put this new outfall for the plant, what do you think the most important factors would be in choosing the best location in the Puget Sound for it?

- 1. If answers come as: "make sure the sewage does not pollute the shellfish", or "Make sure my kids can still play on the beach", the facilitator will begin making a list of the kinds of factors people believe the County should consider.**
- 2. If answers come as: "I don't know", the facilitator will suggest some factors that might be important to consider, such as, "choose a site that will protect shellfish", "Choose a site that will allow recreational use of the beach" etc.**

Goal of this segment: Understand the kinds of criteria focus group participants believe are most important to keep in mind when siting the new treatment plant and outfall.

Goals and Values (Key Messages) (40 minutes)

As King County considers this new wastewater treatment facility, staff from the County have been working hard on different ideas to communicate the siting process and to communicate how the plant will operate. We would like to know what you think is important to communicate (via messages) to the public regarding the siting and operation of the plant (probe in the areas listed below without communicating the specific message)

Present the messages one at a time and discuss participant reactions, in terms of what is most important to them and why.

(we'll have a large printed list available, and this will also be printed on cards...)

- ✓ **Water conservation is important.** The County is working on ways to use recycled water from the plant for lawns and flowerbeds.
- ✓ **The plant will be a good neighbor.** The County wants to use the best available technology to control odors and noise. The plant will also be attractively landscaped to give it a "park" feeling.
- ✓ **The plant can be located with other facilities.** In some parts of the country, wastewater treatment plants are built underground, with soccer fields on top of them. Or, they can be surrounded by large parks.
- ✓ **The plant will be environmentally-friendly.** King County is carefully studying any environmental impacts of the treatment plant. And, when it builds the plant, it will be careful to protect both the environment on the land, and the environment in Puget Sound.

Is there anything unclear or any wording that bothers you? Other ways to say it better?

What else important to you/what would you add to this list? What are the other things you believe King County should think about when it builds and operates this plant?

Now, review the list in front of you. And again, make a list of the three most important items – with #1 being the most important thing King County should think about, #2 the second most important thing, etc.

How did you all rate your lists, and why?

Goal of this segment: Understand the kinds of values that are most important to focus group participants, and the kinds of messages that will be important to share throughout the siting of the plant.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

Before we leave tonight, what else would you like King County to know as it goes ahead with building this wastewater treatment plant? What other advice would you like to give to the County?

Goal of this segment: Probe for any additional ideas, concerns, or comments from participants.

Thank you and good night – (you'll receive your remuneration out at the desk when you sign out.

Appendix B - Focus Group Screener

Interviewer Name _____ Date _____ ID# _____

Respondent's Name _____ Male/Female _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone Day: _____ Eve: _____

Group Date/Time _____

CALL INTRO: (Ask for Name on List) (IF NOT AVAILABLE, SCHEDULE A CALLBACK APPOINTMENT OR LEAVE A MESSAGE, AS NEEDED)

Hello, this is _____ with _____, an independent opinion research firm. Today / tonight we are conducting a very brief study with people in your area regarding issues of interest in your area. Let me assure you that this study is being conducted for planning purposes only, and that your opinion is important to us.

IF NEEDED

The purpose of our study is to learn more about King and Snohomish County residents' opinion of services provided in these areas.

We are inviting some of the people we talk with to a focus group discussion in your area and would like to talk with you a few minutes about that.

1. First, let me just verify, do you live in the _____ (Bothell/Woodinville)

(Kenmore/Lake Forest Park)(Edmonds/Shoreline) (Lynnwood/Mountlake Terrace/Brier) area?

Yes [CONTINUE]
No [THANK & TERMINATE]

2. How long have you lived in the Snohomish/King County area ? _____
KEEP TRACK OF THIS.

3. Do you own or rent your current residence?

Own 1

→(RECRUIT 75%)

4. What is your age? (RECRUIT A MIX)

TERMINATE IF UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE.

RECORD: _____

5. What was the highest level of education you completed? (RECRUIT A MIX)

High school or less	1
Some college/voc./tech	2
4-year college degree	3
Some post graduate work	4
Ph.D., Masters, post grad. degree	5

6. And what is your total annual household income before taxes? Is it...READ 1 - 5 (RECRUIT A MIX)

Under \$25,000	1
\$25,000 - \$49,000	2
\$50,000 - \$74,000	3
\$75+	4
DK/REF	9

8. GENDER RECORD:
(RECRUIT A 50/50 MIX)

Male_____ Female_____

INVITATION

As further part of our research, we are inviting people like you to participate in a focus group discussion regarding King and Snohomish County community services. These discussion groups are held for research purposes only. We'd just like to hear your honest opinions. The group will be relaxed and informal, and you will simply be involved in an exchange of ideas and opinions with about 8 to 10 other people like yourself.

The discussion will be held at _____, located at _____. The group will take place on [CHECK MATRIX BELOW]. It will last approximately 2 hours, and at the conclusion of the discussion, we will be pleased to present you with a cash honorarium of \$50.00 in appreciation of your time. Will you be available to participate in this discussion?

GROUP 1 — Tuesday, May 30, 2000 at 6:00 PM - Bothell/Woodinville

GROUP 2 — Tuesday, May 30, 2000 8:00 PM - Kenmore/Lake Forest Park

GROUP 3 — Thursday, June 1, 2000 at 6:00 PM - Edmonds/Shoreline

GROUP 4 --- Thursday, June 1, 2000 at 8:00 PM - Lynnwood/Mountlake Terrace/Brier

1. Yes [CONTINUE]
2. No [THANK & TERMINATE]
3. DK [SAVE AS UNCOMMITTED, GET C/B
DATE ANDTIME _____]

All right, we'll be sending you a letter to confirm this invitation, along with a map to the facility. May I please have the correct spelling of your name and address [RECORD ON FRONT PAGE] ? (VERIFY PHONE NUMBER FROM SAMPLE)

For this project, it is very important that we are able to count on your attendance. **If, for any reason, you find yourself unable to join us, please call us at _____ as soon as possible. This will, hopefully, enable us to find a replacement for you.**

Thanks again.