
Chapter 12

Public Involvement Policies

The RWSP public involvement policies are intended to guide King County in maintaining public information and education programs and to engage the public and component agencies in the planning, designing, and operating decisions that affect them. The policies direct the county to involve public officials and citizens of affected jurisdictions early and actively in the planning and decision-making process for wastewater capital projects. They include direction on disseminating information and providing education on the status, needs, and potential future of the region's water resources. The policies also provide specific guidance on implementing a public education program regarding infiltration and inflow. Lastly, the public involvement policies call for the county to support regional water supply agencies in their public education campaign to conserve water and to promote pilot projects that support water conservation.

This chapter provides an overview of implementation of the RWSP public involvement policies from 2004 through 2006. There were no amendments to these policies in 2004–2006.

The complete text of all the public involvement policies and a summary of how each policy was implemented in 2004–2006 are provided in Appendix K.

12.1 Implementation of Public Involvement Policies from 2004 through 2006

King County places a high priority on educating and engaging the public in decisions that affect them. Because wastewater facilities are often “out of sight and out of mind,” the county recognizes the importance of carrying out programs and activities to inform the public about the need for these facilities and the role they play in protecting public health, the environment, and economic development.

The county values public input, opinions, and recommendations in the planning, siting, design, and construction of its wastewater facilities. Engaging and involving the public are fundamental to ensuring the county's wastewater facilities meet the county's goal to construct facilities that enhance the quality of life in the region and in the local community, and are not detrimental to the quality of life in their vicinity.¹

This section provides an overview of major efforts carried out in 2004–2006 in accordance with the RWSP public involvement policies. The activities are as follows:

- Engaging the public, local jurisdictions, and component agencies in the decision making process

¹ This goal is stated in RWSP Environmental Mitigation Policy-4 (Chapter 11).

- Promoting awareness and education of infiltration and inflow (I/I)
- Supporting public education campaigns on the need and ways to conserve water

12.1.1 Engaging and Informing the Public, Local Jurisdictions, and Component Agencies in the Decision-Making Process

Engaging the public, local jurisdictions, and component agencies in the decision-making process is a key component in assuring successful implementation of wastewater programs and projects. A high level of public involvement in wastewater programs has been a standard operating procedure for the regional wastewater system since its development in the late 1950s.

WTD routinely solicits public feedback and opinion in its public meetings, open houses, informational booths, project and program related mailings, and through the annual water quality surveys and annual surveys of near neighbors of the regional treatment plants. Opportunities for public comment are also provided via WTD project Web sites, emails, letters, or phone calls. Information from these activities is incorporated into project planning, design, construction, or operations as appropriate. Pre-construction surveys and construction hotlines provide WTD and its contractors with important information in preparation for and during construction. The surveys provide information on how people want to be kept informed, or whether they need materials provided in alternative formats or a different language, and whether special needs should be considered in the development of traffic control and other construction-related plans. Calls to the construction hotline serve to alert WTD staff about construction-related concerns that can often be resolved.

Although not every comment, idea, or suggestion is implemented, WTD considers each one seriously. As shown in the list that follows, public comment and input from local jurisdictions have helped to identify project needs, improve project design, and minimize project related impacts.

Examples of activities in 2004–2006 that illustrate the county’s commitment to continuing a high level of public engagement are as follows:

- The agricultural design for the future Carnation Treatment Plant was selected based on input from the public and Carnation City Council.
- In response to community concerns, the design of the new Hidden Lake Pump Station was changed to ensure that it architecturally fits in its residential neighborhood.
- In response to suggestions made at community meetings, the design of the new Juanita Bay Pump Station will protect sight lines from neighboring residences to the extent possible. In addition, native plant landscaping, building perimeter, and sidewalks will complement the neighborhood and nearby park.
- In 2004, a series of meetings were held around the Brightwater Treatment Plant and portal areas to update community members on design and mitigation issues and to solicit

their ideas and feedback. Many of the suggestions from those meetings were incorporated into the systemwide mitigation package for Brightwater.

- Representatives from various groups, including Woodinville Chamber of Commerce, Tulalip Tribes, Brightwater Teacher’s Task Force, and local school districts and environmental education organizations in the Brightwater service area, participated in the Brightwater Education Center/Community Center Advisory Group to provide input on the architectural design of the center directly to the county’s design team.
- To implement the *Executive's Recommended Regional Infiltration and Inflow (I/I) Control Program* approved by the King County Council in May 2006, WTD worked with the Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee’s (MWPAAC) Engineering and Planning Subcommittee to develop selection criteria for the I/I initial reduction projects. Based on the criteria, four projects were selected by MWPAAC to move forward into predesign.
- During preparation of the conveyance system improvement (CSI) update, WTD staff met with staff from individual component agencies to discuss regional conveyance system needs in their areas.
- As a part of the process to update the CSI program, WTD and MWPAAC developed prioritization criteria that address factors such as public health risks, coincident benefits, costs, and rate impacts; these criteria were used to rank planned CSI projects identified in the 2007 CSI Program Update as high, medium, or lower priority (Chapter 3).
- WTD staff met with staff from the cities of Auburn, Kent, Algona, and Pacific to help determine the preferred locations for the pipelines associated with the Kent-Auburn Conveyance System Improvement project. WTD conducted interviews of environmental and community groups, key stakeholders, schools, and commercial and institutional establishments for input on level of interest, issues, and preferred communication methods. WTD held a workshop attended by local jurisdictions and key property owners to evaluate alignment alternatives and tradeoffs. In conjunction with environmental review, county staff will hold community meetings so that residents and businesses can learn more about the project and discuss ways to minimize construction impacts.

12.1.2 Promoting Awareness and Education on Infiltration and Inflow

RWSP Public Involvement Policy (PIP)-7 calls for the county to implement a public awareness and education program regarding the environmental impacts and costs to ratepayers of infiltration and inflow (I/I) in the local system. The policy direction specified that such a program begin in 2001 in conjunction with the I/I pilot projects. The *2004 RWSP Update* discussed the public involvement efforts that were part of the I/I pilot programs in 2000 through 2003. This section focuses on activities carried out in 2004–2006 in accordance with this policy.

In November 2004, in preparation of the Alternatives/Option Report that was published in March 2005, a telephone survey regarding I/I was conducted within the county’s wastewater service

area.² This survey included 400 homeowners in the general service area plus 100 from three of the I/I pilot project areas. They were asked about their role as a property owner in implementing solutions to reduce I/I, whether they preferred having voluntary and/or mandatory property owner actions, their willingness to pay to reduce I/I, and what would be acceptable community options to reduce I/I.

The county and the component agencies participating in the initial I/I projects as part of the *Executive's Recommended I/I Program*, adopted by the King County Council in May 2006, will carry out a comprehensive public involvement effort associated with the field testing and predesign work for the initial I/I reduction projects. The program recognizes that public education is an important element in implementing long term I/I control measures. WTD public involvement staff is working closely with the component agencies to develop general public information materials about I/I as well as materials specific to each initial project.

WTD's I/I Web site is updated on a regular basis. WTD serves as a clearinghouse regarding information on technologies related to I/I reduction; this information is made available to MWPAAC members. Chapter 4 provides more information on implementation of the RWSP I/I policies.

12.1.3 Supporting Public Education Campaigns on the Need and Ways to Conserve Water

RWSP PIP-8 calls for King County to support regional water supply agencies in their public education campaign on the need and ways to conserve water. The policy also states that the county should promote pilot projects that support homeowner water conservation in coordination with water suppliers and purveyors, emphasizing strategies and technologies that reduce wastewater flow.

The following are examples of how King County has supported campaigns on the need and ways to conserve water in 2004–2006:

- Signing a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2005 with the Cascade Water Alliance to address water supply needs
- Participating with multiple agencies and organizations in a regional water supply planning process
- Participating in activities to increase water conservation with the Water Conservation Coalition of Puget Sound (now called Partnership for Water Conservation)
- Coordinating the *2005 King County Climate Change Conference*
- Implementing a drought response plan in March 2005, which directed King County facilities to use less water in their operations
- Providing educational information on the county's water conservation Web site <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wtd/waterconservation/index.htm>

² The *Alternatives/Option Report* presented a set of alternative approaches to controlling regional I/I.

- Participating as a co-sponsor along with other water and wastewater utilities of a reclaimed water conference held in June 2007 sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association

In accordance with policy direction to promote pilot projects that support water conservation, the King County Council approved a five-year water conservation program through 2005 that emphasized water conserving retrofit projects. While no additional funding was allocated in the 2006 budget, the program was extended by one year to complete several projects that began in 2005. The projects are as follows:

- **Public Health—Seattle & King County Facilities.** The toilets and faucets in the White Center and Renton public health facilities were upgraded and will lower water and sewer costs, freeing up financial resources for other community services.
- **West Point Treatment Plant.** A partnership was formed with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) to install a second filtration system for backup to the existing system and provide additional capacity to cover high reuse process water demand. The project was completed in December 2006, and is expected to save about 29,736 ccf of water per year and \$72,854 in potable water costs.³
- **Harborview Medical Center.** Eleven new water-saving autoclaves, used for sterilizing medical instruments, were installed at Harborview Medical Center. This project is expected to save more than 5 million gallons of water and \$60,000 a year.
- **King County Correctional Facility.** This facility houses an average of 2,300 inmates a day who use about 33 million gallons of water a year in showers alone. In partnership with SPU, King County replaced more than 50 percent of the old inefficient shower valves with new low-flow shower valves. This project is expected to save 4.5 million gallons of water and \$60,000 per year.
- **King County Animal Services.** Efficient washing machines and dishwashers were installed in the Kent and Bellevue animal shelters. This project will save 190,000 gallons of water per year.
- **King County Department of Youth Services.** Water-efficient washing machines were installed, and toilets, urinals, and faucets were retrofitted. The project will save 24 million gallons of water annually and more than \$250,000 a year in operating costs.
- **Weyerhaeuser King County Aquatic Center.** The final phase of the water saving retrofits at this world class facility were completed in summer 2004. More than 500,000 people use this facility every year, and water savings from the 83 upgraded toilets, urinals, faucets, and showers are expected to exceed 2.25 million gallons of water and more than \$7,000 a year in water and sewer costs.

³ ccf = 100 cubic feet.

12.2 Ongoing Public Information and Education Programs

The Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) conducts a variety of general public information and outreach activities in support of the county's wastewater programs and the needs and potential future of the region's water resources, including:

- **Speaker's bureau.** WTD staff is available to speak to schools and community, business, environmental and neighborhood groups. Popular topics include wastewater treatment basics, creating energy resources from wastewater, marine science and water quality, planning for wastewater needs, controlling combined sewer overflows, recycling biosolids, water conservation and reclaimed water, and industrial and residential waste disposal.

During the siting, design, and construction of its facilities, WTD staff seeks out groups, businesses, and residents that may be affected by its facilities to ensure they have as much information as possible on specific projects.

- **Community open houses.** The two regional treatment plants, South plant in Renton and West Point plant in Seattle, host open houses each year that feature water conservation, water quality, and wastewater treatment information; several hundred people attend each year. Between October 2005 and August 2006, both treatment plants held 40th Anniversary Celebrations, which were widely attended and involved numerous community groups and King County schools.
- **Wastewater treatment plants and facilities tours.** WTD's robust tour program introduces over three thousand students and hundreds of other interested parties annually to the wastewater treatment process and the importance of protecting our region's water resources and water quality.
- **Informational booths at community fairs, festivals, and other events.** WTD's public involvement and project staffs participate in these kinds of activities to inform and educate community members about the county's wastewater programs and projects.
- **Web site.** WTD's Web site is updated regularly and includes information on the county's wastewater system and process, programs planned for the future, projects in design and construction, and sewer rates and the capacity charge. WTD also hosts Web sites that offer information on ways to conserve water, to dispose of trash properly to help protect the region's wastewater infrastructure, and to eliminate fats, oils, and grease from our sewers.
- **Duwamish River Educational Events.** Events in 2006 included (1) a fall habitat restoration day where hundreds of volunteers worked on seven habitat restoration projects along the Duwamish River, and (2) a *Duwamish Alive! Earth Day* event where over 800 volunteers helped with plantings and other activities and learned about actions they could take to help restore five areas along the Duwamish. In addition, the county has been a sponsor of the annual Duwamish River Festival that began in 2005. The festival

includes live music, activities for children, kayak tours, and updates on the Duwamish River Superfund cleanup efforts.

- **Working with businesses to protect the wastewater system.** WTD's industrial waste program helps businesses meet regulations by educating them about pollution prevention, waste reduction, and water reuse. The program's advisory committee meets on a quarterly basis; it was formed in 2000 to exchange ideas among representatives of industrial wastewater dischargers, sewer agencies, environmental groups, and Industrial Waste staff about ways to protect water quality and the wastewater system, as well as the services and work of the Industrial Waste Program.
- **Keeping local news media informed.** WTD's media relations keep local news media informed about WTD projects and programs that affect the neighborhoods they serve and about general information on the county's wastewater system.
- **Project-specific activities.** WTD staff seeks out groups, businesses, and residents that may be affected by its facilities and provides them with as much information as possible on specific projects. Staff keeps people informed about regional wastewater projects in their neighborhoods through mailings, door hangers, e-mail alerts, neighborhood meetings, and signage. WTD staff also responds to letters, e-mails, and phone inquiries in a timely manner. In addition, staff works with local jurisdictions on decisions related to project permitting, traffic control and planning, coordination of city and county projects, landscaping, and architectural treatments.
- **Emergency responses.** In the case of emergency repairs, such as the Lincoln Park Sewer Line project in early 2006 or the North Mercer Interceptor Emergency Repair in early 2007, WTD staff employs emergency response procedures, such as posting and canvassing the affected area to notify visitors and neighbors of the situation. WTD staff works closely with the local jurisdictions and nearby neighbors to keep them informed and updated during these kinds of activities.
- **Water quality surveys.** King County conducts an annual water quality survey to measure WTD's performance as an agency and to learn about concerns or questions regarding the county's wastewater services. The survey asks people whether they are aware that King County provides a certain service and then gives people an opportunity to rate our performance in several areas, including wastewater treatment, combined sewer overflow control, water quality management, and salmon and habitat protection. The survey also asks respondents their opinions on the use of biosolids and reclaimed water.

For more information on WTD's public involvement program, visit the program's Web site at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wtd/community/involved.htm>