



Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Frequently Asked Questions

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Project Background and Need

Q. What is the Northeast King County Recycling and Transfer Station (NERTS) project?

A. In 2020, King County's Solid Waste Division began a process to find a site for a new recycling and transfer station (a facility where garbage hauling companies, businesses and King County residents can bring their waste and recycling) in northeast King County. The new facility will replace the aging and outdated Houghton Transfer Station in Kirkland that has been in operation since the mid-1960s. A new station will provide convenient, accessible recycling and waste services to residents of Kirkland, Redmond, Woodinville, Sammamish, and areas of northeast unincorporated King County.

Q. What is the basis for the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project?

A. Plans to expand and modernize solid waste disposal and recycling services in the northeast portion of King County’s service area were outlined in the [2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan](#) (Comp Plan), specifically Chapter 5, Pages 134, 141, 142, 143-145. The Comp Plan was approved by the King County Council and Department of Ecology after many years of

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deliberation that included opportunities for public input. In fall 2020, King County’s Solid Waste Division moved forward with a siting process to identify potential locations for a new facility.

Q. Why do we need a new transfer station?

A. King County identified the need for a new station in the 2019 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan. The aging Houghton Station, in operation since the mid-1960s, cannot accommodate our growing community because it:

- Lacks space for comprehensive recycling services
- Lacks ability to compact waste
- Lacks adequate queuing space
- Lacks space for waste storage in the event of a major regional emergency

Currently, many people in northeast King County need to drive 30 minutes or more to dispose of household waste and recycling.

Project Siting Process

Q. What are the steps to find a site for the transfer station?

A. Since early 2020, King County has been following a step-by-step process to find a site for the new station. The County began by looking at many different sites and, through robust evaluation processes that included community input and a siting advisory group, has narrowed the list down to four sites. Here are the steps the County followed:

1. **Pass/Fail Criteria:** These criteria establish minimum standards that must be met for potential sites to qualify for further consideration.
2. **Geographic Information System (GIS) Criteria:** Used to identify sites for further analysis.
3. **Broad Area Site Screening (BASS)** – After applying the above criteria, 109 possible sites remained. King County evaluated these sites in consultation with a technical team of professionals and the cities of Kirkland, Redmond, Sammamish, and Woodinville. Together the project team used Broad Area Site Screening criteria to identify the best 15 sites that would move on to the next stage. Broad Area Site Screening Criteria includes:
 - Appropriate site characteristics (size and shape accommodate the required features of a modern transfer station facility).

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- Few negative environmental considerations that cannot be mitigated (e.g., sites with sensitive environmental areas such as steep slopes, large wetlands, heavily wooded, or other environmental issues).
 - Few on-site property improvements that would require relocation (the presence of active on-site businesses or uses requiring relocation that would make development more expensive and disruptive).
 - Relatively few nearby sensitive receptors (such as schools, parks, residences, and hospitals).
 - Site can be developed with no unresolved equity or social justice concerns. Any equity or social justice concerns are mitigated by the NERTS Equity Impact Review or other supplemental Equity and Social Justice project.
 - Site can be developed with minimal known geotechnical concerns.
 - Any site located within an aquifer recharge zone will be noted for further assessment.
4. **Community involvement:** To gain the community input and knowledge, and to recruit for a Siting Advisory Group, King County:
- Mailed a postcard announcing the project in English, Spanish, Russian, and Simplified and Traditional Chinese to over 115,000 homes, businesses, residents, and tenants in the siting area.
 - Posted about the project on county and city social media channels.
 - Published a press release.
 - Announced the project in county and city newsletters and on websites.
5. **Focused Site Screening (FSS):** The top sites from the Broad Area Site Screening (BASS) were then evaluated in more detail in the Focused Site Screening. That evaluation assessed the sites from several perspectives including functional criteria, and input from the four core cities and the public. The results of the FSS helped shape the County's decision about which sites would proceed into the environmental review process.
6. **Second Community Involvement:** After the Focused Site Screening identified four top sites, King County conducted the following outreach to announce those sites and encourage participation in the fall and winter community survey.

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- Mailed a postcard announcing the project in English, Spanish, Russian, and Simplified and Traditional Chinese to over 115,000 homes, businesses, residents and tenants in the siting area.
 - Posted on county and city social media.
 - Published two press releases.
 - Announced the project updates in county and city newsletters and on websites.
7. **Environmental Impact Assessment:** The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requires state and local agencies consider potential negative environmental impacts of a project before taking action. As lead agency on the project, the King County Solid Waste Division was responsible for conducting the environmental review, which includes:
- **Scoping: In summer 2021**, the scoping process began, allowing the public to provide input to King County and the project team about what should be studied and prioritized in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
 - **Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):** In late 2021, King County will publish a draft EIS that will analyze the potential adverse impacts of the project and proposed mitigation. The draft EIS process provides the public opportunities to review the analysis of the sites proposed for the project, and to ask questions and make formal comments that will be considered in the final EIS.
 - **Final EIS:** In late 2022, King County will complete a final EIS that considers the comments and feedback on the draft EIS. The analysis presented in the final EIS, combined with cost, community considerations, and other factors, will help inform the announcement of a selected site in early 2023.

Siting Process Community Engagement

Q. What has been done to date to inform and engage the cities and the public in the siting process?

A. Since late 2019, King County’s Solid Waste Division has held regular monthly meetings with representatives from the four “core cities” of Kirkland, Sammamish, Woodinville, Redmond, as well as with the Department of Local Services, which represents county residents living in unincorporated areas. These representatives helped establish criteria to advance or eliminate

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certain sites from further consideration. They also completed Community Profile Questionnaires to provide King County with details about the characteristics of their communities that included: demographics; community values and interests; lists of current capital projects; and the number of major essential facilities, including those in economically distressed neighborhoods. Finally, jurisdictional representatives were able to comment on the list of proposed sites to be shared with the public, and helped review and shape King County's public involvement planning.

Activities to date include:

1. Siting Advisory Group (SAG)

- The project team worked with the four core cities and unincorporated area representatives to recruit members for a SAG to serve as community and neighborhood voices on the project. The group was convened in October 2020.
- Members of the public have opportunities to attend advisory group meetings to watch the process, and to provide public comment during a dedicated period at the end of each meeting.

2. Press Releases

- Three press releases were published to notify people about the new facility siting, and opportunities to serve on a Siting Advisory Group (SAG), opportunities to attend the SAG meetings, which were open to the public, and to notify people about the four locations identified for possible study in an EIS.
 - Sept. 17, 2020: [Public input wanted to help site a new recycling and garbage transfer station in northeast King County](#)
 - Oct. 12, 2020: [Siting advisory committee meeting on Oct. 14 kicks off new recycling and transfer station project in north King County](#) -- Oct. 12
 - Jan. 25, 2021: [King County considers four potential sites for its Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station set to open in late 2027](#)

On Feb. 16, 2021, King-5 News covered the project in its evening newscast and promoted the NERTS community criteria survey.

3. Two Multilingual Mailers

- Mailers introduced community members to the siting process, and ways to learn about the project and participate by taking surveys to share input, ideas, and information.
- Sent to 114,000 addresses in November 2020 and 115,000 addresses in January 2021

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4. Newsletters and Social Media

- King County developed a communications toolkit with social media and newsletter text to share with the cities of Kirkland, Redmond, Woodinville, Sammamish, and unincorporated King County to include in their local publications and newsletters.
- Notices appeared in Kirkland’s weekly newsletter on January 27 and February 17, 2021. Kirkland also posted information about the survey on their city Facebook page on January 26.
- The Woodinville news published an online article about the recycling and transfer station on January 25, 2021, and promoted the survey in the February issue of the Woodinville Wire. The city Facebook page had two posts featuring the survey on January 25, February 3, and February 8, 2021.
- The City of Redmond posted information about the community criteria survey to their Facebook page on January 29 and February 15, 2021.

5. Two Multilingual Social Media Ad Campaigns on Facebook

- Ads ran on Facebook in November and January/February to inform people about the project and encourage them to visit the kingcounty.gov/northeast website for information, and to take surveys where they could share information and input. Languages included Spanish, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Hindi, Russian, Arabic, and Farsi.

6. Two Surveys – One in November 2020, one in January/February 2021

- **November 2020 – 786 responses:** The first survey ran from **November 10 to 19** to get public input on what is most important to community members about a new transfer station location. The 7-question survey asked where people first heard about the project, how important it is to have access to a transfer station, whether they use the current Houghton Transfer Station, what type of benefits they think a project might bring, and an open-ended question about whether they had any concerns about a future transfer station. Response can be viewed on the kingcounty.gov/northeast website.
- **January 20 to February 18, 2021 – 2,431 responses:** The second survey sought to gain community insight on the four locations being considered for an environmental review. People were invited to share information about the sites

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King County may not see from a parcel search or a Google map, and they were also able to rank what criteria is most important for selecting a site. The information gained from the survey was shared with Siting Advisory Group members on March 17 so they were able to consider the community's criteria ranking in their recommendations to the project team.

7. Setup of a dedicated email address to the Project Team

- The team created the northeast@kingcounty.gov email address to allow people to directly contact the project team with questions or concerns throughout the life of the project.

8. Meetings and Briefings

- King County offered briefings to over 30 community organizations to share information about the project and ways to stay informed and engaged in the project. King County presented at the following briefings:
 - South Rose Hills Neighborhood Association (Feb. 9, 2021)
 - Houghton Neighborhood Association (Feb. 22, 2021)
 - Woodinville Wine Country Association (March 18, 2021)

Q. What kind of future activities are planned for public engagement?

A: Below is a brief summary of future opportunities for the public to share their input on the project:

1. Environmental Review Process

- In April 2021, the project team will begin preparing for an environmental review process under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).
- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected to go out in late 2021.
- The process begins with scoping to enable the public to comment on what should be studied about the selected sites in the EIS. There will be meetings and a formal comment period.
- A draft EIS will be out for public review and comment in early 2022. The project team will hold meetings that will include presentations and opportunities to comment, and the division will consider the comments when preparing the Final EIS. The Final EIS will announce the site selection and is expected in early 2023.

2. Design – 2023-2025

- The division will recruit a Design Advisory Group to represent community interests in informing the architectural and service features of the new facility.

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- Community members will have opportunities to weigh in on design concepts and proposed mitigation measures to make sure the new facility is a good neighbor.
- The Design Advisory Group and the community will also have opportunities to weigh in on public art that will be included as part of 4Culture’s 1% for Art program.

Q. What is the Siting Advisory Group and how are they involved in the County’s decision?

A. King County brought together a Siting Advisory Group (SAG) comprised of community representatives to advise the county on where the new station should be located and what to consider in making that decision. The SAG has 23 members that represent community, business, and city interests and perspectives. Part of the SAG’s work includes participating in the site scoring and weighting processes. In late 2020 and early 2021, SAG members developed and weighted community criteria based on community concerns, interests, and values shared through community surveys in Fall 2020 and Winter 2021.

For additional information, the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station [project library](#) includes:

- SAG Convening plan (includes recruitment process)
- SAG roster
- Meeting summaries
- Final SAG rankings of sites

Identifying Candidate Sites

Q. Why would the County consider sites that have existing businesses or active plans for development?

A. Vacant land is increasingly hard to find in a densely developed and growing area like King County, and commercial/industrial properties are in very short supply. King County needs to keep a range of options open to site essential facilities needed to support growth, and to provide services needed to protect public health and the environment. At this stage in the siting process, King County is not looking to acquire properties for the new facility and will not consider doing so until after environmental review is completed in early 2023.

Q. Why did the County choose to include a site less than the 8-acre criterion? Were other smaller sites considered?

A. The Houghton Park-and-Ride property is smaller than the other three properties and smaller than the 8+ acre and clusters of 2+ acre parcels GIS criteria used to identify sites. However, the project team determined it warranted further consideration given it is minimally developed, and, based on information provided by King County Metro, it is underutilized in its current

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designated use. Other similarly sized parcels with current uses were not considered for several reasons, mainly costs entailed in building and operating a transfer station on a constrained lot, and service limitations.

Q. How did the County determine the four candidate sites warranted further study?

A. Finding sites for essential public facilities that need to be located in the communities they will serve is challenging in a region where so much development has already occurred. Finding suitable sites for a transfer station is even more challenging, because the sites need to meet certain size, shape, and topographical characteristics, and they need to be located in areas with access to transportation corridors. The information outlined in the Identifying Candidate Sites section of this FAQ, or in the [Northeast Recycling & Transfer Station \(NERTS\) Project Site Selection Process Fact Sheet](#) on the website provides information on how candidate sites were identified.

A number of factors will be considered in determining which sites advance for further analysis in an EIS, including cost, technical feasibility, transportation access, community needs, and environmental impact. It is important to emphasize that King County is not prepared to acquire sites or make offers on property at this time.

Environmental Review (EIS Process)

Q. What is “SEPA,” and what is an environmental review or an “environmental impact statement?”

A. Enacted in 1971, the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) is a law that requires state and local agencies to identify the likely environmental consequences of proposed actions and plans. The environmental consequences are identified through a SEPA review process. When potentially significant impacts are anticipated, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review process is designed to help agency decision-makers, applicants, and the public understand how a proposed action or plan will affect the environment.

The EIS process starts with scoping, which gives community members, cities, business organizations, and other interested parties an opportunity to shape what will be studied in the Draft EIS. Comments on the Draft EIS are considered in the development of a Final EIS, which informs the agency’s decision on which plan or action will be selected to move forward.

Q. Will there be an environmental review for the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project?

A. Yes. King County will study the environmental impacts and proposed mitigation of proposed sites in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). During the environmental review, King County will look at the potential impacts of each site to the natural and built environment

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through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). There will be several opportunities for public input during this process. To stay updated, please sign up for our mailing list at www.KingCounty.gov/northeast.

After King County identifies the sites that will undergo environmental review, the scoping process will begin. During scoping, members of the public can provide input and comments to help determine what issues and potential alternatives will be studied in the Draft EIS.

After scoping concludes, King County will analyze the potential impacts of each site in a document called the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS). After the Draft EIS is completed, members of the public can review and comment on the findings during a comment period. After the comment period closes, King County will consider all substantive comments, or comments related to the technical analysis and findings in the Draft EIS, and conduct further analysis if necessary.

King County will then prepare and publish a Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The Final EIS will include responses to all substantive comments submitted during the Draft EIS. Finally, King County will issue the record of decision explaining the final site selection, the alternatives considered, and plans for mitigation and monitoring potential impacts.

Q. How will the final decision on the site be made?

A. After the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is completed, King County will carefully evaluate the technical feasibility, environmental impacts and mitigations, equity and social justice considerations, costs, and community input before selecting the final site for the new recycling and transfer station.

Q. When will the decision be made for where to site the transfer station?

A. King County will make its decision on the new recycling and transfer station site in the first Quarter of 2023. To be kept up to date on any schedule changes, please sign up for our mailing list at www.KingCounty.gov/northeast

Other Community Concerns

Q. Can a modern transfer station facility be an amenity to the community?

A. Yes. King County is committed to working with the local community to ensure the transfer station offers community benefits. After a site is selected in 2023, King County will convene a Design Advisory Group. This group of community members will advise the County on its efforts to ensure the transfer station fits within the selected location’s community character.

Some community benefits from a new transfer station are guaranteed, such as improved recycling services and larger, easier-to-use unloading areas. Other community benefits will

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depend on what is possible at the location, what the community asks for, and additional design and environmental considerations. For example, other King County transfer stations include public art, rainwater harvesting, and creek restoration.

Q. How will the new transfer station fit into a community?

A. The new transfer station will be a modern, enclosed facility that meets the latest environmental standards and best practices. It will feature a fully enclosed waste and transfer building to control noise and odor, and will provide larger and easier-to-use customer loading areas to reduce wait times. Modern equipment will include waste compactors, which will reduce truck traffic that will lead to less road impacts.

Three potential sites will go through an environmental review process required by the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), where impacts to the natural and built environment are assessed and evaluated for each site. There will be opportunity for community input during the environmental review process. To stay updated, please sign up for our mailing list at www.KingCounty.gov/northeast.

Q. What will happen to the current Houghton Transfer Station after the new site is selected?

A. One of the sites being considered for the new recycling and transfer station is located at the current Houghton Transfer Station. King County will determine next steps for the current transfer station after the site for the new recycling and transfer station has been selected.

Q. I heard that the proposed site at 11724 NE 60th Street in Kirkland is a Superfund site. Is that true?

A. No, it is not accurate. Superfund is the commonly known name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) that is enforced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). CERCLA regulates the liability and requirements regarding closed and/or abandoned landfills and provides a trust fund for cleanup of sites with no responsible owners. For a site to be considered a Superfund means it has potentially dangerous releases of hazardous chemicals or materials and has been placed on the CERCLA National Priority List. The County's closed Houghton Landfill is not on the National Priority List and is safely managed by the County in accordance with the pertinent federal and state regulations.

Q. I have questions and concerns that go beyond the Northeast Recycling and Transfer Station Project. How do I get more information?

A. People with questions or concerns about waste disposal, waste prevention, or recycling are welcome to call us at 206-477-4466 or email us through the "Contact Us" section at the lower right corner of our website at www.kingcounty.gov/solid-waste.aspx.

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