



Clean Water Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #8 Summary

Background

The King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) has convened the Clean Water Plan Advisory Group to:

- Advise King County on the planning process to identify the most effective water quality investments the region can make.
- Advise King County on the ways to best engage and hear from key interests and constituencies throughout the region, including historically underrepresented groups.
- Provide insights and information related to the pressures, issues, and trends impacting constituencies and businesses throughout the region.
- Assist King County in understanding high-level implications, trade-offs, and opportunities associated with the planning process.

The eighth meeting of the Clean Water Plan Advisory Group took place on December 10, 2020 virtually, through a web-based conference call. Meeting #8 objectives were to:

- Review emergent thinking on Clean Water Plan strategy alternatives and obtain Advisory Group member input on the opportunities and choices WTD should highlight through the strategies and how to engage decision makers and community members about these opportunities and choices.
- Provide a granular understanding of how King County is scoping and analyzing actions by reviewing details for two example actions and solicit feedback on potential ways to show summary comparison performance data for the 35 actions.
- Learn about recent and upcoming regional engagement and communications activities.

In advance of the meeting, Advisory Group members were provided a briefing document that contained the following:

- An overview of strategy formulation and analysis progression, including the steps to formulate, analyze, and characterize the strategies, and engage the region in a conversation about them.
- An overview of how to navigate action description sheets.
- Two example draft action description sheets with highlighted text intended to direct advisory group members' focus on aspects of the actions that have relevance to the performance results.

The briefing document included a set of appendices that provided additional context on these items. Advisory Group members also received a link to a pre-recorded presentation about regional engagement activities in 2020.

This meeting summary provides non-attributed highlights from the presentations and discussions from the December 10, 2020 meeting.

Land Acknowledgement & Opening Remarks

DNRP leadership opened the meeting with a welcome and an acknowledgement that, though we met virtually, many participants were calling in while located on the traditional land of Duwamish People and expressed gratitude for all Coast Salish People, past and present, stewards of this land since time immemorial.

Next, DNRP leadership noted that they have heard concerns about the Clean Water Plan timeline. King County agrees that regional understanding of the Actions and Strategies is important. This meeting and the next meeting in February are designed to be responsive to Advisory Group members' interests in understanding more detail about the Clean Water Plan team's analysis. The timeline will continue to be monitored as the Advisory Group meeting progress.

Planning Process Overview

The County shared an update on the Clean Water Plan process, noting where this and upcoming Advisory Group meetings fall in relation to other planning milestones. To date, the Clean Water Plan team has completed the following planning steps:

- Determined decision areas, that is, identified the major areas where critical decisions need to be made for the regional wastewater system and water quality; and
- Identified and developed actions for each decision area that explore a range of potential performance outcomes.

Currently, the team is working to wrap up the step in which they:

- Analyze and evaluate actions to characterize the performance of individual actions.

Upcoming plan development work will include the following steps:

- Build strategies from actions, that is, shape multiple actions into packages of "strategies" that reflect distinct, complete water quality investment approaches
- Explore and evaluate those strategies to illustrate the range of choices and opportunities available to the region, and gather community perspectives and preferences on those choices and opportunities
- Assemble the preferred strategy, in which the Clean Water Plan team and County leadership will sift and balance community perspectives and the technical, regulatory, and financial requirements to articulate an approach to addressing regional wastewater system and water quality needs
- Prepare the Final Plan, in which the King County Executive's Preferred Plan will be presented to King County Council for discussion and approval

In light of this process, future Advisory Group meeting topics (and their estimated timeframes, to be scheduled) include the following:

- Meeting 9: Actions Review (Feb 4, 2021)
- Meeting 10: Strategy Formulation Results & DEIS (Q2 2021)
- Meeting 11: Preferred Strategy & Implementation Plan (Q3 2021)

Clean Water Plan Strategies

During this session, the County provided an overview of the strategy formulation and analysis phase of the planning process, which will explore alternative approaches the County could follow. The County detailed the activities that will be conducted in this phase that will reveal the nature of the choices needing to be made and the value (or not) of pursuing particular approaches. The County concluded the overview with a summary of the progression from Actions to Strategies to a Preferred Strategy and how engagement with the region informs the foundation elements and ultimately the Preferred Strategy.

After the Clean Water Plan Strategy alternatives overview, Advisory Group members were put into virtual breakout rooms of 3-4 members to identify and discuss strategy objectives or themes that would be helpful to explore choices and opportunities available to the region. Clean Water Plan team members facilitated the breakout rooms and asked Advisory Group members to work through the following prompts:

- Prompt 1: Identify an objective or theme to prioritize in a strategy
- Prompt 2: Why did you select this objective/theme?
- Prompt 3: What choice area(s) are critical to meeting this objective/theme?
- Prompt 4: What are important implications for other choice areas?

The facilitators recorded the responses to these prompts for each breakout room, and at the conclusion of the breakout room discussion, each breakout room reported out to the full Advisory Group. Attachments 1-4 include the content generated during these breakout room discussions.

During the Advisory Group member report outs, Advisory Group members made the following observations:

- There are lots of pieces to this puzzle, which makes it difficult to say if there is one element that is more important than the others.
- The water utility industry has an innovation gap that makes it difficult to think about better, more cost-effective solutions. Innovation relates to affordability. To address this gap and figure out how to be more innovative, we all need to work together. There is engineering, regulation, and financial innovation. Engineering innovation is often limited if constrained by legacy regulations or financial planning that don't look to the future. To support engineering innovation, there needs to be innovation from these other two areas.

- Affordability and long-term thinking are important. This may require spreading investments over time (versus short-term investments). Investment in the system is important as well since, it is hard to plan for the long-term if the system is failing.
- The County should consider how to get the most out of its water quality investments by thinking about multiple benefits. This may also be a way to provide funding across multiple sources.
- The County should focus on forward facing needs (e.g., water quality, climate change). There also is a need to address righting past wrongs in terms of equity considerations, such as overburdened communities and existing (backward looking) environmental health disparities. A focus on multiple benefits could help if targeted in deliberate ways.

Action Analysis

The County provided an orientation to the Clean Water Plan team's Action Description Sheets, which are living database worksheets that collect and store information about actions in a comprehensive and standardized way. Each Action Description Sheet provides context for an action, describes its key components and characteristics, and summarizes the anticipated results of the action.

Following this presentation, a facilitation team member described an opportunity for Advisory Group members to review additional, high-level information about the full suite of actions the County is considering. The team shared this information after the meeting in response to interest expressed by members to see "under the hood" of the ongoing analysis and to help prepare for more effective and targeted discussions at the next Advisory Group meeting on February 4. Advisory Group members are invited to provide input on what additional information or questions would be most helpful to better understand the performance results for the actions.

Advisory Group member comments on the action analysis updates included the following:

- The heading "Regulatory Considerations" in the Action Description Sheets caused some concerns, as there is a difference between a "consideration" and a "requirement." Advisory Group members were particularly sensitive to any characterization that could be read to downplay the importance of meeting regulatory obligations. King County must comply with the regulatory requirements. The County may have some discretion within its compliance approach, but not *whether* to comply. For the different Actions, County should be explicit about whether the Action will or will not meet regulatory requirements. Regulatory obligations, such as wastewater and stormwater requirements, need to be integrated with investment choices affecting the ecosystem and public health.
 - The County confirmed that it is committed to fully meeting its regulatory requirements/obligations, while also seeking to explore different approaches for achieving those outcomes.
 - An Advisory Group member added there are opportunities for innovation within the current regulations.
 - For the nutrient bubble permit Action Description Sheet, the Clean Water Plan team noted that the action was not a proposal, but simply one of the actions being considered to address anticipated nutrient requirements. The County clarified that the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is currently

developing nutrient requirements for Puget Sound, while the County is concurrently developing its Clean Water Plan. In response to this parallel development context, the team has developed a range of potential nutrient actions that will help the County provide input to Ecology's process as well as inform the Clean Water Plan.

- After the meeting, an Advisory Group member shared with the County that regulatory "implications" may be a phrasing that could work within the Action Description Sheets, with regulatory requirements and regulatory considerations described under this heading.
- Several members stressed the need for getting to creative, innovative solutions, thinking outside the fence, and not building the same technology as has been used historically.
- The pollutant loading and energy use information in the Action Description Sheets would be more useful if reductions or increases were expressed relative to existing or a threshold. For example, is the pollutant load a 5% reduction or an 80% reduction.
- An Advisory Group member reflected on the information in the Action Description Sheets and what that might mean for communicating with the public. Based on focus group research around public health communications, the words used in communications with the public do matter, and what language resonates can be unpredictable. In addition, the quality of the message may not matter if people cannot find the information due to either the volume or polarization of information on social media.
- An Advisory Group member expressed appreciation for the County's increased transparency of information and suggested that forming an expert panel could be helpful to validate the assumptions, analysis, and conclusions of the planning effort and to help build support for the plan recommendations. In response, the facilitation team noted that the County plans to host technical workshops in 2021 and will be inviting Advisory Group members to participate.

Regional Engagement: A Year in Review

The County referenced the [Regional-Engagement: 2020 Year in Review Video](#) shared with Advisory Group members prior to the December 10 meeting, noting that the team is finalizing a companion regional engagement written summary describing the full suite of the year's engagement activities in greater detail. An Advisory Group member made the following observations:

- Regional engagement is a strength of this effort, particularly efforts to engage with community-based organizations (CBOs). Despite this, a CBO representative shared that they felt their organization did not have enough time to provide substantive feedback in the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) scoping process earlier this year. Perhaps more time could be spent preparing for and answering questions for CBOs in future feedback opportunities.

Closing Comments

At the end of the meeting, DNRP leadership thanked the Advisory Group for their time and effort in this process and noted that the feedback members provided on strategies and themes will be

very helpful and insightful to the Clean Water Plan team as it moves forward in the planning process. They encouraged all to stay healthy and safe in the holiday season.

The facilitation team will follow up with scheduling info for 2021 meetings at the February 4 meeting.

Attendees

Advisory Group

NAME	Title	Organization	Attendance 12/10
Monty Anderson	Building Trades Board Member	King County Labor Council/Building Trades	Present
Lori Blair	Engineer/Strategist	Boeing	Present
Josh Brown	Executive Director	Puget Sound Regional Council	Present
Caia Caldwell	External Relations Manager	Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties	Present
Adrian Dominguez	Scientific Director	Urban Indian Health Institute	Absent
Jessie Israel	Puget Sound Director	The Nature Conservancy	Present
Jay Manning	Board Chair; Vice Board Chair	Puget Sound Partnership	Present
Ben Marre	Drainage & Wastewater Planning and Program Management Division Director	Seattle Public Utilities	Present
John McClellan	Engineering and Development Director	Alderwood Water and Wastewater	Present
Rachel McCrea	NW Section Manager	Department of Ecology	Present
Bud Nicola	Affiliate Professor	University of Washington	Present
Bridget Ray	Director of Strategic Partnerships	Na'ah Illahee Fund	Present
Mindy Roberts	Puget Sound Program Director	Washington Environmental Council	Present
Randy Shuman	Affiliate Associate Professor	Oceanography, University of Washington	Present
Anne Udaloy	Board Member	League of Women Voters	Present
Ken Workman	Former Council Member	Duwamish Tribe	Present

King County and Clean Water Plan Staff

NAME	TITLE
Christie True	Department of Natural Resources and Parks Director
Mark Isaacson	Wastewater Treatment Division Director
Josh Baldi	Water and Land Resources Division Director
Sonia-Lynn Abenojar	Clean Water Plan Regional Engagement Project Manager
Steve Tolzman	Clean Water Plan Program Manager and Planning Project Manager
Tiffany Knapp	Clean Water Plan Planning Project Manager and Alternate Program Manager
Susan Kaufman-Una	WTD Project Resources Unit Manager
Abby Hook	Environmental Affairs Officer
Joe Hovenkotter	Tribal Government Relations Officer
Rebecca Singer	WTD Resource Recovery Section Manager
Lisa Taylor	WTD Project Planning and Delivery Section Manager
Marie Fiore	WTD Strategic Communications Coordinator
Amina Kadir	WTD Clean Water Plan Team Member
Ian McKelvey	Brown and Caldwell – Clean Water Plan Consultant
Chris Cleveland	Brown and Caldwell – Clean Water Plan Consultant
Elizabeth Lowell	HDR, Inc – Clean Water Plan Consultant
Lauren Dennis	Ross Strategic – Clean Water Plan Consultant

Facilitators – Ross Strategic

NAME	TITLE
Rob Greenwood	Principal
Sarah Shadid	Senior Associate
Jennifer Tice	Senior Associate

Attachment 1: Strategy Objective/Theme Exercise Table - Breakout Group #1

Strategy Objectives/Themes			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring a focus to more distributive approaches, with less emphasis on modifications to the existing three, large wastewater treatment plants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance a Utility of the Future theme with an emphasis on providing solutions now that meet future needs (for example, various resource recovery efforts, including water reuse). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on protecting life in Puget Sound and the regions rivers. Healthy ecosystems are critical to the sustainability of the region, as well as playing a critical link to the health of humans that inhabit the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address providing for an equitable rate structure that provides some form of protection for lower income rate payers Additionally, addresses the historical legacy of inequitable distribution of the costs and benefits of water quality and the regional wastewater system.
<i>Rationale for selecting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributive systems have good potential for improving system resiliency through providing “least regrets” pathways to wastewater system investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to fairly assess the opportunities for converting wastes to valuable resources and examine how treating waste as a resource can help address future concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We, humans, are all part of environment – by protecting the environment we also protect ourselves. This represents an approach that “saves the planet one blade of grass at a time.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is anticipated that the choices the County will make will increase the need for revenues in the future. In this context, the county will be unable to accomplish its objectives without formulating an equitable rate structure.
<i>Choice areas that are critical to meeting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Scope Change choice area will be critical because moving to a greater emphasis on decentralized operations represents a change to WTD’s business model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope Choice Area because moving to an emphasis on Utility of the Future will represent a change to WTD’s business strategy. Sustainability Area because this area addresses choices related to enhance resource recovery efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality because this choice area focused on improving water quality performance and connects to ecosystem health outcomes. System Reliability because system failures can impact both public and ecosystem health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Approach as it relates to the potential for differential rates, or some other means, to protect low-income customers in the context of raising rates.
<i>Important Implications for other choice areas:</i>			

No discussion for this theme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Quality because how the County addresses improving water quality will affect its choices for resource recovery. • Financial Approach because resource recovery will have financial implications for the County. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability because decisions about water quality and system reliability investments will affect the choices for resource recovery • An additional observation related to the need to manage the scope of the overall effort in the Clean Water Plan. If the plan is too broad, or has too many additions, it could fall victim to overcommitting and result in poor outcomes. 	No discussion for this theme.
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Attachment 2: Strategy Objective/Theme Exercise Table - Breakout Group #2

Strategy Objectives/Themes		
<p>“Focus” and “advocacy”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus: It’s important to focus on the main things that matter for water quality. Keep it simple. • Advocate to region: We need to ensure we’re getting the best value for money and educating the public about that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Innovation as a means to drive Affordability and other objectives.” • Innovation (e.g., radical green infrastructure, new technologies, etc.) coupled with a nimbleness in implementation approach could be an important way to reduce overall costs, while also achieving other objectives such as water quality and sustainability. 	<p>Affordability: Keep rates affordable within the context of a growing region.</p>
<i>Rationale for selecting this strategy theme/objective:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s hard to separate the choice areas from each other; they all relate and are important. • We will have to make decisions about what to invest in, since we cannot afford everything. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s better to proactively test innovative approaches over time rather than spend a lot up front on current, known solutions. It could be shockingly expensive if we (only) use the old ways to solve water quality challenges. • This will be important for addressing future needs such as climate change, nitrogen treatment, and other water quality challenges. Focusing on multiple benefits could also help with addressing equity issues and health disparities if done deliberately. • We need to invite participation from sectors known for innovation (the wastewater utility sector is conservative, slow moving, and has an “innovation gap”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to balance growth and consider affordability. • We don’t have an unlimited checkbook.
<i>Choice areas that are critical to meeting this strategy theme/objective:</i>		
No discussion for this theme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing choice area: Financial approach to help ensure affordability. • New choice area: Innovation to deliberately test and explore new types of investments that have the potential to deliver more value for the region (better results, lower total costs). 	No discussion for this theme.
<i>Important Implications for other choice areas:</i>		
No discussion for this theme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in testing innovative approaches could mean delaying implementation of certain things in order to achieve better results long term. • All the other choice areas relate to this. For example, with system health, it is important to prepare for capacity demands of the growing region. 	No discussion for this theme.

Attachment 3: Strategy Objective/Theme Exercise Table - Breakout Group #3

Strategy Objectives/Themes			
<i>Focus on financial package, least expensive; requires bookend; most affordable package</i>	<i>Reliability and resiliency issue</i>	<i>Water Quality and human health & environmental endpoints driver</i>	<i>Innovation, new technology</i>
<i>Rationale for selecting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wastewater rates are high compared to the rest of the country; awareness to where we stand nationally/regionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to plan if system is failing; unpredictable costs (resident to business/industrial scale costs); backups; predictability is necessary for planning a utility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our system exists to protect public health & water quality Need a well-designed & managed system Long term planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think differently about how we manage our sewage (i.e., smaller scale/neighborhood) Status quo is conservative, flexibility to permit us to move from old models to new/better ones in the future
<i>Choice areas that are critical to meeting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity & social justice lens considerations Water Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System Health Water Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wastewater reliability & resiliency Equity and social justice: Unfair amount of burden Costs effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to innovate around regulatory & financial management
<i>Important Implications for other choice areas:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Package of tradeoffs Long term view vs short term costs (spread of investments over time) May need to accept higher rates of system failures; accepting environmental impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed outcomes (i.e., environmental impacts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tradeoffs: ability to manage quality, speed and costs Managing the public commons (common good); making sure we are not damaging the public commons (air, water, land). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairness vs. equity – social benefits (i.e. septic, point source, permitting). Resistance moving outside of the box; from what has been done historically (legacy regulation). Smaller systems more nimble; potentially lower O&M costs.

Attachment 4: Strategy Objective/Theme Exercise Table - Breakout Group #4

Strategy Objectives/Themes			
<i>Multi-Benefit, Leverage Every Dollar</i>	<i>Meet Regulatory Obligations</i>	<i>Public health & species recovery (Restoration of rivers, lakes, and Puget Sound)</i>	<i>Watershed Impact & Collaboration</i>
<i>Rationale for selecting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By leveraging every dollar to achieve multi-benefits, you are able to create a defensible rationale for policymakers and the public to understand why you've chosen those investments. Ensure that we can do what we have to do to keep the system operating or to meet regulatory requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory obligations are not able to be neatly separate or distinct from other decisions. They are rollup of ecosystem and public health and to take care of wastewater and stormwater. They also include legal ramifications. Clean water actions and habitat actions are green jobs and action in that area may open the County up to be eligible for future federal, state, and local stimulus dollars. King County has impacts on the resources of others, and if the County tries to negotiate regulatory requirements, others are going to be impacted by that. King County cannot write its own ticket without the rest of the regulatory context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visibility: People need to see investment in these things with their own eyes. Sewer system is underground so these projects would be more visible and will help in the long-term with priorities money and policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to be efficient in the decisions and capitalize on the research that's being done in other organizations and collaboratives.
<i>Choice areas that are critical to meeting this strategy theme/objective:</i>			
Financial Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory Approach Need to be clear about what regulatory requirements we are meeting and how we are meeting them. Direct, transparent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality People need to see investment – outreach and engagement (e.g., Mountains to Sound internship program). Might be opportunities to train a whole new set of ambassadors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Quality Need to think about watershed scale -- be comprehensive though efficient. Our Green Duwamish work is highly relevant.
<i>Important Implications for other choice areas:</i>			
If the same action is beneficial to multiple areas, let's name that and then it can be funded accordingly.	No discussion for this theme.	Collaboration across government so that actions are not at cross-purposes	Clean Water Plan scope