



August 10, 2016

Thurston County Board of Commissioners
Thurston County Courthouse
Building One, Room 269
2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98502-1045

Dear Thurston County Commissioners,

We, the undersigned Mayors of Tumwater, Olympia, and Lacey, on behalf of our city councils are writing to request your assistance to help our communities further protect our drinking water and sensitive water resources from septic systems at urban densities. As far back as 1987, the proliferation and continued use of septic systems in the urban areas was identified as a real risk for our growing communities:

“Recent groundwater contamination occurrences and lake quality degradation that is occurring in the Five Lakes area suggest that the regional assimilation capacity for onsite disposal systems may be reaching its limit in selected areas. ...the continued use of on-site waste disposal for existing uses and new developments without mitigation threatens the public health in the urban area.” (LOTT Urban Area Wastewater Management Plan Summary, October 1987)

It has been almost 30 years and no significant action has yet been taken to address septic concerns in our region. That has been changing in recent years.

As you are aware, Thurston County, the three cities, and the LOTT Clean Water Alliance have been researching the benefits of converting legacy urban density neighborhoods served by septic systems to city sewer. There have been two “Septic Summits” to brief the elected officials of the cities and county on the research findings. After the second summit, staff from each of the cities discussed the topic with their mayors and councils. The cities agreed that it is appropriate for each of them to engage in multi-decade projects which will convert most if not all residential parcels now served by septic systems to service by city sewer.

There are many compelling reasons for undertaking these efforts. They include;

- All three cities rely on groundwater for drinking water. Proactive measures taken today will reduce the cost burden for future generations of finding new water sources and constructing expensive water treatment facilities. Septic systems (which would be addressed through the cities’ programs) were not designed to remove nitrogen from wastewater, and even functioning systems contribute nitrogen¹. There is

evidence of degrading water quality in shallow groundwater and surface water in our region to which septic systems are likely contributors.

- Each year some of the legacy septic systems in the region fail. Some failures go unnoticed, as the effluent does not pond to the surface but enters the groundwater below the system. When property owners discover a failure they find that replacing septic systems is costly and sometimes impossible.
- Many of the septic systems in urban areas were permitted as a temporary measure until sewer became available and do not meet current septic system standards, especially in regards to density.
- Collecting, cleaning, and reusing the wastewater which currently passes into the ground via septic systems can augment our finite municipal water supplies.

For the cities to each develop successful programs for septic to sewer conversion, we respectfully request the following items of support from Thurston County;

1. Confirm that urban density communities served by septic systems in the cities and urban growth areas pose a significant risk to public health and conversion is necessary to protect public health and our surface water and ground water resources.
2. Pass a resolution or write a letter confirming you support our efforts to convert high risk urban density communities served by septic systems to sewer.
3. Take the lead on the outreach program related to the harmful effects of septic systems in the urban area. This is in recognition of the Department of Health's expertise with septic systems. The cities will partner with Thurston County on outreach related to the regional conversion plan.
4. Work to ensure the cities have the authority to require a parcel owner in the UGA to connect to sewer under specific conditions.
5. Work to ensure that any city wishing to charge a sewer availability fee has the authority to do so.

Sincerely,



Andy Ryder
Mayor
City of Lacey



Cheryl Selby
Mayor
City of Olympia



Pete Kmet
Mayor
City of Tumwater

1. Roberts, Mindy, Anise Ahmed, Greg Pelletier, and David Osterberg. Deschutes River, Capitol Lake, and Budd Inlet Temperature, Fecal Coliform Bacteria, Dissolved Oxygen, PH, and Fine Sediment TMDL Technical Report: Water Quality Study Findings. Publication no. 12-03-008