



## Land Use & Environment Committee

### Briefing on Recommended Changes to Waste Water Regulations for Onsite Septic

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#### **Title**

Briefing on Recommended Changes to Waste Water Regulations for Onsite Septic

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **Committee Recommendation:**

The Utility Advisory Committee reviewed and supports the recommendations (see attached letter).

##### **City Manager Recommendation:**

Recommend to the full Council approval of the changes to onsite septic regulations outlined in this report.

#### **Report**

##### **Issue:**

Whether to forward new regulations regarding on-site septic systems to City Council.

##### **Staff Contact:**

Diane Utter, P.E., Water Resources Engineer, 360.753.8562  
Andy Haub, P.E., Director of Water Resources, 360.753.8475

##### **Presenter(s):**

Diane Utter, P.E., Water Resources Engineer, 360.753.8562

#### **Background and Analysis:**

Approximately 4,140 onsite septic systems are located within Olympia and its Urban Growth Area. As Olympia continues to grow these systems pose a long-term public and environmental health risk.

The 2007 Wastewater Management Plan and subsequent regulatory changes placed appreciable constraints on repairing existing septic systems and installing new ones. With few exceptions, new systems are not allowed and failed systems within 300 feet of sewer need to connect to the municipal sewer system. These policies and regulations are being revisited. They may be actually restricting infill development as well as hindering people from converting onsite systems to the municipal system.

Work completed by the Thurston County Health Department in 2013 reveals that surface and ground

water contamination due to onsite systems in Olympia may be limited to specific locations rather than widespread. With this in mind, the 2013 Wastewater Management Plan, as adopted by City Council, opens the door for potential and limited modifications of the current regulations while still ensuring that public and environmental health is maintained.

Attached are the goals, objectives, and strategies from the 2013 Wastewater Management Plan regarding onsite septic systems and other alternative sewage systems. Objective 1B indicates that the basic approach regarding onsite systems is to manage the systems so there is no net annual increase in the total number of systems in Olympia.

Based on the new information from Thurston County coupled with the 2013 objectives, regulation changes were presented to the Utility Advisory Committee (UAC) in April 2014.

**Recommended Changes:**

Changing the City's regulations to allow more, but still few, new onsite systems will necessitate clear criteria that can be readily implemented. The following approach was presented to the UAC and is fully supported (see attachment):

- Allow on-site systems to be constructed on vacant lots in existing neighborhoods with a predominance of septic systems.
- Reduce the requirement to connect to sewer from 300 feet to 200 feet.
- Modify sewer extension requirements.
- Fund a limited number of small-scale sewer extensions through the Wastewater capital facility program to make it more affordable for residents.
- Allow the City to set up payment plans for City General Facility Charges and potentially LOTT Capacity Development Charges.

The 2013 Wastewater Management Plan anticipates adopting these proposed changes by mid-2015. Staff is interested in completing the process in 2014, if feasible.

**Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

Current wastewater regulations regarding onsite septic systems may not be facilitating infill development and septic conversions. Costs of sewer service are high.

**Options:**

Option 1: Forward recommended approach to City Council for further consideration.

Option 2: Return to the Committee for additional consideration prior to forwarding recommendations to Council.

**Financial Impact:**

None at this time

**Attachments:**

1. 2013 Wastewater Management Plan excerpts regarding onsite septic systems goals, objectives and strategies.
2. Letter of Support for Onsite Septic System OMC Changes from the Utility Advisory Committee.

