



City Council

Discussion of Regional Septic Conversion Program

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Title

Discussion of Regional Septic Conversion Program

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred from Committee

City Manager Recommendation:

Concur with the direction of the regional work on a septic system conversion strategy.

Report

Issue:

Whether to support City of Olympia staff involvement in developing a regional strategy to convert septic systems to municipal sewer.

Staff Contacts:

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Presenters:

Rich Hoey, P.E., Public Works Director

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Background and Analysis:

The Cities of Lacey, Tumwater, and Olympia; and Thurston County are discussing a potential program to connect septic systems, also known as onsite sewage systems (OSS) within the urban growth area to municipal sewer. City staff will provide Council with an update on the regional work effort, Olympia's current Septic-to-Sewer Program, and potential next steps.

Around 16,000 septic systems are used by residents of the three local cities and their urban growth areas that pose a threat to public and environmental health. However, converting septic systems to municipal sewer systems is challenging. Approximately 1,980 septic systems are used within the City limits. Another 2,180 are located in Olympia's urban growth area (UGA).

In April 2015, elected officials from the four local jurisdictions participated in a Septic Summit. The officials encouraged staff of the four jurisdictions to work together to develop regional options for converting septic systems to municipal sewer. Since then, staff members initiated work to develop a regional strategy.

Staff will present near-term conversion priorities and potential costs.

Olympia's Septic-to-Sewer Program

The City of Olympia has worked on OSS issues for some time. The City recognized the challenges of OSS in the Council-adopted 2013 Wastewater Management Plan as well as the 2006 Wastewater Plan. The Plans restricts the installation of new septic systems to very limited circumstances. The 2014 Comprehensive Plan also addresses OSS (See attached goals and policies).

Olympia was the first jurisdiction in Thurston County to implement a Septic-to-Sewer program. The program provides staff support, financial incentives, and capital project funding for septic conversions by individual residents and neighborhoods. The City's webpage includes information on Olympia's current Septic-to-Sewer program (see hyperlink).

Regional Proposal

Staff members from Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, and Thurston County have developed a proposal for a broader, regionally coordinated approach to septic conversions. Recommended approaches include the following:

- Cities would extend public sewers over time.
- Property owners would be responsible for installing sewer pipe from the property line to the home, removing the septic system, and paying connection fees.
- If sewer were available, property owners choosing not to connect would pay an "availability charge" equal to a monthly sewer rate. These charges would help pay for sewer extensions.
- Require property owners to connect to sewer at the time of system failure, home remodel, or property sale.

This proposal prioritizes sewer extensions into neighborhoods that pose the highest risk to public health and the environment. In Olympia, this includes approximately 480 high-risk systems within the City and its UGA.

Next Steps

Recommended next steps include developing a public education campaign. The campaign would explain the risks of urban OSS and the potential conversion strategies. Additionally, staff recommends that local City Councils request that the Thurston County Board of Health adopt a resolution outlining the public and environmental health risks of urban septic systems.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Septic systems have public and environmental health implications for our community. Converting OSS to municipal sewer is complex and costly.

Options:

1. Support continued work on potential septic conversion strategies. This would commit staff time to the regional work effort.

2. Direct staff to develop alternative approaches to responding to the problem.

Financial Impact:

None at this time. The Wastewater Utility currently funds these work efforts. However, increased public education and/or conversion work would have financial impacts for both the Utility and septic system owners.

Attachment(s);

Goals and Policies

[Hyperlink](#)