



Utility Advisory Committee

Urban Septic Conversion Strategy

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Title

Urban Septic Conversion Strategy

Recommended Action/UAC Deliverable:

Provide feedback on emerging regional onsite septic system conversion strategy

Staff Contact:

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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 within the urban growth area to municipal sewer. City staff will provide the Utility Advisory Committee with an update on the regional work effort, Olympia's current Septic-to-Sewer Program, and potential next steps. Staff briefed the Olympia City Council on April 12, 2016.

Approximately 16,000 septic systems are used by residents of the three local cities and their urban growth areas. Septic systems can pose threats to public and environmental health at urban land use densities. 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 have been working on a potential regional strategy.

Olympia's Septic-to-Sewer Program

The City of Olympia has worked on septic system issues for some time. The City recognized the challenges of septic systems 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 septic systems (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 septic 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 septic systems and the potential conversion strategies.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

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

Financial Impact:

None at this time.

Attachments:

Wastewater Goals and Policies

Hyperlink to City's Septic-to Sewer webpage