



Clean Water Plan Workshop Meeting Summary May 2019

Date/Time/Location

Clean Water Plan Workshop

May 20, 2019: 12:30 – 4:30 pm

Tukwila Community Center

Purpose of the Workshop

King County hosted this workshop to begin a conversation with the community about the Clean Water Plan. This was the first Clean Water Plan workshop and an opportunity for King County to hear initial input on the best ways to make regional water quality investments. During the workshop community members had the opportunity to share what's important to them when thinking about the future of our communities, our health, our environment, and how we use and take care of our water for decades to come. The goals of this workshop were to:

- Provide participants with background information on regional water quality conditions, the need for the Clean Water Plan, and community priorities.
- Ask participants to share their priorities for water quality, public health, and the environment.
- Ask participants what key trends will affect water quality in the future.
- Create an opportunity for participants to hear perspectives from other community members.
- Hear from participants about the best way to engage their communities as we continue the conversation.

Advance Notifications

King County sought diverse perspectives at the workshop. The County used a variety of tools to notify the community about the workshop, including:

- Email invitations to 6,000+ individuals via GovDelivery.
- Follow-up emails and phone calls to approximately 200 individuals and organizations.
- Ask the following groups to share information about the workshop through their communications channels:
 - Local sewer agencies

- Advisory Group members
 - Individuals who participated in community interviews
 - Community-based organizations.
- Social media posts, including Facebook and LinkedIn.

Attendance

Thirty-eight community members attended the event:

- 10 individuals from environmental nonprofits
- 8 public sector representatives
- 5 environmental or engineering consultants
- 5 local sewer utility representatives
- 3 individuals from community-based organizations
- 3 individuals from native community-based organizations and tribal affiliations
- 2 educators
- 2 members of the public.

Format of the Workshop

During the workshop, participants visited four topic stations around the room to learn about the following:

- Regional water quality
- Community priorities from initial outreach
- Clean Water Plan development process
- Key trends that shape our future.



Water quality activity from the workshop

The stations included group exercises, presentations, and opportunities to ask King County staff questions.

After visiting the stations, participants moved to small tables and discussed regional water quality, community priorities, and trends that shape our future. King County staff facilitated discussions at the tables and took notes.

Throughout the workshop, participants could visit a storytelling booth. The purpose of this booth was to hear directly from individuals about their relationship to water and their vision for our water. Staff recorded quotes from participants. A photographer also took portrait photos of some participants. King County may use quotes and photos from the storytelling booth in future project materials.

Regional Water Quality & Community Priorities

During the first part of the workshop, participants visited two topic stations: regional water quality and community priorities.

Regional Water Quality Station

King County presented about regional water quality improvements in the last 40 years. Staff then asked participants to identify the pathways pollutants take to enter Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes.

Community Priorities Station

King County shared what we have heard so far about community priorities from community interviews and public opinion research. Staff then asked participants to share information about their relationship with water in a group exercise.

Materials provided at the stations are available on the project's webpage in the [public engagement library](#).



People reviewing water-related images for an activity

Participant feedback

After visiting these stations, participants moved to small tables to discuss the following questions:

1. What's working well in our region for protecting our water? What's lacking?
2. What priorities are most important to consider when planning our water quality future?
3. Which of these are most important to you, and why?

Presented below are key highlights from table discussions on these questions, organized into major themes that emerged during those discussions. Priorities are alphabetical and do not represent relative

importance. Highlights may represent many voices or the opinions of a single participant. They are not meant to imply consensus or a shared viewpoint among participants.

Affordability

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Make affordability a key consideration in the Clean Water Plan.
- Consider the impact of water quality investments on customer rates in an area with an increasing cost of living.
- Consider equity-based funding options and alternatives for low-income populations.

Community Engagement

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Build on the region's strong connection to Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes to create momentum for water quality improvements. Participants credited the work of nonprofits and media coverage in elevating community awareness and engagement. Use the region's strong connection to water as an opportunity to keep pollutants out of Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes.
- Raise awareness about what individuals can do to improve water quality. For example, one participant recalled a recent education campaign that helped to reduce sales and use of products containing microbeads.
- Invest in early and sustained community engagement to create buy-in and provide feedback to create a stronger Clean Water Plan.
- Create a shared picture of water quality. This shared picture should resonate across cultures and ages.
- The County has a limited opportunity to make an impression on the public about clean water. Use positive messaging around trends and opportunities to build momentum.
- Use clear and easy to understand communications about water quality. Water-sector language can be heavy on jargon. Community members do not always understand the full picture nor their role in protecting water quality.
- Create materials that are of interest to the full range of multicultural communities and generations in the region.
- Address the failure of past regional outreach efforts that did not include certain populations. This led to historic underrepresentation in public processes.
- Create targeted communications to historically underrepresented communities, such as immigrant populations, that may not have information on how to access water for recreation or fishing.

Effective Water Quality Policy

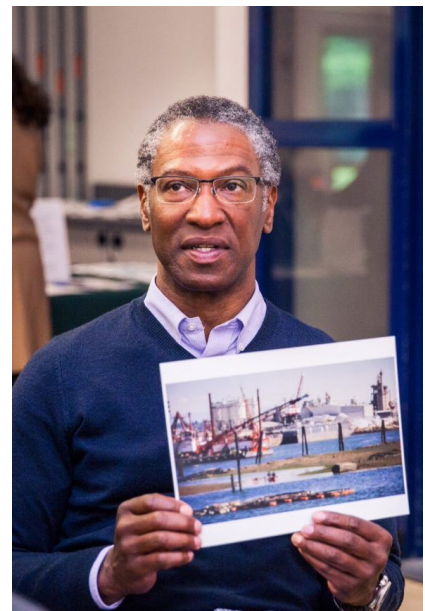
Participants discussed the important role that policy at the federal, state, and local level can play in reducing pollution and achieving water quality improvements. Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Consider how a higher monetary value of water could increase water conservation and reduce pollution.
- Use rules governing development and redevelopment as an opportunity to improve water quality.
- Review current regulations. Determine whether they will help us achieve the level of water quality that satisfies community expectations.
- Review the process for designing and building wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Look for efficiencies to make improvements to aging infrastructure faster.

Equity and Social Justice

Participants emphasized that equity and social justice should be central to the Clean Water Plan process outcomes. Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Use a transparent and participatory engagement approach. Conduct early outreach in historically underrepresented communities.
- Help address historical inequities. Concentrate Clean Water Plan improvements, particularly early investments from the plan, in areas where damages have been the greatest. Coordinate these investments with existing housing, parks, and other planning efforts.
- Honor and incorporate the relationship between First Peoples and Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes by doing the following:
 - Honor tribal treaty rights.
 - Safeguard access to traditional and cultural food sources.
 - Ensure the ability for American Indian and Alaskan Natives to subsistence hunt and fish.
 - Learn from tribes and native communities about how natural systems function and we can improve them. Incorporate these findings into the Clean Water Plan.



*Workshop participant holding
Seattle maritime image*

Habitat and Species protection

Participants emphasized the importance of protecting species and critical habitats, noting that threatened species like orcas and salmon are strong indicators of aquatic health. Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Advanced wastewater treatment.
- Protecting and planting more trees.
- Habitat protection in critical areas such as Puget Sound and the Cedar River.

Interagency Approach

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Prioritize an integrated, interagency approach to manage legacy contamination and impacts of future growth and development.
- Better integrate water quality considerations into the regulatory and permitting processes for land use development.
- Coordinate efforts across departments at King County. Collaborate with transportation, land use, and housing sectors.
- Collectively target the most cost-effective solutions for water quality. Consider sharing costs across departments or agencies. Look for opportunities to collaborate on green infrastructure, affordable housing, and improving the natural and built environments.
- Consider the private sector as a potential partner for financing projects and implementing sustainable business practices related to water quality.
- Maintain and build on existing partnerships with non-profit organizations.

Multi-Benefit Approach

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Choose activities and projects that provide many benefits for the community in addition to water quality. An example might be projects that improve water quality and provide job opportunities.
- Avoid misrepresentation and mistrust by not overpromising project benefits. Ensure that communities will see many benefits before making promises.
- Incorporate multiple benefits into the plan that provide flexibility and the ability to adapt to a changing and uncertain future.

Pollution Prevention at the Source

Participants emphasized the importance and cost-effective nature of preventing pollution at the source in addition to treating water after it is polluted. Some participants considered treating water after it is polluted costly and insufficient to protect water quality.

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Explore options for preventing pollution at the source, such as product stewardship, to help improve water quality in the region. Participants acknowledged the complicated nature of preventing the root cause of pollution.
- Discuss the role of agricultural runoff. Participants acknowledged that agricultural regulation may require expensive equipment and can be onerous for farmers to comply.



Small table discussion at the workshop

Public Health Protection

Participants emphasized the important role of water quality in protecting public health. Participants spoke of the impact that pollutants can have on public health, from shellfish contamination to exposure to contaminants of emerging concern.

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Play an important local role in safeguarding public health given uncertainty at the federal level on protective measures.
- Work regionally to address contamination in drinking water and protect the community from lead in schools.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Superfund site cleanup efforts. Work federally and regionally to address legacy contamination and contamination of fish and shellfish.

Resource Recovery

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Approach water management holistically. Prioritize resource recovery and water conservation as key principles in the Clean Water plan.
- Support and expand programs that recycle water, biosolids, and energy. This could reduce nutrient pollution and help conserve water and energy.
- Consider reusing the clean water that leaves the Brightwater Treatment Plant rather than piping it directly to Puget Sound.

Robust Data

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Collect robust, meaningful data to better understand how to move forward and accurately measure water quality success. Participants warned that past processes have lacked data to make informed decisions resulting in a loss of opportunity to make the most effective decisions.
- Collect data on willingness to pay, to conduct cost-benefit analyses, measure pollutant reduction, and set performance targets.



Workshop participants

Stormwater Management

Participants acknowledged that stormwater is a pathway for many of the contaminants entering the region's rivers, lakes, and streams. Participants stressed the importance of managing stormwater and expressed support for the Clean Water Plan addressing both stormwater and wastewater. They also expressed frustration that there has not been more progress on stormwater even though we have understood its impact for many years. Some participants expressed interest in increased stormwater regulation in place of or in addition to regulations targeted toward point-source pollution. Other participants cautioned the use of regulation as a blunt water quality management tool. Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Work to break down silos between agencies who manage stormwater and wastewater.
- Explore other management tools, such as ecosystem services, certifications, and incentives.
- Conduct a study on cost and impact of different pollution removal efforts to determine the most effective investment of the public's money. For example, the study could explore the cost and impact of combined sewer overflow (CSO) control and stormwater runoff pollution reduction.

Understanding and Engaging Youth

Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Meaningfully engage youth in the Clean Water Plan and to consider the impacts of water quality decisions on younger generations.
- Engage with young leaders who may have a different perspective on sustainability and the right investments for water quality.
- Build on youth willingness and readiness to adopt behavior change to encourage broader communities to do their part in protecting Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes.
- Invest in ongoing, positive, and creative educational programs for youth.

- Review and replicate effective youth engagement efforts, such as the campaign to create lifetime transit riders by providing ORCA cards to all Seattle Public School students.
- Consider implementing youth programs, such as the Lake City Little Brook Youth Corps and the Unleash the Brilliance program, to engage youth, provide work opportunities, and create a stream of knowledge at a young age.

Water Quality Improvement

Participants discussed the importance of continuing regional efforts to improve water quality. They indicated that efforts, such as the transfer of development rights to preserve environmentally sensitive land and the cleanup of Green Lake, had positively impacted regional water quality. Participants encouraged King County to consider the following suggestions:

- Consider advanced treatment and its impact on regional water quality.
- Exceed treatment standards for wastewater.

Trends That Shape Our Future

During the second part of the workshop, participants visited two additional topic stations: Why the Clean Water Plan and Clean Water Plan Drivers.

Why the Clean Water Plan

King County staff presented on why and how King County is developing the Clean Water Plan. Participants participated in a team activity to learn more about the process and timeline for creating the plan.

Clean Water Plan Drivers

County staff reviewed trends that are important drivers for the Clean Water Plan. A trend is an ongoing or anticipated local, regional, and/or national general direction that is developing or changing. Staff explained that King County is studying these trends and their implications to imagine different future conditions we may see and experience in the coming decades.

Materials provided at the stations are available on the project's webpage in the [public engagement library](#).



Kicking off the small table discussion sessions during the workshop

Participant feedback

After visiting the stations, participants returned to small tables to discuss the following questions:

1. Of the trends, which are the most important to you and why?
2. What implication do these trends have for water quality and other regional priorities?
3. Given that this region will be making substantial investments, what are the opportunities you would like to see considered for inclusion in the Plan?

Presented below are key highlights from table discussions on these questions. Highlights may represent multiple voices or the opinions of a single participant and are not meant to imply consensus or a shared viewpoint among participants.

Aging Infrastructure

Background

The region's wastewater facilities (pipes, pumps, and treatment plants) are aging. Some of these facilities are approaching the end of their useful life.

Feedback

Participants discussed aging infrastructure and the need to:

- Replace aging facilities and build more facilities to accommodate anticipated population growth.
- Maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure because it is a critical factor to water quality.

Climate Change

Background

Scientists predict that climate change will bring sea level rise, more intense rainfall events in the winter, and higher temperatures to the region.

Feedback

Participants discussed climate change and its impact on:

- The increase in the frequency of storms resulting in a higher volume of stormwater carrying contaminants to Puget Sound, rivers, and lakes.
- Increased temperature due to climate change that may also result in decreased pH and decreased oxygen levels which would have a negative impact on aquatic species and habitats.

Given these threats, participants encouraged King County to:

- Plan proactively. Consider the long-term investments our region needs.
- Make a plan that is resilient and adaptable to the uncertainty of climate change and its impacts on water quality.
- Consider expanding recycled water and energy programs to reduce water and energy use.

- Offset energy use for new facilities by installing or investing in renewable power alternatives.

Environmental Regulations

Background

The trend of declining numbers of Puget Sound southern resident orca indicate that this population is at risk of extinction in the future. Continued decline in salmon populations, particularly from urban rivers, and decreases in aquatic habitat in urban and urbanizing areas is expected to persist in the future. State and federal water pollution control regulations are expected to become more stringent in the decades ahead, and there may be new requirements to do the following:

- Remove nutrients, like nitrogen, from wastewater that can lead to low dissolved oxygen in the water that is harmful to fish.
- Remove contaminants of emerging concern, like medicines and cleaning products, from wastewater.
- Increase stormwater treatment.

Feedback

Participants discussed the role of regulations in improving water quality. Some participants supported increased regulations, while others raised concerns about the financial burden that new regulations and technologies could bring to ratepayers.

Population Growth

Background

The central Puget Sound region is projected to add 1.7 million residents and 1.2 million jobs by 2050. Much of this growth will occur in King County.

Feedback

While population growth creates additional complexity and challenges, participants also emphasized the opportunities that come with a larger community. Participants discussed the need to do the following:

- Proactively address the large population growth the region is expecting in a way that preserves quality of life and water quality.
- Defend a strong growth management plan to reduce sprawl and encourage compact development.
- Maintain open space and variety in density. For example, allow increased density in areas such as Seattle's downtown core
- Encourage land use development that does not add to or reduces impervious surface area and stormwater runoff.

Rising Cost of Doing Business & Availability of Funding

Background

The cost of living and of doing business continues to increase in the region. Financing water quality improvements is increasingly expensive. There are not many federal grants or much loan funding available for wastewater facilities, and the County expects limited availability into the future. Additionally, affordable housing is one of the region's most pressing issues and disproportionately affects historically underrepresented communities including people of color and indigenous communities.



Small table discussion sessions during the workshop

Feedback

Participants discussed the rising cost of doing business and the decreasing availability of funding. They highlighted the following:

- The impact of this trend on rates as well as equity and social justice.
- The responsibility of the region to maintain and upgrade infrastructure given the decrease in federal funding.
- The need to consider how legislative changes to stormwater management or growth and development may provide additional income streams for King County.
- The need to fund utilities and remove silos.
- The role private business might play in improving water quality and covering the cost of doing business. Participants highlighted a highway off-ramp that Microsoft helped to fund as an example of collaboration between business and government.

Technology & Innovation

Background

There are ongoing improvements in wastewater treatment and water pollution control technologies. Installing and operating technology is expensive, and there is uncertainty about the future costs to install and operate these new technologies.

Feedback

Participants encouraged King County to do the following:

- Remain open to innovation and new technologies.
- Be willing to continue to lead bold innovation. Examples of innovation included: Shoreline Salmon Safe Certification, Ballard stormwater improvements.

- Work to create a robust understanding of both the positive and negative impacts of technology before implementing new programs.
- Consider additional green infrastructure strategies and the expansion of such projects beyond the urban landscape.
- Consider blue carbon strategies and how these may help pay for water quality improvements.

Water Quality Conditions

Background

The region has made significant water quality accomplishments. Fifty years ago, millions of gallons of raw sewage flowed daily into Lake Washington. Today, it's one of the cleanest urban lakes in the world.

- There is more work to do:
 - Water temperature is getting warmer, which is worse for fish.
 - Water does not always meet state standards for certain criteria, including bacteria and dissolved oxygen.
 - Historically contaminated sediments persist in the region's waters.
 - Emerging contaminants are being detected, but their impacts are not fully understood.
- Due to historic and systemic inequities, historically underrepresented communities do not experience the same quality of life as white residents, this includes exposure to pollution.

Feedback

Participants discussed these issues:

- The implications of water quality on a wide variety of regional concerns, including tribes, treaty rights, habitats, and species.
- Connection between environmental indicators. For example, the impact declining salmon populations have on tribal fishing, livelihood, and culture.
- The need for restoration efforts to consider the impact of construction and machinery on habitats and species.

Let's Continue the Conversation

The workshop closed with a thank you to all participants and a request for feedback on the format, timing, and content of the workshop. King County explained that this first workshop was the start of the conversation with the community, with the intention of keeping the conversation going throughout the planning process.

King County staff explained that there are many ways to stay involved, including the following:

- Visit the project webpage kingcounty.gov/cleanwaterplan.
- Ask questions or providing feedback by sending an email to cleanwaterplan@kingcounty.gov.

- Participate in an upcoming Online Open House.
- Invite King County to attend your next community meeting.
- [Sign up](#) to receive regular email updates about the project.
- Participate in future events.

Alternative Formats Available 206-477-5371 | TTY relay: 711