March 25, 2020

The Honorable Dow Constantine
County Executive, King County
401 Fifth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

SUBJECT: Wastewater Treatment Division 2021 Rate Recommendation

Dear Executive Constantine:

The Metropolitan Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee (MWPAAC) is unified in its opposition to the Wastewater Treatment Division’s (WTD) rate proposal for 2021, and its projected rate forecast for 2022-2026. The proposed increase of 9.5 percent is a massive increase over the forecast of 4.5 percent released in June 2019, and it is a complete surprise to all MWPAAC agencies and our customers. The region is already struggling with affordability and this rate increase, coupled with the impact of COVID-19, will create significant hardships for our communities and customers.

We value a close working relationship with WTD and expect more transparency and engagement when changes of such high magnitude are being considered. The reason given for the steep rate increase – funding a backlog of Asset Management projects – makes sense. But Asset Management has not been a topic on a MWPAAC agenda since October 2018. Moreover, the background materials sent recently in connection with Asset Management have not provided the level of information needed to justify the increase. We still don’t have the answers we need to make an informed decision.

MWPAAC must also, again, raise the issue of our virtually nonexistent role in the rate review process. We know that rates aren’t developed in a day; rather, it’s a months-long process. It is unacceptable that MWPAAC does not see a rate proposal until the eleventh hour, on the eve of its transmittal to the King County Council. Many MWPAAC agencies must review and respond before they have time to discuss the proposal with elected officials at public meetings. An increased role in governance by MWPAAC members is of great interest and will be included in the ongoing contract negotiations.

This rate proposal and the complete absence of a collaborative process to share information to justify the proposal reflects the lack of a partnership between WTD and the agencies that make up MWPAAC. Please consider either a zero percent rate increase or adopting the original projection of a 4.5 percent increase.
Every MWPAAC member agency understands the challenge of balancing asset replacement with rate stability. We live that challenge every day. Only together, as true partners with WTD, will we find a solution that meets the needs of the wastewater system while providing a smoother and more affordable rate path for all our customers.

Sincerely,

Pamela Carter
MWPAAC Chair

cc: MWPAAC Members
Christie True, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP)
Mark Isaacson, Division Director, Wastewater Treatment Division, DNRP