

## Staff Reporting Tool 2023 Annual Update

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February 2022



**King County**

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## II. Ordinance Text

Ordinance 18627 is attached as Appendix A.

## III. Executive Summary

Ordinance 18627 directed the Executive to provide a staff reporting tool by which plant operational staff can anonymously communicate suggestions or concerns to agency management. To provide this reporting tool in spring 2018, the Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) added a check box to the Bright Ideas submission form stating, “If your idea relates to treatment plants or offsite facilities, please check this box.” The Executive was also directed to prepare an annual summary of the suggestions and concerns received through the reporting tool, as well as responsive actions taken. This report satisfies that requirement.

Between January and December 2022, five Bright Ideas submitted had the box checked for “relates to treatment plants and offsite facilities.” Of these, one was made anonymously. WTD approved three submissions. Two submissions are still under review.

## IV. Background

**Department Overview:** The King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) works in support of sustainable and livable communities and a clean and healthy natural environment. Its mission is to foster environmental stewardship and strengthen communities by providing regional parks, protecting the region's water, air, land and natural habitats, and reducing, safely disposing of and creating resources from wastewater and solid waste. The Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) of DNRP protects public health and enhances the environment by collecting and treating wastewater while recycling valuable resources for the Puget Sound region.

**Key Historical Context:** On February 9, 2017, a severe flood occurred at the West Point Treatment Plant. The flooding inundated electrical and mechanical equipment resulting in emergency bypasses of sewage through the emergency outfall, and discharge of partially treated sewage through the offshore outfall.

West Point’s remote location, lengthy commute times, and the intensity of operating West Point during wet weather events combined with sewer flows coming into the plant can make working at this plant challenging for employees. The complexity of operating West Point is also a driver for some employees to work at the plant because they enjoy the challenge. Following the 2017 flooding event, the King County Council wanted to ensure that staff at West Point and other WTD facilities had a way to anonymously communicate their concerns and suggestions for their worksite.

WTD uses Bright Ideas as a way for employees to report problems they see in the workplace and to offer solutions. It is a hands-on, employee idea program where employees can submit and track their ideas through an online tool. In 2018, Bright Ideas was augmented to be further utilized as a staff reporting tool where employees can report needed workplace improvements and offer ideas on how to address them. Employees will continue to have the option of reporting anonymously.

**Current Context:** WTD employees are introduced to the Bright Ideas program during the onboarding process and icons are added to all WTD employee computers, so any WTD employee may submit directly into Bright Ideas.

In 2022 WTD experienced technical difficulties when the Bright Ideas platform migrated to a new server. WTD is addressing these issues and anticipates more employee interaction with the program in 2023.

**Report Methodology:**

WTD staff evaluated the Bright Ideas site database for all ideas submitted in 2022, with the box checked on the submission form that states, “If your idea relates to treatment plants or offsite facilities, please check this box.” The data for the relevant submissions was then reviewed to determine which ideas were implemented and completed, which ideas have implementation plans, and which ideas are still under consideration.

## V. Report Requirements

Ordinance 18627 requires the King County Executive to transmit a report providing an annual summary of suggestions and concerns received through a staff reporting tool and the response from the WTD.

Bright Ideas is a hands-on, online, tool that allows WTD employees to submit and track workplace improvement ideas. While most employees freely post their name along with their workplace improvement ideas, they also have the option of submitting their ideas anonymously. Bright Ideas encourages creative problem solving, especially among front-line employees who are often the first to see ways to address workplace concerns.

In 2022, five Bright Ideas were submitted with the box checked for “relates to treatment plants and offsite facilities.” Of these, one was made anonymously. These numbers are lower than in past years as WTD experienced technical difficulties when the Bright Ideas platform migrated to a new server. WTD is addressing these issues and anticipates more employee interaction with the program in 2023.

WTD approved the following three submissions:

- A suggestion to decrease email traffic by posting Operations and Maintenance work group schedules to SharePoint was approved and implemented.
- A request for engineers to evaluate previous and current projects with Operations and Maintenance staff to better understand the impacts of engineering solutions was approved and an implementation plan is being developed.
- A submission to formally document the Operator in Training program as part of succession planning was approved. Work is scheduled to begin January 2023.

Two ideas are still under review:

- A suggestion to cycle the air flow up in the pre-aeration tanks to prevent the grit lines from becoming clogged is under review.<sup>1,2</sup> Implementing this process would require changes in policy, procedure, and training.

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<sup>1</sup> Pre-aeration tanks introduce air into the wastewater to remove suspended solids, grease and oil.

<sup>2</sup> Grit is fine particles of organic and inorganic matter ranging in size from 75-150 microns with a higher specific gravity than treatable organic solids.

- A suggestion to change the procurement process for safety equipment to an electronic, rather than paper-based, format is being reviewed.

## **VI. Conclusion & Next Actions**

Between January and December 2022, five Bright Ideas were submitted that related to treatment plants and offsite facilities. Of these, three submissions were approved and implemented or are in the implementation process and two are under review. These numbers are lower than in past years as WTD experienced technical difficulties when the Bright Ideas platform migrated to a new server. WTD is addressing these issues and anticipates more employee interaction with the program in 2023.

## **VII. Appendices**

Appendix A – Ordinance 18627

**KING COUNTY**1200 King County Courthouse  
516 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104**Signature Report****December 12, 2017****Ordinance 18627****Proposed No. 2017-0428.2****Sponsors Kohl-Welles and Lambert**

1 AN ORDINANCE related to at the West Point Treatment  
2 Plant, requiring a report and plan from the executive  
3 addressing issues related to staffing concerns, including  
4 staff retention, and a mechanism to provide for anonymous  
5 staff reporting of operational concerns at the West Point  
6 Treatment Plant.

7 **STATEMENT OF FACTS:**

- 8 1. In response to the February 9, 2017, system failure event at the West  
9 Point Treatment Plant, the council commissioned an independent  
10 assessment of circumstances leading to the event, and identification of  
11 appropriate responses.
- 12 2. As an element of the independent assessment, AECOM Technical  
13 Services, which was selected to perform the assessment, conducted  
14 extensive interviews with plant operations staff, and with plant and agency  
15 management. AECOM also conducted a hazardous operations workshop  
16 involving plant operations and management and agency management staff,  
17 intended to surface operational conditions that may have contributed to the  
18 February 9 event, and to conditions of concern at the plant generally.  
19 Both the staff interviews and the hazardous operations workshop were

20 central to the identification of critical plant conditions and the  
21 development of recommendations, which will guide the agency, the  
22 council and the region in supporting the recovery from the February 9  
23 event, and the avoidance of future such events. The council desires to  
24 institutionalize a mechanism to heighten awareness by decisionmakers of  
25 critical operational conditions that have the potential to result in system  
26 failures similar to the February 9 event.

27 3. Additionally, the AECOM report described the issue of staff retention  
28 at the West Point Treatment Plant. The report notes that "staff retention  
29 has been an ongoing issue...the plant is not in an easy location for  
30 commuting, and the cost of living in the surrounding area is high. WPTP  
31 has had a significant number of new hires compared to the South Plant and  
32 Brightwater Treatment Plant; ...there has been a large number of transfers  
33 from WPTP to one of the County's other treatment plants." The report  
34 notes that lack of corporate memory is a potential problem associated with  
35 lack of staff retention.

36 4. The wastewater treatment division currently operates a safety hotline  
37 monitored by the agency safety committee, which provides employees the  
38 opportunity to communicate concerns that are specifically related to safety  
39 but does not provide a process to identify larger operational issues.

40 BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

41 SECTION 1. A. The executive shall prepare a report and recommendations  
42 addressing issues related to staff concerns at the West Point Treatment Plant, including

43           1. How to provide an ongoing staff reporting tool by which plant operational  
44 staff can anonymously communicate suggestions or concerns to agency management.  
45 The reporting tool may be in the form of an electronic staff hotline or suggestions box, or  
46 other means of allowing for candid and unreserved identification of conditions of  
47 concern. The reporting tool may build on the existing safety hotline or Bright Ideas, but  
48 shall also provide for reporting on broader plant operational issues; and

49           2. The identification of issues that result in problematic low levels of staff  
50 retention at the West Point Treatment Plant.

51           B. The executive shall prepare a plan, based on the report, for the implementation  
52 of the recommendations of the report, addressing both:

- 53           1. Instituting or augmenting an anonymous staff reporting tool; and  
54           2. Means to improve staff satisfaction and retention, such as staff incentives or  
55 other strategies intended to strengthen retention outcomes at the West Point Treatment  
56 Plant.

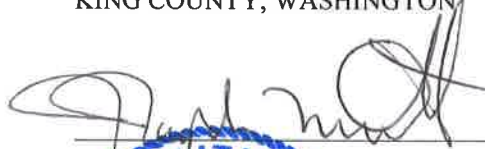
57           C. The executive shall also prepare an annual summary of the suggestions and  
58 concerns received through the plan's reporting tool, as well as responsive actions taken.

59           SECTION 2. The report and the plan shall be transmitted to the council by  
60 February 15, 2018 and may be combined with the quarterly report required by Motion  
61 14813. The annual summary shall be transmitted by February 15 of the year following  
62 the year the suggestions and concerns are received through the plan's reporting tool. The  
63 annual summary may be combined with the West Point Treatment Plant Independent  
64 Assessment Final Report Implementation Plan quarterly report. The report, the plan and  
65 each annual summary, shall be transmitted in the form of a paper original and an



66 electronic copy to the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an  
67 electronic copy to all councilmembers, the council chief of staff and the lead staff for the  
68 transportation, economy and environment committee and regional water quality  
69 committee, or their successors.  
70

KING COUNTY COUNCIL  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON



J. Joseph McDermott, Chair

ATTEST:

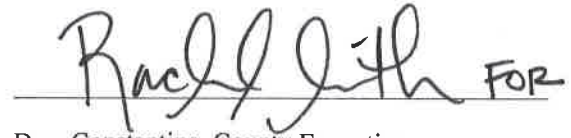


Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council



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KING COUNTY COUNCIL

APPROVED this 21<sup>st</sup> day of DECEMBER, 2017



Dow Constantine, County Executive

Attachments: None