



May 23, 2025

The Honorable Girmay Zahilay
Chair, King County Council
King County Courthouse
516 3rd Ave.
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Proposed Ordinance 2025-0129 2026 Proposed Sewer Rate and Capacity Charge

Dear Chair Zahilay,

The City of Kirkland has grave concern about the affordability of our regional wastewater system. We encourage the King County Council to seek alternatives to the unsustainable sewer rate forecast. Kirkland remains steadfast in its commitment to environmental sustainability and to ensuring dependable infrastructure for generations to come, including our regional wastewater conveyance and treatment system. Kirkland recognizes that utility rate increases may be necessary to maintain and invest in our regional wastewater system. However, the County's rate increases must be balanced with affordability for the ratepayer in mind and multi-year predictability needs to be established.

For these reasons, and in the context of rising rate forecasts across all utilities, Kirkland strongly supports Executive Braddock's plan to convene a summit on utility affordability for regional elected officials this year. Kirkland intends to fully participate in the summit and encourages the County Council's support, engagement, and leadership in seeking creative solutions to our complex regional challenges.

Through Kirkland's engagement in Sound Cities Association and advisory bodies like the Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC) and Municipal Water Pollution Abatement Advisory Committee (MWWPAAC), we are aware of the Executive's Proposed 2026 monthly sewer rate of \$62.66 a 7.5% increase over the 2025 rate. We have also received the 20-year wastewater rate forecast with steep hikes beginning as soon as 2027 at 12.75% and peaking at 13.5% annual increases in 2029-2031. The City is also receiving rate forecasts for other utilities, all of which are projected to increase significantly. Early estimates show that the average Kirkland ratepayer's solid waste, wastewater, water, and surface water bills are projected to nearly double over the next decade, reaching nearly \$400 per month. Projected sewer costs account for the largest share of the increase, making up close to 50% of the monthly bill.

The Kirkland City Council has already invested in rate relief programs for our lowest income residents through the Kirkland Cares Program. As of December 2024, the program supports 132 households in multi-family residences with bi-monthly utility rebates, 265 single-family accounts with sewer bill discounts, 541 single-family accounts with garbage discounts, and 202 single-family accounts with water discounts. We are proud of our investment in this program but the number of households needing assistance is rising steadily. We expect the need to be even greater should the Congressional budget make substantial cuts to federal medical, food and housing assistance programs. Rate relief programs like ours will be quickly overwhelmed under the current rate path. As a region we must find additional solutions to these rising costs.

Therefore, we affirm and support the recommendations proposed in letters from RWQC and MWWPAAC to improve transparency and accountability in the sewer rate-setting process, ensure rate stability and predictability, and provide a closer review of capital program delivery to ensure the right balance of system investment and customer affordability.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kelli Curtis".

Kelli Curtis
Mayor, City of Kirkland