

# Scatter Creek Aquifer – Septic System Management Project

Purpose: To make sure water in the Scatter Creek Aquifer is safe to drink now and in the future.

**Citizen's Committee approved notes:** June 5, 2013, 6:15-8:15 pm. Approved 8/7/13.

Rochester School District Board Room (*old primary school, enter from front*)  
10140 Highway 12 SW, Rochester, WA 98579

**Attending:** Gene Weaver, Chanele Shaw, Tom Budsberg, Roger Max, Marlene Hampton, Maureen Pretell, Art Starry (staff). Facilitator: Jane Mountjoy-Venning (staff). Note taker: Kateri Wimsett (staff). Excused: Karen Deal, Sandra Adix, Lowell Deguise, Bruce Morgan, Scott Schimelfenig. Guests: none. Absent: Dave Dafoe.

## Introductions

**Agenda review and approval:** approved

**Approve May notes:** notes approved

**Other housekeeping:**

**Report on any community input, questions, etc.:** There were several questions which staff took back to answer. Answers in *italic*.

1. When does the Planning Commission meet? Do they have a regular schedule?

*The Planning Commission has scheduled meetings on the first and third Wednesday of every month. Meetings may be canceled due to a lack of items. Special meetings may be called. Announcements of meeting agendas cancellations are sent via the Planning Department's web mail list. All meeting agendas are posted online on the Planning Commission's web page.*

*The Planning Commission web page is here:*

[http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/planning\\_commission/planning\\_comm\\_home.htm](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/planning_commission/planning_comm_home.htm)

*To sign up for email notifications please go here:*

[http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/contact/constant\\_contact.html](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/contact/constant_contact.html)

2. How often is the county required to review growth management area boundaries, and when will the Grand Mound GMA next be evaluated?

*The County is required to update its Comprehensive Plan on a schedule established in the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A). The next statutory deadline is at the end of 2016. However, the County is not required to update urban growth area boundaries until 2018. The update deadline has been pushed out by the state legislature two times in the past few years due to a lack of funding.*

*The Grand Mound plan update is currently on the docket, and is proposed to continue to be on the docket. Staff is not currently available to work on the update.*

3. What information do you have about a gopher preserve on Gibson Road?  
*Staff is still checking on an answer for number 3.*

*For follow-up on the questions above (1-3) feel free to contact Jeremy Davis, Senior Planner with Thurston County Planning. His phone number is (360) 754-3355 ext. 7010*

4. A committee member reported that there is a lot of foam on Scatter Creek. Any thoughts or explanations?

*Foam in creeks is very common. It is usually caused by turbulence frothing up naturally occurring organic material as the water flows along. However, if someone suspects or observes a pollution source to the creek ie a flowing pipe, or manure applied or piled next to the creek, they can call us with the location and we will investigate.*

*For follow-up on question 4, contact Sue Davis, Thurston County Environmental Health. Her phone number is (360) 867-2643. She is frequently in the field, so don't hesitate to leave a message.*

5. A committee member reported that the water system in her development was getting "flushed" and there was a sign to flush out your hot water heater. Was this due to some kind of contamination?

*Kelly Alsin of Northwest Water Systems manages FROG HOLLOW DIVISION #1 Group B public water system. She said they flush the waterlines annually as part of their routine maintenance program. The lines were flushed about one month ago. Their standard practice is to notify the users on the system prior to flushing, which they did in this case. The notification includes draining the hot water heater as a preventative measure just in case any sediments get trapped in the hot water heater. They also recommend flushing household lines prior to use when the water main is flushed by running a cold water tap or outside hose bib. This helps to prevent temporary odor or discolored water problems. She also noted they recommend flushing the hot water tanks to correlate with the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule, which is to flush hot water tanks on an annual basis. Flushing the hot water tank after the annual flushing is a recommendation, not a requirement.*

*For follow-up on question 5, contact Sara Brallier, Thurston County Environmental Health. Her phone number is (360) 867-2629. She is also frequently in the field, so don't hesitate to leave a message.*

**Questions:** What nitrate level is of concern in the Scatter Creek area? What level would trigger action or the need for intervention? ie: In computer modeling how much nitrate is too much? Are there other pollutants we should be looking at or modeling?

**Decisions:** The nitrate level of concern for modeling is 5mg/L, the nitrate action level is 6 mg/L. This is a compromise decision that all present felt they could live with. Some are concerned that these levels are too high, some are concerned that the levels are too low given the historic cyclic levels of nitrates in the aquifer.

**Reminders:**

- Nitrate and bacteriological contaminants are the primary septic system pollutants addressed by state and county law

- Natural background levels for nitrate are less than 2 mg/L
- Thurston County nitrate early warning level is 2 mg/L
- Thurston County nitrate contaminant action level is 4 mg/L
- Washington State nitrate drinking water trigger is 5 mg/L
- Maximum nitrate level for safe drinking water is 10 mg/L
- Nitrate levels in Scatter Creek Aquifer vary

Points Raised in Discussion:

- The nitrate levels that we are deciding upon are for committee use when looking at the groundwater model results. The levels that we decide do not change the policy for the county or state and the actions that nitrate levels trigger in those county and state policies. The nitrate levels that the committee decides upon help us determine at what levels in the groundwater computer model results we will be concerned about, and help guide the development of recommendations for the Board of Health.
- There was discussion about trends, timing, and actions. The nitrate levels were compared to blood pressure levels. Even when you are below a threshold, if your blood pressure is going up your doctor might advise you to make some changes. If your blood level spiked quickly, that could be cause for alarm. At a certain point, you might need to undergo more aggressive treatment. Similar with nitrates. If we see nitrate levels rising, that can cause us to begin investigating or taking preventative actions. A slow shift compared to a rapid change in nitrate levels might cause different responses. At a higher threshold, we may need to take more drastic actions. We want to set the level low enough that there is time to deal with any problems before nitrates reach a harmful level.
- It was noted that one size does not fit all. Because of the underlying geology, there may be areas that are more vulnerable than others and more precautionary actions may be needed. On the other hand, we do not want to unduly alarm people, or unnecessarily take actions across the whole aquifer to address certain “hotspots.”
- Different experiences helped shape different committee members points of view. One member spoke of living in another western city where early warning signs were ignored years earlier, which resulted in a water crisis. Another spoke of the protective steps already taken in this area, which reduced the number of allowed water connections and appear to be working, as nitrate levels have gone down. Another asked us to think about a row of glasses of water, each with a slightly higher level of contamination – all within approved levels, and asked us to think which glass we would want to drink.

**Community Workshop – July 30, 2013 from 6:30-8:30 pm at Rochester Middle School**

**Upcoming mailing**

- The first community workshop is coming up. It is a chance for residents to learn more about the project thus far and provide input.
- The format will be an open house for the first hour with a variety of stations folks can visit, including listening posts where they can write down questions, comments, or concerns. There will be a brief presentation, followed by a question time.
- In order to accommodate as many questions as possible, people will be asked to write down their questions. That will allow similar questions to be put together. Answers to all questions will be sent out to participants and posted on the website.
- It was suggested to include a children’s activity area as one of the stations.
- Folks thought it would be helpful to have people sign in and identify whether they live within

- the study area boundary. We will have a map posted to help with this.
- There was discussion about whether or not we should request staff from the planning department to attend and be prepared to answer questions or address concerns on gophers. The committee felt that while the concern was likely to come up and it might be helpful to have someone there, it is such a volatile issue that there was a large potential of sidetracking the workshop from its purpose of addressing concerns about drinking water. It was decided to not include a “gopher station” and handle questions/concerns by restating that this workshop is on drinking water and please contact the planning department about gophers.
  - The Board of Health is interested in attending and thanking committee members. Due to their busy schedules we are looking at either July 23 or July 30 for the community workshop. The committee pointed out that Tenino Trail Days is July 27 & 28 which is a good opportunity to get the word out. We scheduled the workshop for July 30 from 6:30-8:30 pm at Rochester Middle School. Jane will staff a booth at both Swede Days and Tenino Trail Days to let residents know about the project.
  - The upcoming mailing will go out before the community workshop and will include some updates about the project. Members requested that we not scare people with the newsletter. There will be a clear place to go for more information. Jane will send a draft to the committee for review (with a deadline) before finalizing the newsletter. As fact sheets are drafted for the community workshop she will send those out for review as well.

Question: Should we provide free water quality tests to 50 residences or a higher number of discounted water quality tests, such as 100 half-priced tests?

**Decision: The project will provide up to 50 free bacteria and nitrate tests for households on single family or two-party wells in the Scatter Creek Aquifer Study Area.**

Background: The project has funding to provide up to 50 free water sampling tests for both nitrates and bacteria for single family wells in the Scatter Creek Aquifer study area.

Points Raised in Discussion:

- Eligible households will receive a notice in the upcoming newsletter.
- Water sample bottles will be available at the community workshop in addition to the usual locations.
- There are Advanced Placement students from Rochester High School who have been trained to take samples, and have volunteered to help people collect water samples if they are interested. People can also collect their own water samples.

**Public Comment:** none

**Wrap up**

- Review any tasks/commitments & timeframe
- Review notes, capture any missing points

