

**Questions from Open Houses & Surveys about the
Recommended On-Site Sewage System (Septic) Management Plan Update**

All of the questions Thurston County Environmental Health received are listed below. They have been grouped by topic. A summary question for each topic is listed in **bold**, with the *answer in italics*. The bullets which follow are the questions as written, for that topic.

Q1. How often do we have to pump or inspect?

A: The plan calls for most septic systems to be inspected every three years and pumped when needed. Just like the current plan, there are some complex systems which require annual inspections. We recommend that septic systems be inspected often and pumped only when needed. There is no requirement to routinely pump the septic tank if it is not needed. Special situations, such as when a home sells or is being brought back into compliance have additional requirements.

- How often are you going to require pumping and reports?
- How can you base the need for pumping by a year when families vary from a one person household to as many as a household of 10-12 and use and need for pumping is no way comparable? Also there is a variable of water tables depth, why is that not considered? Why are commercial systems not included also?
- When you recommend yearly reminders to everyone, are you basing this on science that recommends 9-12 years? Scientific data state that septic systems should be pumped every 9-12 years. Why doesn't the county use this scientific data?
- Settled science tells us a once per 12 year pump out cycle is reasonable. Why do you want a 2-3 year cycle?
- Septic systems don't begin working right until about 3 years. Why would you require it to be pumped before that?
- Septic tanks become fully functional after 2.5-3 years. If they are pumped every 3 years, they are never fully functional. Why would you desire this? Please use current science.
- Single person on 3 bedroom septic system. Why should I have to pump the same as a family of 5?

Q2: The information mailed to us says that the system must be inspected by a septic professional such as a certified monitoring specialist, installer or pumper – yet when I called our pumper (Petunia) he said to call Dave Tipton to get a name to inspect –

- **Why can't the pumper do all inspection report, pumping and one fee –**
- **Which pumpers are certified to do all this – The pumper list should (could) indicate this.**

Thanks

A: Community systems (serving several homes) and some complex septic systems require a third party monitoring specialist to monitor and evaluate the septic system and take any required samples. Most pumpers do not have monitoring specialist certification and will refer a homeowner to their monitoring specialist to inspect the system and coordinate the pumping of the septic tank if it is needed.

Q3: Why can't I as an owner inspect my own system for my 3-year "operational certificate"?

A: Homeowners that have gravity flow drainfields, mounds, Glendon® Biofilter Septic System, or pressure distribution drainfields in Henderson and Nisqually Marine Recovery Areas can inspect their septic systems after taking a 5.5 hour training class. The cost to offer these training classes are covered by the Marine Recovery Area fees charged to owners in the Marine Recovery Areas. Years ago owners OSS owners were allowed to inspect their systems without special training, and many made mistakes and submitted inaccurate reports. The proposed plan includes a recommendation to explore and implement training options for all septic system owners.

Q4: If a drain line is clogged what liquid can be used that won't damage the septic system?

A: If a line is clogged we would recommend you try a mechanical means of cleaning the line such as a plumber's snake. If that does not work and a homeowner wants to try a chemical product we suggest you try the least harmful method, for example a product that says, CAUTION or WARNING, rather than DANGER or POISON. Look for a product on the [List of Approved On-site Sewage System Additives](#). The Washington State Department of Health has reviewed the ingredients in these products and determined they are unlikely to cause harm. Department of Health approval and subsequent listing in the approval document must **not** be interpreted as certifying effectiveness, endorsing or recommending use of an additive. ALWAYS follow the manufacturer's label instructions.

Q5: If a current gravity feed system drain field fails, can you get it repaired or must you install a mound/pump system?

A: When a septic system fails we encourage homeowners with the help of sewage system professionals to evaluate the failed septic system, try to diagnose why it failed, and determine the type of repair needed. Sometimes the drainfield is failing due to a broken pipe, and fixing the pipe repairs the system. Sometimes a septic tank is leaking, and repairing the tank fixes the failure. If the entire drainfield fails the property should be evaluated to determine what type of repair options are available. Most drainfield repairs today require a pump and pressurized drainfield.

Q6: Why do you think people are ignoring failed septic systems?

A: Septic systems failures can be difficult for homeowners for a variety of reasons which may include, cost of installing a new system, cost of county permits, design fees and sometimes people don't know how to proceed. There are often cases where a septic system is failing and the homeowner is not aware of it. This could include sewage being captured in a drainage pipe and discharging over the hill out of sight to the homeowner, or a leak in the tank draining into the soil and perhaps reaching groundwater without full treatment. In 2012-14 survey, 17% of the 102 Eld Inlet waterfront septic systems evaluated were found to be failing. Most of these property owners were unaware their systems had problems before the survey. There were similar results when shoreline surveys were conducted elsewhere in Thurston County.

Q7: What is the rationale behind the Time of Transfer program?

A: The Time of Transfer program requires an evaluation of the septic system when a property sells. It requires the septic system to be pumped and inspected. The evaluation also reports if the septic system

is permitted, what it is permitted for and whether or not the septic system is in compliance with the regulations. Often times a seller is not aware that their septic system is considered non-conforming and this may impact the buyer's ability to obtain financing and future building permits. The Time of Transfer process allows the department to inventory and gather information on systems that do not have permit records.

- The time of transfer fee is a one time fee for many people – if used at all. The recommended fee schedule is asking me to pay for this every year. What is the rationale? I say no to this fee.
- Does the committee believe that the people are not responsible and smart enough to have the septic system checked before sale or purchase? Why do we need to fund the Health Department to do this for us?

Q8: Why is pumping required at the time of transfer? What if the septic tank was recently pumped?

A: The septic tank is pumped for the Time of Transfer Evaluation so the tank can be fully inspected. Often times a septic tank has a crack or hole in the bottom or the side of the tank that leaks sewage. This is considered a failing tank and must be repaired or replaced. A septic system professional most likely will not see the damage to the tank just by opening the tank for an inspection. Septic tank pumping and inspection reports can be up to one year old and still be used for the Time of Transfer Evaluation process.

- At the time of transfer why is pumping required and not just an inspection? What if the tank was pumped 7 months previous? Another pump out is a waste of money!

Q9: Are some properties exempt from inspection & pumping? What are they?

A: During the presentation there was discussion about the Time of Transfer Evaluation which is an evaluation of the septic system when a property sells. A property transfer is required to go through this evaluation unless it is exempt. Exemptions include: foreclosure, sheriff's sale, court ordered transfer, gift or an inheritance or devise. Local sewage codes reflect other regulations that exempt property from certain requirements during the foreclosure process. However, if the bank then sells the property a Time of Transfer Evaluation is required.

- Mr. Peterson mentioned exemption from inspection & pumping? What are they?
- Why are foreclosures exempt from the time of transfer? A bank owns the property.

Q10: How many Time of Transfers are done every year?

A: There were 1,938 Time of Transfer Applications in 2015 and 1,688 in 2014.

Q11: Can a new septic system be mandated at the time of sale?

A: The Citizen's Committee has recommended that "system component deficiencies be corrected at time of property transfer." Component deficiencies typically would be an alarm float that is no longer functioning, a pump on/off float switch that isn't working, a riser lid that is damaged and not securable, or a septic tank baffle that is damaged. Currently the department only reports these conditions on the evaluation. The department requires that a failing component be repaired or replaced. Failing components include a leaking sewage tank or a failed drainfield. If a septic system is functioning

properly as it was designed and permitted, there is no requirement that it be brought up to current standards.

- Did he just say that new system type could be mandated at time of sale? Whose judgement is that?

Q12: Has the Committee or Board considered the impact to health and water quality of upstream lakes (i.e. Henderson watershed) in its deliberations?

A: The impacts of lakes were considered when the boundaries were established for the Henderson Inlet Marine Recovery Area (MRA) in 2005. The original proposal was to include the entire watershed in the MRA. After further evaluation, the boundary was reduced to include only those areas that could be contributing fecal coliform bacteria to Henderson Inlet and its tributaries.

Q13: Why are you asking all septic owners to pay, even though only some systems are causing problems?

A: The stakeholder committee considered many options and chose to talk about all septic systems in the county. All septic systems have the potential to impact an area. Some areas may be more vulnerable than other areas, but all systems have the potential to impact public health and water resources. Therefore, requirements to operate and maintain a septic system should be in place throughout the county. The committee believes improvements are needed to the county management system to identify failing systems. The county needs resources to track septic system monitoring and maintenance and provide information to everyone so owners can take care of their septic system, protect their investment and public health. The plan proposes that all septic system owners be charged to improve services available county wide.

Q14: Why not focus on areas that are more likely to have problems?

A: The proposed plan recommends that special areas be established for Eld Inlet and Summit Lake – two areas where septic systems that fail pose the greatest public health risk. The advisory committee believes that all OSS owners would benefit if more services were provided, and proposed charges to all OSS owners to pay for increased services. The proposed charges would fund educational opportunities and assistance for all OSS owners as well as replace Time of Transfer, O&M renewal, pumper and O&M reporting fees. The Board of Health could choose to revise the project area to cover some or all of the part of the county that drains to Puget Sound.

- The original purpose of looking @ septic systems that feed into the Sound – this is over-reach to include those that have no effect – Why?
- Why don't you concentrate your concerns in the more densely populated areas instead of blanketing the county?
- I can understand concern about "sensitive areas." Why go county-wide when there are no problems in most areas?
- Why not limit these charges to areas where failing septic systems effect other water sources?
- I live in an area that is outside all of the sensitive areas, and have never had septic problems. Why are these fees affecting our area? Is this a shell game to spread the fees out?

- “Everyone contributes to risk, everyone should pay something.” Please tell me how my rural septic contributes to this risk and in what way. This statement is mis-information if not an outright lie.
- I would like the county to make decisions based on scientific data. Why are you charging a fee to the 95-97% of functioning septic systems? Put your efforts to the 1-3% problems.
- So is the recommendation to the Board of Health asking me if I would accept to pay an annual fee to “share” the cost of cleaning up and protecting the waters of the State, even though I don’t anticipate using the services hidden in this fee? I do not consent to this fee.
- Homeowners with modern, “better” systems pay huge fees for monitoring & operation, where older systems on the water pay little but present the highest risk to water quality. Why is homeowner expense based on system complexity and not risk?
- Why is it fair for us in South County to subsidize those that have chosen to live in more expensive and sensitive areas?
- How can the Health Department reconcile the difference between a choice to buy a house on the water for the view and environment to the choice to buy raw land and build your own home and install your own septic system? How do you justify equity in both homeowners paying equally a flat fee of \$45? Or even the tiered fee? Neither appears equitable. I do not consent. I say no to paying this fee.
- If these recommendations are adopted isn’t the action forcing us to use the services that the health department will tax us for? It’s like forcing us to legitimize your behemoth plan.
- Why do we need the Health Department to look over the shoulder of professionals whose expertise is to service our septic systems. Especially when these recommendations are asking me to pay for it. I do not consent.

Q15: Why does the plan cover all septic systems when only some fail each year?

A: *The problem is finding those systems. Current efforts focus on two Marine Recovery Areas and complex systems that require renewable operational certificates. While those efforts have been successful, information suggests that there are systems in other sensitive or high risk areas where failing systems are not being identified. As an example, a shoreline survey in 2012-14 found 17% of the 102 Eld Inlet waterfront septic systems evaluated to be failing. These systems were in areas where the Department of Health determined water quality was declining. Most of these property were unaware their systems had problems before the survey.*

Q16: How many failures or problem systems are found each year?

A: *In 2015 the health department received 112 applications to repair or relocate a septic system drainfield and 111 applications for new septic tanks. These repair applications are located throughout Thurston County. In addition, many septic systems have problems like a collapsed sewer pipe between the septic tank in the house, a crack in the septic tank, or a loose fitting that do not require a permit. These are called minor repairs. In 2015, in the areas which required regular inspections, almost 7% of the septic systems had deficiencies requiring minor repairs. (Approximately 3,200 of the 11,042 systems in Henderson and Nisqually Marine Recovery Areas were inspected in 2015 and 209 systems with 340*

deficiencies requiring minor repairs were found.) Deficiencies requiring minor repairs can cause water quality problems and lead to a total system failure if they are not addressed. Approximately half of the septic system problems resulting in water quality violations during sanitary surveys of Eld and Henderson Inlets were due to broken pipes and loose fittings. Water quality was restored when minor repairs were made. The overall failure rate found during these surveys was about 14%. The committee believes that similar problems would be found and public health benefits would result if all septic systems are regularly inspected. The recommended charge means the health department has the resources needed to ensure routine inspections take place and sewage problems are repaired.

- How many septic systems fail per year, in Washington State? How many fail in Thurston County? I am not asking about Summit Lake. Where are they located?
- Why does the plan cover all septic systems when your data suggests that just a few fail or require service each year? How many septic systems fail each year?
- If Thurston County issues 150 to 200 permits to repair septic systems per year out of 53,000. This is less than 1%, how can this be justified taxing the 99% with good septic systems?
- Of the 52,560 septic – how many problems in 2014-2015? Is it less than 1%? I don't believe the 14% failure rate.
- The Henderson 50% pumping needed does not seem right. I only found ~14% in need of pumping. What were your criteria to get to 50%?

Q17: How many septic systems fail per year, in Washington State?

A: We do not have reliable information on the number of failed septic systems in Washington State.

Q18: How many OSS are currently known on the shorelines? What other areas could become MRAs? What is your operation estimate? I want to make an informed decision!

A: Our records show there are 11,044 systems in the Henderson and Nisqually MRAs, and approximately 5% are on the shoreline. The advisory committee recommends that Eld Inlet be designated as an MRA and that Summit Lake be a sensitive area. There are approximately 3,583 septic systems in the Eld Inlet watershed of which 880 are high risk (near shorelines or tributaries). In 1997 we identified 357 septic systems in the Summit Lake basin.

Q19: Why are some septic systems exempt from charges?

A: RCW 90.72.070 exempts certain properties from the proposed charges, including animal feeding operations, facilities assessed for wastewater discharge permits and timber and forest land under Chapter 84.33 and 84.34 RCW.

- Why do we need a charge for control of our septic systems via tax when others are exempt? Allow none. We paid fee for permit to place septic, we pay fee for pumping & inspection, we pay for repair.
- Why should we pay for the people that can't or won't pay for it?

Q20: Why aren't sewage infractions a legal issue? Scofflaws should be answerable for their contributions to degraded water and lakes, corporate and private!

A: Legal action is taken against owners of failing septic systems if they do not comply with warnings and notices. Penalties and other enforcement tools are available to use when OSS owners fail to renew or maintain their operational certificates.

Q21: Are you carefully monitoring the corporations that impact the water quality?

A: This program applies to corporations and commercial properties, as well as homes served by on-site sewage systems. In addition, LOTT has a program to evaluate pollution risks associated with their sewer customers and requires facilities with waste streams that pose a risk to LOTT facilities to dispose of them via other means (source separation) or to require pretreatment before wastes can go into the sewer system. The state and county have programs designed to help assure wastes stay out of storm water systems and that hazardous materials are properly managed.

Q22: Why do most septic systems employ water flush toilets that require the contents of septic tanks to be removed and processed elsewhere? Are composting toilets and other alternative technologies allowed in Thurston County?

A: Composting toilets can be permitted in Thurston County. When composting toilets are used, a system is needed to collect and treat gray water (water from sinks and clothes washing), which contains fecal coliform bacteria and nutrients. Most people prefer water flush toilets. As time goes on it is likely we will see new technologies and systems that conserve water and provide higher levels of treatment.

- *I prefer to install greater known science of composting toilets & wastewater on site as proven in Finland & Sweden. Why should homeowners install systems needing to 'collect' sewage & transport to treatment plants? – making a bigger problem. This is old system, disease-oriented, barbaric & yucky. I don't consent to FEE!*

Q23: How is the money used that is collected from the data collection company?

A: Funds collected by On-line RME, the firm used by Thurston County to receive septic tank pumping reports, are used to pay for staff to evaluate reports, follow up on problems, and to maintain the county data management system.

Q24: I don't understand "fair." No one helps the rural person pay for the installation of their septic system. Please explain fair.

A: The advisory committee does not think it is fair for the county O&M program to focus on just the 14,000 or so systems with renewable certificates and properties that are being sold or transferred. They think other areas need attention, and that all septic system owners will benefit if additional education and outreach and technical assistance is available. The committee thinks it will be fairer to charge all septic system owners in order to fund the program. The proposed charges would replace Time of Transfer, O&M renewal, pumper and O&M report fees, including the special septic system fees in the Marine Recovery Areas, and be used to fund educational opportunities and assistance for all OSS owners.

- *If I currently pay no fees and, as a homeowner and senior citizen in unincorporated Thurston, I have no intention of selling my home, how do you justify the recommendation that I pay a fee for services I will not use? Or that I should pay this fee every year? I do not consent to this fee.*

Q25: Will this proposal require people to use septic system professionals?

A: *Thurston County regulations require septic system owners to hire certified pumpers when they need to have their tanks pumped. Owners of complex systems must also hire certified monitoring specialists. The plan recommends that the county provide educational opportunities and assistance for all OSS owners. If implemented the plan would establish more areas where septic system monitoring and maintenance is actively managed, and reminders being sent to all septic system owners to remind them when systems should be inspected.*

- Your presentation refers to marine recovery areas. This issue tonight is not about marine recovery areas. It's about whether or not we are willing to accept paying for this by placing a tax on our property. Even when many of us will not use the services of operation & maintenance. Is the recommendation a play to force us to use these services?

Q26: Why are you using phony data – like shellfish closures- to justify this tax? Most fecal coliform is avian and wild animal origins.

A: *Fecal coliform come from all warm-blooded animals. Thurston County and others have shown humans and septic tanks are significant sources of fecal coliform bacterial with DNA studies. Shellfish beaches have been closed when dye studies traced contaminated streams and drainages back to failing septic systems. Recent investigations by the Washington Department of Health confirmed that three Norovirus outbreaks in Mason County were caused by failing septic systems.*

Q27: If the burden of funding this plan is carried on septic owners what is the financial impact to municipal systems?

A: *If implemented the program has no direct financial impact on municipal sewer systems. They do not fund the county septic system program or receive funding from it. Charges can only be used for septic operation and maintenance program, not for a public sewer system. This will not change if the plan is implemented.*

- Why tax owners of septic systems to pay for public systems. I think it should be the other way around.

Q28: What will the proposed charges pay for?

A: *The charges will pay for the services recommended in the plan, including: improvements to the Electronic Database Systems; work necessary to establish and implement sensitive areas for Eld Inlet, Summit Lake, and other areas (if needed); make monitoring and maintenance information education opportunities available to all septic system owners; provide resources for limited water quality monitoring and investigations; and provide staff needed for quality assurance and compliance efforts as described in the plan. The proposed charges would replace Time of Transfer, O&M renewal, pumper and O&M report fees, including the special septic system fees in the Marine Recovery Areas, and be used to fund educational opportunities and assistance for all OSS owners.*

- What do we get for the fee (tax) on our property tax?
- What benefit will residents see from this new fee?
- What are we getting if we already are maintaining our systems?

- What value will come from this?
- How will you spend \$2,385,000 per year collected?
- What benefit will residents get from the millions of dollars that will be raised from us?
- Why update the County's Plan, what are the benefits for these fees?
- Why would you charge a yearly fee? Homeowners have already paid money to have a septic system installed.
- Why is a charge needed? What will the money go to?
- This fee schedule, however it is managed, will increase the operations & management plan budget by a minimum of 1 million dollars. How do you justify this annual increase in funds? I do not consent to this fee.

Q29: What is the proposed budget, and how does it compare to the current level of funding for related programs and activities?

A: *A \$45 annual charge will generate approximately \$2.35 million per year. The tiered structure will generate approximately the same amount of revenue. In 2015; fees, charges and grants provided about \$1.5 million for the services and activities described in the plan (the \$1,358,000 figure in the plan was a 2014 midyear budget estimate). If fully implemented, up to 6 staff will be added to the program by the end of a 5-year implementation schedule. More detailed budget information is provided in the draft plan and FAQ document.*

- Is the projected income from the flat & tiered system roughly the same?
- The official number of OSS countywide is about 53,000. A flat fee would fund the OSSMP at \$2,385,000. Their operating budget for 2014 was \$1,358,000. Why didn't staff work up an estimated cost for continued operation as a guideline for the public?
- The new fee proposal would raise approx. 2.3 million. How much does the current fee schedule raise?
- How much will budget and staffing be increased?
- How many more employees does this plan require?
- What is the revenue amount that the county is trying to raise through these fees?

Q30: Can you speculate on the truer cost of funding the operation and maintenance of County oversight on private onsite septic systems, by charging a service fee for services not rendered, when it will possibly bring lawsuits against the county that will be paid for by the same people you are levying the fee against? I do not consent to this fee.

A: *The budget does not anticipate or provide funding for legal services needed to defend lawsuits or significant legal challenges.*

Q31: Will the proposed charges replace or be in addition to current fees and charges?

A: *The charge would replace fees currently charged for time of transfer (sale) reports, pumper reports, and operational certificate renewals. It would also replace the special Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach shellfish protection district charges that are billed and collected via the property tax statement.*

- It is not clear from the plan that the flat fee would replace or be in addition to the current property tax district fee shown as SHELLFISH PROTECTION HENDERSON on my property tax report?
- How much of fees & taxes you collect now (approx. 1.7 mil) will go away when new fees take effect?
- If this recommended fee is adopted, does it eliminate the current fee structure imposed on marine recovery areas? I do not consent to this fee.
- So is this like the license plates you still have to buy new ones even if yours look brand new?

Q32: How will the annual charges be evaluated and adjusted?

A: The Thurston County Board of Health has the authority to set and adjust fees. This authority comes from RCW 70.05.060 and RCW 70.05.190. Current fee and rate schedules for Environmental Health programs, including the special O&M programs for Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach, include provisions that tie adjustments to the Consumer Price Index for Seattle-Bremerton Urban Wage Earners, and limit fee and charges increases to no more than 3.5% per year. RCW 70.05.190 states that sewage system management plan rates and charges may only pay for the actual costs of administration and operation of the on-site sewage program management plan. State law does not allow septic system fees to be used for roads, schools, or sewer extensions.

- What guarantees are there that these fees will only be used for septic systems and not for road, schools, etc?
- What guarantees are these fees will not constantly raise year after year?
- If we pay this, what is the guarantee these fees will not go up?
- How is it that Thurston County can legally levy a new tax on my property under the guise of operation and maintenance fees for my septic tank that I have not incurred? Isn't this a violation of property rights? Isn't this a misleading stealth tax? How can I be charged for what I have not used? I say no to this fee.
- Who controls any increases in fees?
- Will depreciation be taken into account?

Q33: What is wrong with the current method of funding?

A: The advisory committee believes sustainable, equitable source of funding is needed for the program. The committee recognized that future availability of grants is uncertain and that a minority of septic system owners pay for the service offered by the county. Over the last five years grants provided \$250,000-375,000 year of funding to support O&M activities.

- What is wrong with the current method of funding the operation and maintenance oversight of septic systems that pose a risk to the states waters? I say NO to this fee.

Q34: How were the cost comparison tables developed?

A: The tables were developed to compare costs for the average amount of time someone owns an individual home. They compare current fees for Time of Transfer, pump report filing and operational certificate renewal fees to the proposed charges. The 10-year average is based on staff review of

information available on real estate trends in the county in 2014. A professional Realtor on the advisory committee agreed that the 10-year average was reasonable. We did not calculate or adjust the estimates for sub-areas of the county.

- In the Cost Comparison chart for the flat or tiered fee schedule, those who made this recommendation have generalized operation and management needs over a 10 year period. Were they considering home ownership in the urban areas, the marine recovery areas or unincorporated areas? I do not consent. No to this fee.

Q35: What will be the charge for parcels with more than one septic system?

A: The citizen advisory committee recommends a reduced charge per septic system for when there are more than one system on a parcel. The current Nisqually rate structure charges an additional \$10 for each additional single family septic system on parcel. The exact structure will be determined if the Board of Health chooses to go ahead with the plan, and will require Board approval after a public hearing.

- For those communities with multiple OSS in the parcel, how can we get more info about additional charges?
- I have a drainfield on one end of my property and a design for another one located in for the same land. How will I be charged?

Q36: Since many non-septic owners use and benefit from county H2O – eg Long Lake, Black Lake, and other recreational lakes, why not have the county-wide budget pay for some of the county expenses?

A: While the Board of Commissioners have the latitude to spend general fund money on things like lake water quality programs, there have been budget challenges since the great recession, and funding lake programs would come at the expense of law and justice and other programs that are already under-funded. For the last several years the county goal has been for permit related programs to be fully funded by fees, grants and charges so as to reduce demands on the general fund.

Q37: Do neighboring counties have similar fee structures? Lewis? Mason? Pierce?

A: Not at this time. Mason County commissioners have been asked to consider a similar proposal. Whatcom, San Juan, and Clark counties charge septic system owners via the property tax statement for their septic operation & maintenance programs. King County is considering a proposal.

Q38: Why do rural residents pay a stormwater tax? Mine is \$72.51 per year.

A: The Thurston County Storm and Surface Water Utility program is managed by the Resource Stewardship Department. Please see <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/stormwater/utility/utility-rates.html> or call (360) 754-4275 for more information. Storm and Surface Water Utility charges do not and cannot pay for septic system maintenance activities.

Q39: How much is this worthless meeting costing us?

A: The meeting is being paid for with funds from a grant from the Department of Health.

Q40: Will the current funding methods developed from your work with marine recovery areas impede the County's efforts to comply with State Law? I do not consent to this fee. No to this fee.

A: *No. The proposed charge would replace fees currently charged for time of transfer (sale) reports, pumper reports, and operational certificate renewals. It would also replace the special Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach shellfish protection district charges. The Thurston County Board of Health and Board of Commissioners have authority over both matters, and can choose which, if any, will be used to fund county programs and activities. The final plan must be submitted to the Washington State Department of Health who must review it to determine if includes the elements described in state law have been addressed. The Department of Health reviewed the proposed plan and said it was complete and could be approved.*

Q41: Instead of the federal and state governments taking on the responsibility of restricting and charging corporate polluters to clean up the environmental damage they have created, the recommendation to the County is for the people to foot the bill. Is this perception accurate? I say NO to this fee.

A: *The plan addresses septic systems. All septic system owners would be expected to comply with the regulations and fee requirements adopted by the Board of Health to implement it. Revenue generated by plan related fees and charges can only be used pay for services and activities identified in the plan. They cannot be used to clean up pollution from industrial or commercial activities.*

Q42: If someone fails to pay the new fees, how will you enforce the fee? Place levies on the property?

A: *For charges billed via the property tax statement, the department would work with the Treasurer to determine the best method to collect delinquent charges. State law prohibits the health department from placing a lien on properties due to delinquent septic system O&M charges.*

Q43: How is the current program supported?

A: *Current septic system operation and maintenance program activities are supported by fees, charges and grants. The funding strategy section in the plan estimated fees and charges (including penalties and fines) provide 68% of the program revenue and grants provide 32%. These programs are funded only by grants, fees and charges.*

- Is your current program supported how? % fees, % grants, % general fund, % fines

Q44: According to your chart, income to Board of Health implementing either fee schedule would reduce income. How can they be implanting new rules?

A: *The charts show that for many individual septic system owners the cost of the annual charges would be less than they pay in fees and charges. Overall revenue is greater because all septic system owners would be charged each year if the proposal is implemented.*

Q45: How do we know septic systems are contributing to algae blooms?

A: *Excess nutrients in water contribute to algae blooms and lake eutrophication. Phosphorous and nitrogen are the key or limiting nutrients that trigger these events. Domestic sewage contains both of these nutrients, and most septic systems do not do a good job treating these nutrients. Blooms occur when adequate nutrients are present and other factors, like the weather, are appropriate. Many studies in Thurston County, including studies for "The Lakes" in the Olympia and Lacey area in the late '70's,*

indicate nutrients from septic systems contribute to surface water problems. More recently the Deschutes Total Maximum Daily Load Water Quality Improvement Report (2015) indicates that excessive nitrogen levels in some reaches of the river are likely due to septic systems. Phosphorus and nitrogen also come from animal waste, fertilizer and storm water and other sources. The contribution from each and their significance varies watershed by watershed.

- What percentage of algae blooms are caused by septic systems as opposed to run-off of fertilizers & animal waste (horses, dogs, cattle, etc)?
- Your staff member said the algae in the lake was of unknown cause – So why are you blaming septic systems?
- What percentage of algae blooms are caused by warming water & weather as opposed to septic systems?
- What percentage of pollution & algae blooms caused by industrial wastes?
- Where is the finding that sewage is damaging rivers and streams?

Q46: Where is Summit Lake tested for contamination?

A: Limited water quality tests are taken from the middle of Summit Lake from late spring to early autumn as part of an ambient or long term water quality monitoring program. Monitoring and surveys to identify failing septic systems are not taking place due to funding limitations. The last extensive evaluation of septic systems and pollution sources took place from 1992-1997.

Q47: Pattison Lake is in bad shape. Is its remediation in the plan? When? If not, it should be!

A: Pattison Lake was not identified by the advisory committee as a priority for special studies or investigations. The plan recommends that we form a Special Area Workgroup to evaluate information and determine where enhanced or special septic system program are needed.

Q48: Water quality examples shown are from lakes? What about the private properties. Are you talking about well testing – (no other water source)?

A: Other than referencing work being done in the Scatter Creek area, the plan does not include a specific ground water or well testing component. It does recommend that resources be made available to respond to complaints and evaluate areas to determine if septic systems are failing or creating water quality problems. As needed well testing could be part of such an investigation. The Scatter Creek Aquifer Septic System Management Area Advisory Committee recommend limited ground water quality monitoring within that area. The Scatter Creek Aquifer recommendations were accepted by the Board of Health.

Q49: Where is the full report, not a summary?

A: The complete report, comments, and questions are posted on our website at: www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/

Q50: What makes you think the survey area is representative of the county?

A: *The survey was designed as one method to get public feedback about the proposed septic management plan. It was not a representative sample of county residents. It was included in the TalkinTrash newsletter, which was direct mailed to every mailing address in the county (124,000 addresses), was available on our website and at the three community workshops. The survey was one of several methods to get community input about the plan. We received 357 survey responses, the results are posted on the project website and have been shared with the Board of Health. All comments received from the survey as well as by other means are listed in a separate document which is also posted on the website, www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/ and shared with the Board of Health.*

Q51: Will all questions be answered?

A: *Yes. All the questions and answers are included in this document. They are also posted on the website and have been shared with the Board of Health. Questions came in writing from the community workshops, the survey, e-mails and phone calls. If you still have questions not covered in this document, feel free to contact Jane at 360-867-2643.*

- Can we have a copy of everybody's Qs and your answers?
- Why did you purposely avoid all controversial questions?

Q52: Why are you insisting that questions at the workshops be written down?

A: *There were a couple of reasons we asked for written questions at the community workshops/open houses. One is we have found that we are able to answer more questions during the workshop by having the questions in writing and grouping together similar questions. The other important reason is that all questions and comments are presented to the Board of Health. Having them in writing helps make sure that we present your questions and comments in your own words, rather than our notes about what you asked. If the Board of Health decides to move forward, there must be a public hearing before the plan can be adopted. Citizens are also always invited to share their views with the Board of Health or Board of County Commissioners. Their website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/bocc/ includes a link to send all three Commissioners an e-mail at the same time.*

- Is this a public meeting? Why are you not allowing public to talk or speak out?
- Why aren't the public allowed to speak at these Hearings?
- How can I make my views heard direct to the Board of Health?
- I realize you are here to gather information from the people. To let the Commissioners know what we the people think about this committee recommendation for a new tax on our properties. You are unelected staff. What gives you the authority to sequester the public voice by insisting our questions be written down? I do not consent to this fee. I vote no fee.
- By not letting us speak, have you considered those who may not have the skill to write out their thoughts, feelings and opinions, especially when they may be upset about this new stealth tax? I do not consent to this fee. I vote no fee.
- Do you feel the need to protect yourselves? Is this why you insist on us writing out our questions on such a sensitive issue? Are you aware of how this dis-engenders the public good? And communicates disrespect? I do not consent to this fee. I vote no fee.

- Are any of you aware of how disempowering it is to the people to insist that they submit written questions? Or is this one of the reasons you are insisting? I do not consent to this fee. I vote no fee.
- Have you ever considered that the information you are gathering is equally, if not more, important to the people? That sharing their knowledge, thoughts and ideas with one other in an open, congenial and collaborative public discourse has value? If so, then why haven't you made town hall type meetings a part of your educational outreach? I say NO to the fee.

Q53: Why isn't there a meeting in the North County? (Nisqually & Henderson Inlet area)

A: *There were three community workshops/open houses held in different areas of the county.*

- *Approximately 50 people attended the Saturday session at the health department at 412 Lilly Road NE, Olympia; 12/5/15*
- *Approximately 200 people attended the Wednesday session in Rainier; 12/9/15*
- *Approximately 50 people attended the Thursday session at Griffin School; 2/11/16*

Q54: Why can't this measure be VOTED on?

A: *The Thurston County Board of Health and County Commissioners have the authority to approve, modify or deny the proposed plan. It can only be approved after is the subject of a public hearing. While they could choose to put it before voters, they typically decide whether to approve plans like this after conducting a public hearing.*

Q55: The present septic system management (excepting marine areas) works well – why are we fixing something that's not broke?

A: *The advisory committee recommended changes because it appears most septic systems are not regularly monitored and maintained. Reports filed with the county indicate only about 1 in 5 septic systems are being regularly monitored and maintained unless they have renewable operational certificates. About 80% of systems with operational certificates are current with inspection and monitoring requirements. Only complex systems and those in designated marine areas have renewable certificates. The committee identified a need for enhanced programs for Summit Lake and Eld Inlet, and program funding that is equitable and sustainable. The current O&M program is funded by grants, fees and charges paid by small fraction of septic system owners.*

Q56: Who are the Board of Health in Thurston County? Is it the County Commissioners?

A: *The Thurston County Board of County Commissioners constitute the Thurston County Board of Health as authorized by RCW 70.05.030. Their website is <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/bocc/>.*

Q57: When was Board of Health given legal right to tax residents?

A: *RCW 70.05.190 authorizes the Thurston County Board of Health to impose and collect reasonable rates or charges to pay for the actual costs of administration of the on-site sewage system management plan and to contract with the county treasurer to collect the rates and charges.*

Q58: What state laws require the septic system management plan? Is the county obligated to follow them?

A: *RCW 70.118A requires the health officers of the 12 counties bordering Puget Sound to develop written on-site sewage system management plans to provide guidance to the local health jurisdiction. WAC 246-272A-0015 reaffirms this requirement. RCW 70.05.060 (1) requires the Thurston County Board of Health enforce the public health statutes of the state and the rules promulgated by the state board of health and the secretary of health. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (the health department) is obligated to follow regulations and policies adopted by the Thurston County Board of Health. If the plan is approved by the Thurston County Board of Health staff are obligated to implement it and follow any rules or policies associated with the plan.*

- What state laws are you referencing?
- What specific state laws are you following in formulating this plan? GMA? RCW? #s Chapter/article # etc?
- It appears that the state applied RCW 70.118A to ALL of the state's waters – not just the MRAs. Then required the counties to include it in their management and regulation plans – the county has to follow that “guiding” language. Including item (x) – “other areas as designated by local health officers.” So the county is “licensed” by the state to broaden their reach?!
- When the State mandates government overreach, as demonstrated in the Marine Recovery Area language, items (i) through (x) in WAC 246-272 A.0015, is the county legally bound to be complicit with such overreach? I do not consent to this fee.
- What does the term guideline mean? Is it synonymous with mandatory in the Washington Administrative Code? I do not consent to this fee.
- In the Washington Administrative Code, are the guidelines from the State considered Law, mandatory or legally binding before they are followed? I say no to the fee.
- If the Health Department is legally bound to follow the guiding language of the State Administrative Code, which includes item (1) (b) (x) under Local Management and Regulation that states “other areas as designated by local health officers”; Does this statement then give the county “license” from the state to broaden its reach as it sees fit? Isn't such license how the public trust is so readily breached? I do not consent to this fee.
- What is your jurisdiction based on?

Q59: Who assures the plan is fair?

A: *The Board of Health has the authority to approve the plan. They are required to hold a public hearing before approving the plan and any regulations and charges necessary to implement it. The board will consider the advisory committee recommendations, and any testimony provided through the hearing and public outreach process when they decide whether to approve or amend the plan.*

- Who is the Solomon that will decide what is fair?
- How will this proposal be managed and audited?

Q60: How were the advisory committee member chosen?

A: *Committee members were chosen to represent a wide variety of interests, perspectives and professions. Staff submitted recommendations to the Board after soliciting volunteers from the public and other areas of interest. The Board of Health approved the final set of committee members, which included homeowners, city and tribal representatives, representatives from shellfish, real estate, building and septic system industries. One Environmental Health Division employee represented the county on the committee. Other Environmental Health staff acted as technical advisors. A list of advisory committee members is in the draft plan update.*

- Were the citizen advisory committee members appointed?
- Who appointed the advisory group? The committee would make a lot of \$ with “all” septic needing frequent inspections.
- Why was advisory committee almost all people who benefit financially from frequent pumping?
- I did not see any homeowners/property owners/septic owners on the advisory committee. Why not?
- Why didn’t you make a public announcement to request participation on the advisory committee to include representation on a broader scale?
- Were there any members on the committee with septic systems? If it ain’t broke why fix it?

Q61: Are there any elected officials here? Were there any elected officials on the committee?

A: *Members of the Board of Health did not attend the community workshops. They have been briefed about the plan and public input received. One elected official, a city council member from Rainier, was a member of the advisory committee.*

Q62: Why were citizen advisors (stakeholders) used in this process?

A: *The Board of Health appointed an advisory committee to develop the plan to help assure a variety of interests and perspectives were considered. An advisory committee process allows participants to spend the time to learn about issues and develop a proposal. Once completed, the committee proposal can then be shared with and considered by the public.*

- Is Thurston County considered a stakeholder in the business of the county? The State? The federal government? If it is, does that then include the people of Thurston County or just the administrative arm? I say no to the fee.
- The term stakeholder is relatively new to the general public. Can you explain in general who stakeholders are? I do not consent to this fee. I say NO to the fee.
- The term stakeholder is a deliberate use of language that displaces the notion that residents and citizens have control over their private domains. In practice, the term refers to those politically aligned people and entities that want control over everyone else. Does the term stakeholder include the people affected by their need for control? I do not consent to the fee.
- When I hear the term “stakeholders” I think “big business” and “corporate interest.” Is the inclusion of stakeholders needed to legitimize the idea that corporate interests always have influence in everything the people do? Is this a deliberate and stealthy use of language to keep the people confused about who has control over their lives and property, and public resources like Washington’s waters? I do not consent to this fee.

- Please explain why stakeholders have become more important to have on committees like the one that created this tax recommendation in the OSS plan, more important than the voice of the citizens of unincorporated Thurston. I do not consent to this fee.

Q63: Have you ever observed an elected Health official refuse to agree with and follow State guidelines? If so, please share. I do not consent to this fee.

A: Yes, there are many instances where health officials and the Board of Health did not agree and consequently did not follow State guidelines.

Q64: Is the plan based on the best available science?

A: The plan follows the guidelines developed by the Department of Health, which were developed to meet the requirements in state law (WAC 246-272A-0015 and RCW 70.118A). The guidelines were developed by the Washington State Department of Health with input from experts and others with knowledge and interest in septic system management. The Thurston County plan was developed over the course of 8 meetings where they reviewed recent water quality study information and the results from an evaluation of the Thurston County and other Puget Sound O&M programs. Meeting agendas and materials are available on line at <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/involve.html>. The final plan must be submitted to the Washington State Department of Health who must review it to determine if includes the elements described in state law have been addressed. The Department of Health reviewed the proposed plan and said it was complete and could be approved.

- Why are you failing to base your plan on best available science?

Q65: The fact sheet seems to recommend pumping septic tanks every 2-5 years. Is this correct?

A: We recommend that OSS owners regularly inspect their systems and pump only when needed. The fact sheet costs are based on having the OSS inspected every three years and having the results submitted to the county. A fee is charged each time records are filed. State law states gravity systems should be inspected at least once every 3 years, and that other systems be inspected annually. The estimate does not assume and the plan does not recommend pumping every 2-3 years or at any prescribed frequency.

- The flow chart showing homeowner costs. This chart obviously assumes a pump-out about every 2-5 years. This 2-5 year schedule is entirely BOGUS and NOT supported by best available science! A more reasonable pumping schedule is an average of once EVERY 12 years! Where did that faulty science on the OSS Plan Factsheet come from?!

Q66: The presentation and fact sheet state that septic systems in Thurston County generate about 13 million gallons per day of sewage. How was that estimate developed?

A: The estimate is based on a 225 gallon per day average wastewater flow per residence. This average flow was then multiplied by the number of septic systems in the county to come up with the estimated total. This 225 gallon per day estimate has been used to estimate wastewater generation for septic systems in many studies in Thurston County, including the Scatter Creek aquifer study, and others prepared by consultants to evaluate the impacts of land use proposals. Experts at the Washington State

Department of Health agreed 225 gallons per day was a reasonable estimate for the Scatter Creek study. This is substantially less than the design flow for a single family residence of 360 gallons per day. The estimate assumes each OSS is a single family home. Systems that serve schools, churches, restaurants and commercial facilities can produce much more than 225 gallons per day. There was an error when these calculations were first made, and the correct number is 12 million. The FAQ and presentation materials were updated to reflect this.

- How did you come up with 13 million gallons for rural septic systems? This seems unrealistic, who did the estimations?
- Re: OSS Plan Factsheet. P1 alleged 13 million gallon figure seems unlikely. One person on average uses only 50 gal per day. So the actual output of sewage for a rural homeowner (base 2.5 people) is more like 6.6 million gal per day ($2.5 \times 53,000 \times 50 = 6.6$ million gal per day) This is HALF the amount the county claims. Where did you get your calculations and source estimates?

Q67: Why isn't the county focusing on LOTT and others?

A: The plan was developed to comply with requirements in state laws that address septic system management. Thurston County and others are participating in the [Reclaimed Water Infiltration Study](#) that is working to evaluate the potential risks from infiltrating reclaimed water to groundwater.

- Why don't you spend more time dealing w/ real polluters like LOTT instead of wasting time trying to find ways to tax us?
- Another about why not focus on bigger polluters?
- I am not willing to accept an annual fee to "share" the cost of cleaning up and protecting the waters of the state when I don't plan on doing anything that will require me to pay an operation or management fee. Why aren't the corporate polluters charged directly? Why aren't they restricted? Federal and state governments need to take responsibility to collect from the biggest offenders!

Q68: Why do we need a program that reminds us to inspect our systems?

A: Proper monitoring and maintenance is needed to help assure that septic systems work properly and for as long as possible. Inspections can identify small problems which can be easily repaired, thereby preventing failures or the need for more complex, expensive repairs. Repairing or replacing a failed system can cost more than \$10,000. Available data indicates only about 1 in 5 septic systems are being regularly monitored and maintained unless they have renewable operational certificates. Regular reminders will help increase the number of people that are remembering to maintain their systems.

- What is the real impact of the educational programs? This may be good, but I don't want to pay \$45 a year for this.

Q69: Why should we pay for this when we already paid for permits to install our system?

A: Septic application and permit fees were not intended to and do not fund long term education and outreach activities or other ongoing operation and maintenance program activities. These activities are currently funded by grants. A new, sustainable source of funding is needed if these services are going to

be provided throughout the county. NOTE: Ongoing education and operation & maintenance programs in Henderson and Nisqually are funded by annual septic system charges.

- We have an alarm on our septic system. Why do we need the County to tell us to check on it?
- When systems are pumped and inspected which we pay for they should run. If its working correctly why am I paying you to do it again?
- Why do I pay all this money for permits and design to assure its right and now spend more money after the fact if you plans and designs were more right to begin with we wouldn't be here.
- I went through Thurston County proses to have septic system installed properly now if you say its not right are you going to pay for my system I have already payed for it Has to be changed

Q70: Where would we find information on the damage from septic systems to bring all this on?

Thanks

A: The advisory committee was presented with information on water quality and sensitive areas, groundwater risk, surface water risk, marine recovery areas, and other issues from December 2013 through April 2014. The presentations and meeting notes are available on the [On-site Sewage System Management Plan Advisory Committee](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/involve.html) web page at <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/involve.html>

Q71: How can we trust the information provided and the process?

A: The process has been as transparent as possible. The complete report, and all comments, and questions are posted at: www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehomp/ and have been presented in their entirety to the Board of Health. The report details the process that created the proposal, notes from the advisory committee meetings are also posted on the website. Staff efforts are designed to protect public health to the best of their ability.

- Why should we trust staff, when staff has lied to us before?
- Have any of the employees been subjected to lie detector tests before submitting their reports?
- Do any of you think this is a poor/bad plan? How can I trust you to fairly submit my comments to the Board?
- Does staff get criminal background checks before being hired in the health department?
- Do you believe staff might be personally liable for any misinformation they have produced?
- How is this not a solution looking for a problem?

Q72: What is the projected population growth in each of the tiered fee areas?

A: We do not have population growth projections for the tiered areas. Thurston Regional Planning Council projects the population in the cities and urban areas in Thurston County will grow from 182,800 to 270,570 (48%) from 2015 to 2035, and the population in the unincorporated county will grow from 82,820 to 98,740 (19%) during the same time period.

Q73: Why did you fail to explain the Mason County boondoggle related to their waste water treatment facility which is bankrupting their county with no water quality change?

A: We believe the project referenced by this question refers to sewer conversions and financing in Belfair. This plan is about monitoring and maintaining septic systems in Thurston County, not sewer conversion in Mason County, so the Belfair work was not reviewed by the advisory committee or mentioned.

Q74: Why on Steilacoom RD SE went from 1 to 3 houses per ac to 4-7 houses per ac? So if this is a problem why are they over building?

A: We believe the project in question is served by sewer. New development within the Lacey Urban Growth Area needs to be platted at urban densities. Current standards for stormwater management, sewage disposal, and vegetation management were developed with intent of preserving and protecting water resources. The maximum allowable density for development on septic systems is 3.5 units per acre under ideal conditions. Most new development on septic occurs at 2 units per acre or less.

Q75: What government program has ever worked?

A: One example is the response to shellfish downgrades in Henderson Inlet in 2000 due to declining water quality. Thurston County convened an advisory committee made up of community members to develop a response strategy that included recommendations for septic systems, animal keeping, storm water, education and outreach, and other elements. The community worked to implement the strategy. Improvements in water quality allowed the Department of Health to reopen 240 acres of shellfish harvesting area in 2010, and another 100 acres in 2012. See the [Henderson and Nisqually News](#) and [Henderson Watershed Protection Area OSS O&M Program Five Year Review](#) for more information.

Rhetorical Questions which were not answered

- This is not a public hearing, however it is a public assembly. Where is the US Flag? Pledge of allegiance?
- Why is Thurston County trying to discourage people from moving here?
- Do the commissioners understand we will use this stupid fee as a reason to remove them from office?
- Are Commissioners Wolfe and Romero intellectually capable of understanding anything on this subject?
- If we voted Republican during the last County Commissioner/Governor's election would we still be doing this?
- We are not interested in sump pump Lake or Mason County. Why can't you keep the talk relevant?
- No fee! I do not consent! (5)
- No to this fee.