

SNO-KING WATER-SEWER DISTRICT COALITION

2016 Legislative Agenda (Adopted 11-09-15)

Summary of basic principles: The municipal, water-sewer districts of Alderwood, Coal Creek, Covington, Cross Valley, Mukilteo, Olympic View, Sammamish Plateau, and Woodinville comprise the Sno-King Water-Sewer District Coalition. We are committed to providing safe, reliable, and economically priced potable water—for residential, commercial, industrial, fire protection, and other lawful uses. We also provide sewage collection, transmission, and treatment services and some street lighting services. In addition, we participate in local and regional water supply planning and inter-system coordination (often with cities, counties, tribes, and other special districts).

All water-sewer districts play important roles in several key areas of our society:

- protecting public health through clean water and sanitation
- protecting the environment
- supporting growth of communities
- supporting economic activities and development

Districts support such roles almost exclusively through user fees paid by customers. Increasingly our activities are taxed by local and state agencies and such revenues are being diverted for activities unrelated to our missions. We believe that such diversions are not in the best interests of the State or our communities. Sno-King believes that revenues from rate-payers for water-sewer services should be specifically retained for those purposes.

To convey concerns and discuss future alternatives, the Sno-King Board periodically updates our agenda--reached by consensus--of legislative and regulatory objectives. In 2016, Sno-King expects the following list of specific issues will be actively considered by the Legislature or regulatory agencies. Sno-King will engage these issues and share its position (support, oppose, or amend) based on the points-of-view stated below.

Our 2016 priorities will focus on these three issues:

1. retention or replacement of a **low interest infrastructure construction loan program** and related revenue and cost matters;
2. updated and clarified **standards regarding water quality**;
3. confirming and enhancing **local district decision-making authority**.

Infrastructure financing and budget:

Retain Public Works Assistance Account (PWAA) Loans. Revenues and account balances of the PWAA have been diverted to the general fund. Sno-King believes that adequate and well-maintained infrastructure is vital to a growing economy and all aspects of society, including education, and that a sustainable statewide infrastructure strategy requires support for local capital projects rather than such diversions. We believe the Legislature should restore the Public Works Assistance Account revenue stream and interest rates as originally agreed upon, and stabilize the loan application and selection criteria.

If the PWAA appropriation is not restored to its original purposes, then Sno-King questions the appropriateness of continuing the **repeal of the Real Estate Excise Tax, Solid Waste Collection Tax, and state-level Public Utility Tax.**

Sno-King will track proposal(s) for development of a **dedicated water-sewer infrastructure fund.**

If any water-sewer **utility tax** is authorized or existing utility tax is extended or increased, Sno-King supports only a 6% maximum tax cap and that any franchise or contract agreements, current or future, be included under that cap.

Sno-King supports the imposition of the sales and use tax on bottled water and related products, with the proceeds earmarked for water quality and water supply construction projects financed by the PWAA.

Sno-King supports legislation relieving water-sewer districts from lien recording surcharges which support low-income housing. Such lien surcharges typically are applied to low-income customers or distressed home occupants—who may be near being evicted—to benefit other low income citizens. This makes little sense.

Monitor legislation that would provide **tax relief incentives** for the purchase of water-conserving fixtures and products.

Water Quality Improvements:

Sno-King supports protection of drinking water supplies by opposing injection of storm water or other substances into the ground where it could threaten or deteriorate well fields or ground water.

Sno-King supports **resolution of the permit exempt well issue.** The Department of Ecology has the responsibility under current law to enforce limits on withdrawal of water from permit exempt wells, but their enforcement activity appears to be inconsistent and is

repeatedly challenged by lawsuits. Given changing climate patterns, it is becoming increasingly important to have Legislative action to resolve this issue, and to have Ecology enforce the resulting rules.

Sno-King urges re-visiting Senate Bill 6131, regarding safer use of chemicals and, hence, **improved fish consumption standards**.

. The Coalition believes it is vital for our state to control wastewater/storm water discharge standards rather than leaving them up to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Local water-sewer district decision-making authority:

In general, Sno-King supports Legislation that promotes the ability of local governments to make decisions based on local conditions to best serve their constituents.

Sno-King supports changes to Department of Ecology rules which direct that water-sewer districts be responsible for the maintenance and repair of “grinder pumps.” Such rules should be changed to allow district discretion over whether they own and maintain such pumps, or leave them to private property owners.

Track legislation regarding monitoring and inspection of **side sewers**, especially upon change of ownership of the subject property.

Sno-King urges that concurrency of **water availability and sewer service availability** be a condition of growth management goals and plans when cities or counties amend GMA ordinances. Sno-King believes that water and sewer providers should be included in the GMA plan amendment process and subsequent approval of sub-division plans or development drawings, and, of course, during the issuance of subsequent building permits.

Support legislation (similar to House Bill 1989) that would permit **water storage asset management** as allowable contracts for multi-year contracts for water-sewer districts.

Sno-King supports allowing water districts to have the option to bill non-district properties (such as homes on private wells) for fire protection benefits (availability of hydrants and ample fire flow).

Track legislation similar to House Bill 2156 which would allow **cost recovery** by special districts when required to copy public records for commercial purposes.

Finally, **General and extended list of issues:**

Sno-King would resist legislation to require billing reductions (beyond consumption) to empty lots in mobile home parks and manufactured home parks. **Retain authority of locally elected officials to set rates.**

Current law requires that a complex and expensive process be followed in order for a water-sewer district to dispose of small or irregular parcels of property. Sno-King supports amendment of RCW 57.08.016 to enable the **sale of small parcels** of surplus properties under a simplified but fair process.

Oppose any change to lien laws when liens are applied to collect delinquent utility bills.

Years of controversy have failed to resolve the problems surrounding **unilateral assumption of water-sewer districts**, or parts thereof, by cities. Sno-King supports pursuit of legislation that would amend the Growth Management Act to better define and recognize best service delivery and governance models for water-sewer utilities, not just automatically default to cities.

Track amendments to **rules regarding land surveyors and engineers**. Sno-King insists that rule changes that define the duties of a land surveyor or engineer not encroach upon or restrict the current flexibility a water-sewer district has to determine, identify, mark, or change easements and related matters.

Track new reporting requirements at the **Public Disclosure Commission**.

Track drought relief funds and fire damage relief funds and criteria for their dispersal.

Track any legislation brought forward by the Public Works Board.

Continue to track **Senate Bill 5624**, or a derivative thereof, regarding “big water” bonds for flood control, water supply, and storm water control.

Thank you.

11-09-15