

Finding a balance for Septic Systems (OSS): A Strategic Approach to OSS Management in the Urban Growth Area

Olympia: One City's Experience with Septic Systems

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Decentralized Wastewater Management – Why Does it Matter to Your Jurisdiction?

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City of Olympia | Capital of Washington State

Background

- ~4,140 OSS (on-site sewage or septic systems) in City and its Urban Growth Area
- Over 700 are adjacent to an existing sewer main.
- With few exceptions, new OSS are not allowed in the City. Failed systems within 300' of sewer must connect.
- One barrier to conversion is high cost of sewer extensions - \$25,000 - \$100,000+ for an individual property, along with usual conversion costs: \$10,000 to \$18,000.

Olympia Septic to Sewer Program

- Waiver of City's general facility charge (GFC – currently \$3,342) is available for two years after notification of sewer availability.
- Technical assistance to property owners – dedicated staff. Provide information about cost, contractors, steps to take, sewer main/lateral location.
- Neighborhood Sewer Extension program
 - City pays for project up-front.
 - Residents pay their portion back, at the time of connection.
 - Resident's portion is discounted by 50% for all costs over \$20,000.
 - Financing available for \$200/month at 3.7% interest

Thurston County Risk Analysis



Thurston County
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□ <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/HEALTH/ehadm>

A New Approach

1. Make it easier for properties with septic to convert to sewer.
2. Encourage more infill development (single homes, not subdivisions).
3. Allow some additional septic to be repaired rather than connected to sewer.

1. Easier Conversions

- Eliminate the requirement for septic system conversions to sewer extend the sewer on all property frontages.
- Fund a limited number of small-scale sewer extension projects to assist residents (\$100,000-\$150,000/year). Construct a full block at a time.
- Allow for the payment of City General Facility Charges (GFC) and LOTT Capacity Development Charges (CDC) over time rather than as a lump sum.

Currently converting 10-15 OSS per year to municipal sewer. Changes should increase the number of conversions per year – maybe by 5 – and could keep increasing over time.

Sewer Extension Example



2. Infill development

- Allow septic systems to be constructed on infill, vacant lots in existing septic system-dominated neighborhoods.
- Only in areas not identified as high-risk by Thurston County Environmental Health.
- Allow the limited use of alternative sewer technologies including STEP and grinder pump systems to facilitate difficult connections to municipal sewer.
- Requirements for non-infill developments will not be changed.

Changes should increase the number of new OSS per year – maybe by 5 – and will likely decrease over time.

Infill Example



3. Septic Repairs

- Reduce the threshold for failed septic to connect to sewer from 300 feet from sewer to 200 feet.

Implication is that financial burden on residents will be decreased.

Extension Example



