

# Sewer Moratorium: Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: March 12, 2021



## What areas of the District are impacted by this moratorium?

The moratorium applies only to the North Sewer Service Area of the District. The South Sewer Service Area is *not* impacted. For an overview map, [follow this link](#).

## How do I know if I am in the area impacted by the Moratorium?

There is a detailed street-level map on the LetsTalkAboutOurWater.org website. The PDF version can be downloaded by [following this link](#). You may zoom in to get more detail.

If you are still not sure, please contact District staff by emailing [ConnectionInfo@spwater.org](mailto:ConnectionInfo@spwater.org).

***All of the answers provided below apply only to properties in the North Sewer Service Area. Properties in the South Sewer Service Area are not included in the moratorium.***

## Single-Family Residence

### I want to build a new house; can I get a Certificate of Availability to do this?

Yes. If the District has already received payment for the Sewer General Facility Charge for your property to connect, a Certificate of Sewer Availability can be provided.

- This would be likely if your property is in a new development served by sewer.
- If your property was assessed in a Sewer Utility Local Improvement District (ULID), District staff can check to see if a Sewer General Facility Charge was included.

No. A Certificate of Sewer Availability will not be provided if a Sewer General Facility Charge has not been paid for the property.

### I just want to remodel my house; can I get a Certificate of Availability to do this?

Yes, but only under the following circumstances:

- You are already a sewer customer, and don't need a larger water meter for your remodel (if the remodel includes many new plumbing fixtures).

*or*

- If the District has already received payment for the Sewer General Facility Charge for your property.
  - *If your property was assessed in a Sewer Utility Local Improvement District (ULID) the District can check to see if a Sewer General Facility Charge was included.*

No. If a Sewer General Facility Charge has not been paid for the property.

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## **I am on a septic system and want to change to sewer service. Can I connect to the sewer system?**

If your septic system is failing, you will be allowed to connect after confirmation of the failing septic system is provided by the King County Health Department. If your septic is functioning properly, your interest in connecting is not urgent or health related, and you will have to wait until the moratorium is lifted.

## **I have an Agreement for Future Connection to Sewer with the District, and was told I needed to connect; do I still need to connect now?**

If the District has previously informed you that you are required to connect to the sewer system by a certain date, the District may contact you and provide a new date for the required connection.

## **I have a third-party agreement that requires connection to the sewer system; can I connect?**

No. During the moratorium, you would not be allowed to connect to the sewer system.

## **I am not near a sewer, can I get the Certificate of Sewer Availability required to submit for approval of the new septic system and/or for a building permit based on use of a septic system?**

No. During the moratorium, you cannot obtain a Certificate of Sewer Availability to apply for a building permit based on a septic system.

## **I don't want sewer service; can I get a Certificate of Sewer Availability needed to submit to the Health Department for a septic system?**

No. During the moratorium, you cannot obtain a Certificate of Sewer Availability to apply for a building permit based on a septic system.

## **My lot is in a new development, can I still connect to the sewer?**

Yes. If the development was completed, including installation of sewers and full payment of the Sewer General Facility Charge.

## Development Projects

### **I have a Developer Extension Agreement; can I still go ahead with my project?**

Existing projects with Developer Extension Agreements that have an active development permit with the land use agency can proceed without interruption.

If a project does not have an active development permit and requires a new Certificate of Sewer Availability, updated certificates will only be issued based on the number of connections covered by previously paid General Facility Charges.

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## **I have a Developer Extension Agreement, but the land use agency is asking for an updated/new Certificate of Sewer Availability, can I get one?**

If a project permit has lapsed, and a new Certificate of Sewer Availability is required, it will only be issued up to the number of connections covered by previously paid General Facility Charges.

### District Sewer System

#### **What kind of planning does the District do for its sewer system?**

The District prepares Wastewater Comprehensive Plans. The District's current Wastewater Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2013 and is presently in the process of being revised. With respect to the North Sewer Service Area, the District completed the following:

- 2016 North Diversion Interim Improvement Evaluation
- 2021 North Diversion Phase 1 Interim Improvement Analysis

#### **Why is there insufficient capacity to serve the North Sewer Service Area?**

Before the design of this area was completed in the early 1990s, METRO (now King County Wastewater Treatment Division) told the District that long-term alternatives directing all District flow to the south would not be acceptable, and they would accept flow from the north area only on an interim basis.

Following King County's direction, the system was not designed to carry the full flow from the North Sewer Service Area. The District has been waiting for King County to implement the regional project to direct flows north, the Sammamish Plateau Diversion (SPD). Generally, the District is underserved by the King County regional wastewater system since we only have one connection point available to our growing service area due to King County's failure to extend regional sewer conveyance in the District.

#### **Why do I hear different answers from the District and King County about capacity of the sewer system?**

King County's recent statements indicate that the **King County-owned** sewer system south of the District does not **currently** have limitations on the flow that can be accepted from the District's sewer system.

The District's sewer system, while carrying regional level flows, is considered a local system, and is not owned by King County. This is where there are current capacity limitations.

The King County statement regarding their capacity stops short of disclosing that the King County owned sewer system south of the District will not have the capacity to take all District flows as the District continues to grow, and continues to require some District flows eventually be redirected to the north.

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## **When will added capacity be provided by King County? I hear different dates when new County systems will be added.**

The date when King County has indicated the Sammamish Plateau Diversion (SPD, previously called the North Diversion) has changed over time.

- In 2005, King County represented it was to be installed by 2020.
- Following adoption of the 2007 King County Conveyance System Improvement (CSI) Program, the District was told the SPD could be installed by 2025.
- By 2017, the date for completion of SPD had advanced to 2026, and then was delayed until 2028.
- In 2018, the project was removed from King County funding plans without engaging the District regarding our needs, and no date for installation was provided.
- In April 2019, a King County representative indicated that the delivery of the SPD was deferred to beyond 2040.
- As of 2021, King County representatives indicated they plan to have the SPD in service by 2030.

However, installation of this project requires approval of funding by the King County Council, and is not guaranteed. The earliest that funding would be guaranteed, as part of a full County budget is 2023-2024.

## **What is King County doing to solve this problem?**

Resolving the situation that has resulted in the moratorium requires short-term and long-term solutions.

King County has indicated that the short-term solution is a local problem, to be addressed by the District. In spite of King County representing in 2019 that it would participate financially to fund infrastructure, the County has not yet offered any resources to address the deficiencies resulting in the moratorium.

The District has taken the initiative to address the problem by imposing the moratorium to evaluate both short-term and long-term solutions while attempting to engage King County to participate in the solutions. The District declared an emergency and is presently procuring engineering services to design and construct system improvements.

## **King County has indicated they have accelerated the work on the Sammamish Plateau Diversion (SPD) project. Does this mean it could be completed sooner than 2030?**

King County Wastewater Treatment Division has stated they have “accelerated” work on the SPD project. This appears to mean they have restarted the work that was halted in 2018, for a project, which was originally scheduled for completion by 2028, when funding for the project was removed. It does not mean the SPD project will be completed earlier than 2030. In light of current circumstances and lack of funding from King County, the District is pursuing improvements to allow the moratorium to be lifted, independent of King County.

## What has and is the District doing to solve this problem?

The District...

- ...completed a study in 2016 to identify projects to provide relief from current operational issues and expand capacity of the system.
- ...at the conclusion of the 2016 study, took action to implement some of the identified solutions, which did provide some increase to the capacity of the system.
- ...conducted a follow-up study at the request of King County, when the District became aware the SPD had been removed from the County's capital plan, to include both long and short-term solutions based on the uncertain date for installation of the SPD project.
- ...implemented additional monitoring of flows at its lakefront lift stations to monitor system capacity and limitations.
- ...is currently working to design additional improvements and construct to further alleviate current operational concerns and further expand capacity of the system.
- ...is increasing flow monitoring in the system, to better track flows throughout the year, and as growth continues.

## When did the District begin recognizing it may have a sewer capacity problem?

The District began evaluation of potential capacity issues in the North Sewer Service Area its 2013 Wastewater Comprehensive Plan, which included setting triggers for capacity limits.

The trigger at the North Lake Lift Station was first reached during a storm in December 2019, and has occurred on four additional occasions to date. The lift station flow trigger occurs during large, extended rain events that cause increased infiltration and inflow to overload the sewer system.

## Infiltration & Inflow

### What is infiltration and inflow?

Infiltration is water that enters the sewer system through cracks in pipes and maintenance holes. Inflow is storm water that enters the gravity system through connections to roof and foundation drains, storm water system connections, or manhole covers. The District's sewer system is separate from the storm water system and no stormwater connections are allowed. In spite of system separation, stormwater inevitably enters and affects all sewer systems.

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## Why does rain cause the problem with the sewer?

All sanitary sewer systems experience infiltration and inflow (I&I), and it occurs during dry weather too. However, rain raises the groundwater level, exposing more of the sewer system to groundwater infiltration. Rain events, especially multi-day or intense storms, can cause ponding on the surface, and more stormwater may enter the sewer from areas at the top of the manhole, such as through manhole lids. If there is an illicit connection from a stormwater system into the sewer, this is more likely to add flow during a rain event.

The District's sewer system does experience I&I, but when compared with the regional system, it is considered to have a relatively low level of I&I.

## How is the District addressing infiltration and inflow into its sewers?

The District is developing methods to better track and identify the level of I&I within the sewer basins throughout the District. This effort has been simplified through the installation of Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Water Meters. This allows the District to directly compare daily water use by sewer customers to the sewage that is pumped that same day at District lift stations. Before the AMI meters were installed, the District only had information on water use every two months, which required using average water use values, rather than actual daily use.

Another improvement in monitoring the flow in the sewer system has been through methods to get better automated and frequent measurement of the flows at the sewage lift stations.

The District has an annual maintenance program that includes inspection of manholes, and sewer mains including internal surveys with a camera.

## Certificates of Availability

### Why did the District continue to issue Certificates of Sewer Availability...

#### **...after King County funding for the Sammamish Plateau Diversion (SPD) project was deferred?**

After being advised by King County in 2018 that the SPD would not be built by 2028, the District devoted its staff resources to complete a second interim improvement evaluation at the request of the County. During the course of managing this project on behalf of King County, the District began recognizing its North Sewer Service Area system was reaching capacity during winter months due to I&I. Until flow triggers were met, there was no basis to limit the issuance of certificates of availability.

#### **...after the December 2019 storm that resulted in flows that exceeded the flow trigger?**

The District monitored system constraints after the 2019 storm event where indications of the sewer system reaching capacity first appeared. At the time there was no data to confirm this would become a persistent condition. Ongoing system monitoring confirms the system is reaching capacity and issuing certificates could result in environmental and/or property impacts.

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## Why did the District issue the Town Center Certificates of Availability in October 2019?

The Certificates of Availability for three (3) projects in the Town Center were issued in October 2019. At that point in time, the District had not experienced the December 2019 storm that exceeded the flow trigger. Normal District procedures were followed for issuing the Certificates of Availability for these developments.

## What is the process for issuing Certificates of Availability?

The District receives applications for Certificates of Availability that include information about the applicant, property owner, the property included, and a description of the proposed project.

- If the project is for an individual single-family residence, the Certificate of Availability is administered and issued at the staff level.
- If the project is for a subdivision, multi-family or non-residential project, or requires extension of new water and/or sewer mains, the applicant must enter into a Developer Extension Agreement (DEA) with the District. DEAs are agreements with the District, and are each approved by the Board of Commissioners. After the Board has approved the DEA, District staff may issue the Certificate of Availability.

## How long are Certificates of Availability valid?

Certificates must be provided to the land use agency (City or County) as part of a permit application within one (1) year of the date when the Certificate was issued. Once the Certificate has been accepted by the land use agency as part of a permit application, the Certificate stays valid as part of the permit. Land use processes, such as short plats, plats or commercial developments may take several years to be completed.

## How does the moratorium affect the Sammamish Town Center project?

The moratorium applies to all properties located in the District's North Sewer Service Area, which have not been issued sewer certificates of availability. Three (3) Sammamish Town Center component projects were issued Certificates of Availability in October 2019. All other areas of the Sammamish Town Center Project not previously issued certificates of availability are subject to the moratorium.

## How long could the moratorium be in effect?

The current moratorium is in effect for 90 days (expires at midnight on May 24, 2021) during which time the District will be seeking solutions, including designing capital improvements to provide relief and to allow the moratorium to be reconsidered. It is estimated some projects could be implemented in 1-3 years.

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### **Is it true the moratorium could last 25 to 30 years?**

The District has never stated the moratorium would be in effect for 25-30 years. Interim improvement are estimated to be possible in a 1-3 year timeframe, and King County has publicly represented the SPD is to be completed in 2030. The District will be pursuing interim and long-term solutions to allow the moratorium to be lifted in the future.