



On-Site Septic Systems

by Peter Rimbos, GMVUAC Corresponding Secretary

On Monday, July 1, the Area Council held its regular monthly meeting at the Maple Valley Fire Station and via Zoom. Major topics discussed were: (1) On-Site Septic Systems; (2) Local Community Plan; (3) 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Update; and (4) Proposed Code Enforcement Changes.

On-Site Septic Systems

Health & Environmental Investigator, Meagan Jackson, of the King County Department of Public Health (DPH), discussed On-Site Septic Systems (OSSs). The DPH OSS Program helps ensure over 85,000 sewage/septic systems in King County are safe. OSSs treat wastewater when homes and buildings are not connected to public sewer systems. The program also provides permitting and educational services for owners of septic systems, and certifications for septic professionals.

This past January the Washington State Board of Health approved changes to statewide OSS rules. As a result, King County is updating its Codes to make sure they comply with those changes. The Board of Health will vote on changes in November and in January 2025 the King County Code updates will go into effect. The Code was last updated in 2007.

The DPH uses an *OSS Technical Advisory Committee*, which provides the opportunity for partners and impacted parties to participate in policy development and problem resolution. The Area Council's Warren Iverson serves on the committee. DPH has met with committee to discuss what code changes to pursue in the following categories:

Certification of OSS professionals: Done annually to ensure property owners have access to trained professionals.

Land use and development: Provide clarity and best practices for land use so that property development is aligned with wastewater treatment needs, and healthy OSS can support long term property use.

Design specifications: Find simple requirements to meet nitrogen reduction needs. The state updated nitrogen reduction requirements to address potential OSS nitrogen pollution in groundwater. King County already has some requirements, but wants to ensure its implementation is straightforward and protects groundwater sources.

Repairs and remodeling: Fix small problems before they become bigger, more complex, and more expensive and ensure each property owner can do so easily while also making sure that repairs will properly treat wastewater to prevent public health issues.

Operation and maintenance: Ensure property owners have OSSs that operate property and are maintained so that sewage is sufficiently treated. Failures can be a threat to public health.

DPH is taking a bottoms-up approach to decide what Code is actually needed. Some of the aspects of applicable King County Code being addressed include:

1. Reevaluate inspection requirements which currently call for inspections twice a year depending on OSS type, currently enforced using a risk-based system, i.e., locations where a failure could cause larger problems, such as along a shoreline. Gravity systems are on a 3-yr cycle.
2. Protect against *unpermitted* installations—increase fines on those who scam homeowners.
3. Add clear expectations for OSS industry level of service—basically a Code of Ethics.
4. Change time-of-sale inspection timeline to be valid for 12 months instead of 6 months.

More information can be found at: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/environmental-health/on-site-sewage-systems/>.

Local Community Plan

King County Strategic Planning Manager, Susan McLain, and Subarea Planner, Katherine Shaffer, continued discussions of the upcoming Greater Maple Valley/Cedar River (GMV/CR) Community Service Area (CSA). Please note that the Area Council territory makes up much of the GMV/CR CSA and, thus, this will be the Subarea Plan for our local area—the first in over 30 years.

Susan and Katherine introduced a series of Maps based on recent census data, zoning, land-use, etc. These will serve the basis for communication with the Public as the Plan is developed over the next 2 years.

The Area Council has created a webpage (<http://gmvuac.org/gmvcr-csa-subarea-plan/>) for the GMV/CR CSA Subarea Plan and will continually update it as necessary.

2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Update (Update)

The Area Council continues to coordinate a *Joint Team* of nine Unincorporated Rural Area Councils in participating in the **Update**—a 3-yr effort. The King County Council’s Local Services & Land-Use (LS & L-U) Committee was assigned to review of the King County Executive’s “*Recommended Plan*” released last December.

The Joint Team offered multiple Oral Testimonies of many key issues at the June 5 of the LS&L-U Committee. After hearing Public testimonies the Committee voted to forward its Recommendation on the **Update** to the full King County Council. The Joint Team has developed a Contact Plan to meet one-on-one with each of the nine King County Councilmembers in July and August to discuss and request *sponsorship* its proposed Line Amendments to the LS&L-U Committee’s Recommendation for the **Update**.

Final approval by the full Council will take place some time this December. All information on the **Update** can be found at: <https://kingcounty.gov/so-so/dept/council/governance-leadership/council/useful-links/comprehensive-plan/2024>.

Proposed Code Enforcement Changes

In early June the King County Department of Local Services (DLS), Permitting Division, released a proposed Ordinance to “*to streamline and provide clarity in the code enforcement process to shorten the time between initial complaint and resolution*” (<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/local-services/governance-leadership/local-government-for-unincorporated-king-county/proposed-legislation-for-public-review.aspx>). The Joint Team reviewed the proposed Ordinance and submitted a detailed Comment

Letter (<http://gmvuac.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Jt-Tm-Comment-LTR-Proposed-KC-Code-Enforc-Reform.pdf>) to King County DLS on June 30, the deadline for Public comment.

The Comment Letter emphasized that our zoning laws define and protect our property rights and investments. Unfortunately, the proposed Ordinance, if implemented in its current form by the King County Council, could impede the preservation of rural character and the protection of our natural resources including farmlands, forests, watersheds, salmon, open spaces, critical areas, wildlife habitat, and many other qualities provided by our rural areas.

Consequently, the Comment Letter called for not only for specific changes in the proposed Ordinance, but a rethinking of how the County can best handle its responsibilities under state law, rather than weaken its Code and, thus, its code-enforcement responsibilities.

Next Area Council Meeting

The next Area Council monthly meeting will be held Monday, August 5, from 7 - 9:30 PM, at a special location: **Shadow Lake Community Beach, 18961 SE 216 St, Renton, WA 98058**. Meetings are held on the *first* Monday of the month (except for Holidays, when they are held on the *second* Monday). All meeting announcements, agendas, and Zoom information are posted on the Area Council's [Website](http://www.gmvuac.org) (www.gmvuac.org) and local *NextDoor* platforms. You can also find us on our [FaceBook page](https://www.facebook.com/GMVUAC/) (https://www.facebook.com/GMVUAC/). Each meeting begins with an open Public Comment period where anyone can voice concerns, comments, etc.

Area Council Membership

Your Area Council, founded in 1978, is one of the longest continuously active local councils. It serves as an all-volunteer, locally recognized advisory body to King County on behalf of all rural unincorporated area residents living in the Tahoma School District (TSD). The Area Council, in "*working to keep the Rural Area rural*," collaborates *regionally* with other King County Rural Area organizations through both the *Joint Team* and its *Joint Transportation Initiative*.

The twelve-seat Area Council has four open seats. If you have an interest in joining, please send an e-mail to: info@gmvuac.org *or* attend (either in-person or virtually) a monthly meeting and express your interest. To be eligible to join the Area Council as a *Member* you need to live *within* the TSD.

Residents, even those not living *within* the TSD, are eligible to become *Associate Members* who can serve (including as Chair or Vice-Chair) on any Area Council Committee: *Environment, Growth Management, Transportation, Public Relations, or Train Show*. For information on each of these committees please see the Area Council's [Website](http://www.gmvuac.org) (www.gmvuac.org) and use the drop-down menu under *Committees*.

All Monthly Meeting Summary Articles can be found on our Home page in the *2024/2023 GMVUAC Monthly Meeting Articles* box or by using the drop-down menu under *Correspondence*.