

Septic Financing Advisory Committee

Final Recommendations

Local Septic Management Programs

The Advisory Committee recommends creation of sustainable, long-term funding for local septic management programs. The funding should include the following components:

1. Septic Fee Legislation

Legislation should be enacted (amending RCW70.05.190) to require Puget Sound counties to collect an annual fee from all septic owners to implement the local septic management plans. The legislation should require implementation of foundational services, and assign the Department of Health (DOH) oversight responsibilities to approve plans and ensure local accountability delivering the services. The legislation should emphasize the importance of state and local collaboration.

2. Annual Septic Fee

The annual fee should cover the cost of implementing foundational services, currently estimated to be \$39.80 per septic system.

3. Foundational Services

Puget Sound local septic management plans should be updated at least once every five years to meet requirements and standards and to identify local priorities. Plans should be required to include the following foundational services:

- Septic System Inventory
 - ✓ Locate and have records for all septic systems.
- Septic System Inspections
 - ✓ Educate homeowners on the proper use and care of systems and homeowner responsibilities.
 - ✓ Oversee septic owner inspection requirements and enforce compliance as appropriate. Provide oversight of inspections to ensure quality inspections are conducted. Provide technical assistance to assist homeowners in fixing problems.
 - ✓ Track and verify that septic systems are current with inspection requirements at the time of property sale or transfer, and when local development permits are reviewed.
- Compliance Program
 - ✓ Maintain an effective enforcement program to ensure that owners repair or replace problem septic systems.
- Water Quality Monitoring
 - ✓ Conduct water quality monitoring¹ to proactively identify areas where septic systems may be impacting water quality.

¹ "Water quality monitoring" is a broad term that includes various types of monitoring, including surveys, ambient monitoring, sampling, etc.

4. Performance Standards

DOH should work with the Puget Sound Local Health Jurisdictions (LHJs) and other stakeholders to develop benchmarks and performance standards for the foundational services and other program requirements to measure implementation outcomes and to standardize key aspects of the local septic management programs.

5. Water Quality Monitoring/PIC Programs

Local Health Jurisdictions should use Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) programs as their required water quality monitoring program, as funding allows.

6. Financing Coordination

DOH, the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP), and other agencies should coordinate as appropriate on related legislative finance initiatives, including the integrated water package.

Property Owner Septic Loan Program

The Advisory Committee recommends creation of a regional loan program to provide loans to fix failing septic systems. Priority should be given to septic systems that pose a risk to public health or water quality.

The loan program should include the following components:

7. Funding Sources

The loan program should be capitalized with funds from the Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund and Centennial Clean Water Grant program. The loan program should be designed to be flexible enough to add capital, through the existing competitive process and/or from other sources, if loan demand exceeds available capital or the loan program expands.

8. Loan Program Administration

DOH, in coordination with Ecology and participating counties, should coordinate, capitalize, and administer a regional loan program to fund septic system repairs or replacements.

9. Eligibility Criteria

Septic owners in participating jurisdictions should be eligible for loans to repair, replace, or connect existing septic systems without limitations based on income. The lead implementing agency or lender should determine the appropriate security for a loan. The implementing agency or lender should be authorized to establish a practical minimum loan amount, if necessary.

10. Geographic Coverage

All marine counties should be invited to participate in the initial loan program. The lead implementing agency should be authorized to expand geographic coverage over time to include other counties.