

MWPAAC Joint Subcommittee Meeting

January 8, 2026 Meeting Summary

Agenda:

1. Welcome & Introductions – 8:30 am (5 min)

Gregg Cato, Rates & Finance Subcommittee Vice Chair

2. Director's Report – 8:35 am (10 mins)

Kamuron Gurol, Director, WTD

Director Gurol gave an update on impacts from the recent heavy rains and flooding. The entire Department of Natural Resources & Parks was very busy during and after the storm, especially the Water & Land division. Recovery work is still ongoing. A few highlights related to WTD:

- There was 24/7 work to prevent flooding at the Black Diamond Pump Station. An adjacent lake had risen. Pumper trucks were used around the clock to reduce inflows at the station.
- A levee breach along Green River closed South Plant to non-essential staff.
- At the Sunset and Heathfield Pump Stations, there were a couple pump failures due to power feed issues. Generators and quick staff responses prevented overflow into Lake Sammamish.
- Roads to the Carnation Treatment Plant was inaccessible due to flooding. An operator named Tyler had to run the plant by himself for several days. His heroism was covered in local media.

Director Gurol praised the professionalism of staff in managing the difficult event. There was a great deal of work before and during the event. He also noted investments in the system that also helped prevent serious impacts from the heavy rains and flooding.

Other highlights from the Director's Report:

- Consultants are being interviewed for the third-party review of the Capital program.
- They are trying to meet deadlines associated with provisos and the County Council's Work Plan. WTD staff have limited capacity to take on additional work in coming months.
- CFO Courtney Black left WTD in December. Position is out for recruitment. Caitlyn Hall and others will be stepping up in the interim.
- There has been much interest in the various rate path scenarios. It's important to realize that every run of a scenario is a complex process to figure out – not like pressing a button.
- There is a new County Executive, Girmay Zahilay. He is excited and is building his team.

3. Regional Utility Summit Discussion – 8:45 (30 mins)

A few attendees shared their thoughts about the recent Regional Utility Rate Summit, which was held in November in SeaTac. Their remarks are summarized below.

John McClellan, MWPAAC Chair:

- This summit was a new thing. Many were involved in creating it and making it happen including staff from King County, City of Kirkland, and Sound Cities Association (SCA). Their intent is to bring all utilities and many elected officials together across the Puget Sound region to highlight the rate affordability issue.
- The summit proved there is lots of interest and enthusiasm in the affordability issue. Early-stage planning is under way for future summits.

Kamuron Guroi, Director, WTD:

- The summit was a big success. Six utilities were involved in planning and presenting. SCA, Seattle, Kirkland, WTD agencies. Lots of volunteer work went into finding a venue, organizing content, etc.
- The summit featured presentations in morning (MWPAAC should get access to the briefing packet) with breakout sessions.
- In the afternoon a group of elected and appointed officials discussed what they heard and what it meant.
- There was a consensus that even more people need to attend in the future and be tuned into the content.
- There is talk of a potential additional summit in 2026.
- Regarding advocacy related to rate affordability, any proposals to the WA State Legislature won't happen during 2026 Legislative Session.

Laura Belmont, Policy Analyst at SCA

- As a staffer for both wastewater and solid waste committees for SCA, it's interesting that each agency tends to look only at its own rates and their industry's rates. Households see all the high rates from all the utilities/services at the same time.
- Many people at the Summit were surprised at how intense the affordability problem is and how much worse its projected to get.
- Many questions centered around how to maximize return on investments.
 - Conversations with state? More data-driven regulations?
- Attendees identified need for city councilmembers to talk to state legislators and regulators. Spread network to others, tribes, etc.
- The next steps aren't totally clear.

Maria Coe, MWPAAC Vice Chair

- The Summit was a great way to start the conversation. Many people were surprised about the rate affordability problem.
- The problem of high rates is at least somewhat impacted by policy decisions. We have high cost factors in our region. We need to find a balance, to protect the environment in the most cost-effective way.

Andy Baker, Economist at Cascade Water Alliance

- The Summit was an important first step.
- Hopeful that we will see more collaboration at elected level and staff level.

- There is an opportunity and a need for more collaboration and working together.
- Addressing the affordability issue will involve tradeoffs.

Questions, comments, discussion:

- What did Summit attendees learn about other types of utilities that this Wastewater-focused group might want to know?
 - There is a common theme across all types of utilities - the challenge of aging infrastructure. Also the concern that regulations are crowding out investments for asset management “bread and butter” projects; and concern about bang for the buck to comply with big regulatory changes.
 - Also there is a ripple effect of power rates. When they go up, WTD and others must also increase their rates.

4. Recommendations for Independent Oversight, Update on Progress – 9:15 (20 mins)

Chad Merrill, Capital Delivery Strategy, Quality and Standards Unit Manager, WTD

Mr. Merrill gave an update on the approach to addressing MWPAAC’s request for independent oversight of WTD’s capital program. He presented from a slide deck that was shared with attendees before the meeting.

His presentation covered:

- Proposed structure of work, with KC Auditor Office directing work of consultant.
- Consultant selection panel (includes 1 MWPAAC Board Member)
- Scope Elements for Review
 - Capital Planning & Project Selection Process
 - Program and Project Delivery Effectiveness
 - Project Controls and Governance
 - Process Benchmarking & Best Practices
 - Review of Mega Projects (over \$100M)
- Preferred Consultant Qualifications (slide 10)

Questions, comments, discussion:

- Attendees thanked Mr. Merrill for his work and his presentation, noting that he had incorporated recommendations from MWPAAC Board Members who sat on the Capital Preparedness Workshop.
- Question about whether a hybrid option was considered (a mix between two different options [external, internal, blue ribbon, e.g.])
- Comment – hopefully when a good consultant is chosen, we consider not just who they have worked with but also how good the client agency has been since working with the consultant.

5. Adjournment – 9:42 am

No additional comments, Vice Chair Cato called for adjournment.