Wastewater Leader Insights

King County
Wastewater Treatment

King County engaged wastewater leaders on how to better protect water quality now and for future generations.

We are at a critical juncture. Wastewater utilities nationwide face aging infrastructure, climate change, evolving regulations, workforce shortages, increasing capacity demands, and affordability issues, all threatening water quality and public health. To envision the future of our wastewater system by 2100, King County sought inspiration from wastewater leaders nationwide and beyond. By leveraging peer insights and proactively addressing challenges, we can secure a resilient and flourishing future. These leaders, selected for their expertise and notable contributions to the water sector, shared success stories and perspectives on opportunities wastewater utilities can harness over the coming decades. Their insights, summarized below, helped set the foundation for shaping vision options for King County's Vision for Clean Water.

> *"Future leaders must embrace the transformative power of listening deeply to their communities, responding with vision, and pushing the boundaries of possibility to become anchors of positive change."*
> *— Kevin Shafer, Executive Director at MMSD*

Deepen and communicate the utility's value-add to communities

- Become a trusted community partner and anchor institution, well-known for serving a vital role in improving economy, health, environment, and well-being.
- Take meaningful action to better communicate the utility's benefits provided to the public.
- Treat the community as an equal partner in decision-making.

Advance equity and support household water affordability

- Ensure low-income households can pay their water bills. Targeted assistance programs can help.
- Use robust, long-term planning to manage costs and avoid sudden rate increases.

Develop a robust and resilient workforce

- Develop a sustainable, mission-driven workforce. Attract talent through a reputation as an environmental champion.
- Remove barriers to entry into the water workforce and increase staff engagement in the community.

Champion environmental stewardship through "circular water economy"

- Embrace circular water economy to recycle and recover valuable resources, maximizing value.
- Commit to managing resources sustainably and reducing environmental impact. Strive for net zero carbon emissions.
- Offset costs by monetizing recovered heat, water, energy, and nutrients.

Embrace technologically advanced and efficient systems

- Utilize new technology to control costs, improve operational efficiency, and quickly respond to issues.
- Implement an Environmental Management System (EMS) to reduce costs, ensure compliance, and enhance overall environmental performance.
- Attract digital specialists like AI and cybersecurity professionals.

Implement holistic, integrated management practices

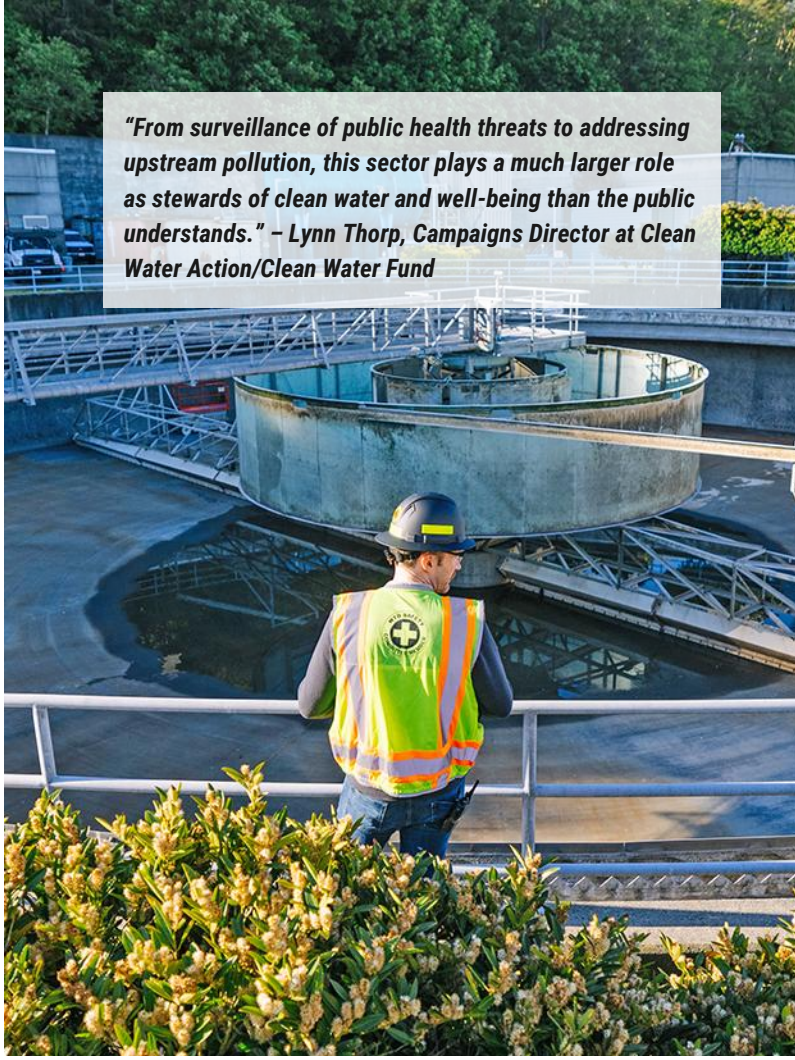
- Adopt an integrated approach to water and wastewater management to meet community and ecosystem needs.
- Share knowledge with other infrastructure sectors, public health agencies, academia, and science organizations.
- Collaborate proactively with regulatory agencies and advocate for an integrated regulatory approach.

Manage contaminants of emerging concern (CECs) and other pollutants

- Implement regional source control initiatives, collaborating across sectors to reduce pollutants entering the system.
- Utilize advanced treatment technologies to monitor CECs.

Ensure resilient systems throughout changing future conditions

- Adapt existing infrastructure to handle changing conditions such as climate change, population growth, and disasters.
- Support green infrastructure and nature-based solutions as adaptable, multi-benefit approaches for climate resiliency.
- Consider decentralization of large facilities into neighborhood systems.



"From surveillance of public health threats to addressing upstream pollution, this sector plays a much larger role as stewards of clean water and well-being than the public understands." – Lynn Thorp, Campaigns Director at Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund

As we look to the future, the insights and experiences shared by these wastewater leaders illuminate a path forward. By embracing innovative solutions, prioritizing environmental stewardship, and envisioning what is possible for our communities when we do things right, King County can ensure that our wastewater system meets today's challenges and thrives in the face of future demands, securing clean water for generations to come.

"Public leaders must view their water utilities as a multi-benefit resource so that every dollar invested strengthens their communities beyond clean water."— Karen Pallansch, former Executive Director at AlexRenew

Interviewees

King County is grateful for the time and thoughtful participation of all interviewees.

- Charles Bott, Hampton Roads Sanitation District
- Peter Grevatt, Water Research Foundation
- Kamuron Gurol, King County Wastewater Treatment Division
- George Hawkins, DC Water (former), Moonshot Missions
- Ted Henifin, Hampton Roads Sanitation District, Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT) Program (former); JXN Water
- Adam Krantz, National Association of Clean Water Agencies
- Andy Kricun, Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (former), Moonshot Missions
- Victoria K. Kristensen, State of Green, Denmark
- Bryn Nelson, Science Writer and Author of "Flush: The Remarkable Science of an Unlikely Treasure"
- Karen Pallansch, AlexRenew (former), Cross Water Strategies
- Kishia L. Powell, WSSC Water
- Lionel Puhuyesva, Hopi Tribe, Water Resources Program (former); Moonshot Missions
- Kevin Shafer, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
- Tom Sigmund, NEW Water (former)
- Beverley Stinson, AECOM
- Lynn Thorp, Clean Water Action/ Clean Water Fund

Learn more. Visit our website at **kingcounty.gov/VisionForCleanWater**

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