



Update on capacity charge studies

The King County Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) recently completed a Rate Design Study that looked at how the capacity charge is allocated to different types of buildings. For more information on our findings, please review the [rate design study report](#) on our website.

The goal of the Rate Design Study is to develop a basis for the capacity charge that

- reflects the approximate amount of wastewater each type of unit sends to the sewer and
- is administratively workable.

How the capacity charge is distributed

Currently, the capacity charge is based on the type of unit (for residential structures) or plumbing fixtures (for commercial structures). A detached single housing unit is considered one residential customer. The capacity charge for other types of residential units—such as multi-unit, accessory dwelling units, or microhousing—is based on a percentage of one residential customer equivalent (RCE), which determines how much customers will pay. Most of these percentages were established in 2001.

The King County Council established an [interim rate classification for accessory dwelling](#) units effective June 29, 2019.

The capacity charge helps pay for the system of pipes, treatment plants, and other wastewater facilities that serve a growing regional customer base.

Proposed changes to the capacity charge basis

The proposal would use data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other housing surveys on the average persons per household (PPH) to set the percentage of one RCE for each type of residence. Using PPH would reflect the approximate amount of wastewater each type of unit sends to the sewer.

The current RCE percentages closely resemble the percentages that are based on these data. So, in fact, there would be little change. However, using survey data means the capacity charge basis can be updated regularly to reflect new housing trends as new data become available.

Two options for single-family homes

Single detached dwelling units will remain the base unit for the RCE, but there are two options to consider: continue to have one category for all single detached homes or create three categories for small, medium, and large single detached homes. Small homes would pay less for the capacity charge and large homes would pay more. The data show that three categories would better reflect the average PPH and, therefore, the amount of wastewater a home is likely to send to the sewer. However, it adds some administrative complexity.

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Options for capacity charge categories

The table below shows the percentages of one RCE that would be used to determine the capacity charge for each type of building.

| | Current | Option 1 | Option 2 |
|--|---|--|---|
| Basis for RCE | Historical | Persons per household | Persons per household |
| Base unit | Single detached (all) | Single detached (all) 1 RCE = 2.79 PPH | Single detached (medium) 1 RCE = 2.88 PPH |
| Single detached | All = 1 RCE | All = 1 RCE | Small ¹ = 0.81 RCE Medium = 1 RCE Large = 1.16 RCE |
| Multi-unit | 2 to 4 units = 0.8 RCE 5+ units = 0.64 RCE | 2 to 4 units = 0.84 RCE 5+ units = 0.65 RCE | 2 to 4 units = 0.81 RCE 5+ units = 0.63 RCE |
| Detached accessory dwelling units ² | 0.6 RCE | 0.61 RCE | 0.59 RCE |
| Attached accessory dwelling units | 0.6 RCE | 0.61 RCE | 0.59 RCE |
| Micro-housing | Fixture count, approximately 0.35 RCE | 0.36 RCE | 0.35 RCE |
| Commercial buildings | 20 fixture units = 1 RCE | 20 fixture units = 1 RCE | 20 fixture units = 1 RCE |

¹ In this example, single detached units are categorized as small (<1,500 sq. ft.), medium (1,500–2,999 sq. ft.), and large (≥3,000 sq. ft.).

² Detached accessory dwelling units are less than 1,000 sq. ft.

Here's how much the capacity charge (paid upfront) would cost by each option:

| Estimated total capacity charge by option based on 2020 monthly capacity charge | | | |
|---|---------|----------|----------|
| Building categories | Current | Option 1 | Option 2 |
| Single detached (all) | \$66.35 | \$65.52 | - |
| Single detached (<1,500 sq. ft.) | \$66.35 | \$65.52 | \$53.46 |
| Single detached (1,500 – 2,999 sq. ft.) | \$66.35 | \$65.52 | \$66.00 |
| Single detached (≥3,000 sq. ft.) | \$66.35 | \$65.52 | \$76.56 |
| Multi-unit (2 to 4 units) | \$53.08 | \$55.03 | \$53.46 |
| Multi-unit (5+ units) | \$42.46 | \$42.58 | \$41.58 |
| Accessory dwelling units | \$39.81 | \$39.96 | \$38.94 |
| Microhousing | \$23.22 | \$23.59 | \$23.10 |

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Next steps

In fall 2019, WTD will be gathering feedback from local sewer agencies and other stakeholders on the two options. Any proposed changes to the capacity charge rate structure would require a change to King County Code.

We want to hear from you

We want your feedback on the recommended changes for the capacity charge rate structure. Please take this short survey by Oct. 18, 2019. We will provide a summary of public feedback to decision-makers: <https://publicinput.com/5066>.

Low-income customer changes underway

Another study, the Low-Income Customer Affordability Study, finished in June with the adoption of assistance programs including payment deferrals for low-income seniors and disabled individuals, more flexible payment plans, and connecting customers to health and human services resources. Read more about those changes in the [Summer Update](#).

How to stay updated

For more information, contact Eunice Lee, King County Wastewater Division Community Services, at elee@kingcounty.gov or 206-263-1614, or visit the [capacity charge studies webpage](#).
<https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/wastewater/capacity-charge/review-studies.aspx>.

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