

Sewer Connection – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the average lifespan of a septic system?

The average lifespan of a septic system is 30 to 50 years, depending on several factors:

- **Maintenance:** Regular inspections and pumping help keep the system working properly. Lack of maintenance can shorten your system's lifespan and lead to early failure.
- **Usage:** More people, more wastewater, and allowing unsuitable waste into the septic system can shorten the system's lifespan.
- **Design and materials:** High-quality materials and proper installation extend a system's durability.
- **Soil and location:** Soil conditions and depth of components affect how long the system lasts.

Older systems become less efficient, and they fail, similar to roofs and furnaces. Proactive planning can help you avoid unexpected costs, interrupted wastewater disposal, or delays later.

If your system is over 30 years old, you should plan for repairs, replacement, or connection to public sewer.

When am I required to connect to sewer?

Under KC BOH 13.04.050 and KCC 13.24.136, you must connect to public sewer if:

- Your property is inside the Urban Growth Area (UGA) **and**
- The city or sewer utility allows connection **and**
- Your property is within 200 feet of public sewer and you are:
 - Building a new house or commercial building
 - Creating new lots through short plat or subdivision
 - Repairing or replacing a failing septic system that cannot be replaced with a system that conforms to current standards (or code).
 - Doing a remodel, addition, or other construction that affects the septic system
 - i.e. doesn't meet setbacks, adding a bedroom, bathroom, or plumbing fixtures, expanding the residential footprint, or remodeling that will extend the useful life of the residence beyond that of the septic system
 - Building an ADU or Middle Housing development

KC BOH Title 13.04.050(C) requires that if the sewer main is within 200 feet of your property line, measured by the shortest legal route (right-of-way or easement), and any of the above applies, connection is required. Your property may also be required to connect in accordance with any other local land use agency (i.e. city) rules regarding requirements for connecting to a public sewer system.

What are the advantages of connecting to sewer?

Connecting to sewer can increase property value, free up land area, and make it easier to add an ADU or addition. It reduces maintenance and removes the risk of costly septic repairs or failures. Sewer service sends wastewater to a centralized treatment facility, which helps protect local water resources and supports sustainable community growth. Homes on sewer often sell more easily because buyers prefer the reliability.

How do I know if I'm within 200 feet of a sewer main?

KC BOH Title 13.04.050 indicates that the distance is measured along the shortest route in road rights-of-way and easements from the existing sewer to the nearest point of the lands or premises to be served. You can find your sewer district by accessing our [Septic & Group B Records](#) tool and entering your address or parcel number.

Contact your local Sewer Utility to verify the distance to the nearest connection point. Be sure to get confirmation in writing — a Sewer Availability Certificate or an email statement — for obtaining cost estimates.

What does it cost to connect to sewer?

The total cost to connect to public sewer can vary widely depending on your location, the sewer utility involved, and the layout of your property. In general, costs may include:

- **Sewer Utility permit fees** – These vary by jurisdiction and may include review, inspection, right-of-way permit, and administrative costs.
- **Sewer Utility, local, or general facility charges** – One-time fees charged by the sewer utility to help recover the proportional cost for connecting to existing infrastructure and to assist in expansion and improvements to the overall sewer system to handle the increased demand.
- **Capacity charges** – In some areas (such as those served by King County Wastewater Treatment Division), a separate capacity charge is assessed for new connections to cover system-wide treatment costs.
- **Side sewer installation** – This is the physical work of connecting your home or building to the public sewer line. You must hire a licensed contractor, and the cost can depend on how far the sewer main is from your home, whether the work crosses a public right-of-way, and how deep the trench needs to be. See the Standard Scope of Contractor Bids on page 6 for more information about what is generally included.
- In some situations, extending the sewer mainline may be necessary, which can greatly increase costs. Be sure to confirm feasibility with your sewer utility.

Ongoing costs: After connection, homeowners typically pay a monthly sewer utility fee. These fees cover operation, maintenance, and treatment of wastewater, so property owners usually do not need to worry about pumping, inspections, or system repairs on their own property.

My septic system has been free for 30 years. Why should I have to pay for sewer?

While it may feel like your septic system is “free” once it’s installed, every system has ongoing costs for inspections, pumping, and repairs. Over a 30-year period, assuming proper maintenance, the typical homeowner will spend tens of thousands of dollars to keep a septic system in working order, the table below provides rough estimates of lifetime costs:

Cost Category	Frequency & Assumptions	30-Year Estimated Cost	Notes
Inspections	Every 2 years at \$450 each (15 total)	\$6,750	King County estimate
Pumping	Every 4 years at \$800 each (7–8 total)	\$6,000	King County estimate
System Replacement	Once in 30 years	\$53,220	Craft3 average loan cost (2025)
Total 30-Year Cost		≈ \$66,000	Rounded to nearest thousand

Sources:

- **Craft3 (2025 King County loan data):** Average septic replacement cost of \$53,220; \$2,000 allowance for maintenance inspections included in Craft3 loans.
- **King County Public Health:** Typical inspections can range between \$400-500 and pumping costs between \$600-1,000 based on local maintenance data. Inspections must be completed every 1-3 years depending on system type and pumping occurs every 3-5 years as needed.

Note: These estimates are provided using **2025 data**. If used in future years, please account for inflation and changes in local labor or material costs.

Once connected, property owners generally do not need to worry about on-site inspections, pumping, or the liability and high financial risk that can come with a septic failure on their property. Sewer service often provides greater predictability and protection against large, unexpected bills.

What if the sewer utility won’t allow me to connect?

If the sewer utility **does not permit connection** or has no capacity, you may be allowed to keep using and/or repair your septic system. A **Sewer Availability Certificate** or a **written confirmation by email** from the utility is required to confirm this if submitting an application to the King County On-site Septic Program.

What if sewer is available but connecting would be too expensive?

If connection would require extending the main line or if the cost of connecting is unusually high, you may be eligible to be granted a **Waiver from the Sewer Connection Requirement**. A waiver is not guaranteed. An application must be submitted with cost estimates, and must be reviewed and approved by Public Health, the sewer utility, and the local building or planning department.

Who can qualify for a Waiver from the Sewer Connection Requirement?

By law, properties within the Urban Growth Area are required to connect to public sewer when the existing OSS fails, a conforming system is not possible, and connection to sewer is available. A Waiver from this requirement will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances, such as when connection would place an unreasonable financial burden on the property owner. Waivers are not guaranteed and must be reviewed by Public Health, the sewer utility, and the local building and/or planning dept. **Waivers will not be granted for new development or subdivisions.**

A waiver will not be granted if:

- The site can support a compliant OSS under BOH Title 13; or
- The site is in a sensitive area where connection is needed to protect public health or water quality; or
- An OSS repair or replacement would likely cause ongoing pollution of surface or groundwater; or
- A sewer stub-out is readily available to the site; or
- An easement is available through a neighboring property that shortens the distance to connect; or
- A connection avoids substantial environmental risk.

Who decides whether I qualify for a waiver?

Public Health – Seattle & King County coordinates the review of waiver applications, but the decision is not made by Public Health alone. Your application will also be reviewed by the sewer utility and the local building or planning department where the property is located.

What do I need to apply for a waiver?

As part of your application, you will need to:

- Speak to a septic designer or professional engineer to evaluate your septic system, site, & soils, and provide a report.
- Submit documentation from the sewer utility
- Provide a report from a licensed septic system designer
- Include three (3) contractor estimates showing the cost of sewer connection
- Complete and sign a hardship declaration

What happens if I receive a waiver?

If a waiver is approved:


- You will be allowed to repair or install a septic system.
- You may need to record a notice to title acknowledging the waiver's limited term or that you must connect if sewer later becomes available or the mainline is extended.
- If your septic system fails again, you may be required to connect under KC BOH Title 13.

How do I get started?

To apply for a Waiver from the Sewer Connection Requirement, you will need to:

1. Exhaust ALL options available via the sewer utility. Remember, connection to sewer is REQUIRED! Waiving that requirement takes considerable proof that it is not possible to connect.
2. Call the number below to ask about the Waiver process and see if an application is right for you.
3. Contact a licensed septic system designer or professional engineer to help prepare the necessary documentation.

Public Health can guide you through the process and help determine whether a waiver application is appropriate.

 (206) 477-8050

 EHOSSInformation@kingcounty.gov

 kingcounty.gov/septic

Standard Scope of Contractor Bids

Purpose

This checklist is intended to help property owners understand the common scope of items that can drive costs for sewer connection or onsite sewage system (OSS) repair/replacement.

It may be a helpful reference when requesting bids.

A. Sewer Connection Bid Scope

Costs for a bid often include:

1. **Design and Engineering**
 - Site plan and utility layout to sewer main
 - Pump/grinder station design if required
 - Erosion and sediment control plan
2. **Permits and Fees**
 - County or city right-of-way permits
 - Traffic control permits (if applicable)
 - Utility connection fees (tap fees, capacity charges, GFCs)
 - Latecomer or payback fees
 - Inspection fees
3. **Construction**
 - Trenching, boring, or tunneling to sewer main
 - Pipe installation and bedding materials
 - Pump/grinder station installation (if applicable)
 - Electrical service to pump station
 - Backflow prevention device installation (if required)
4. **Surface and Site Restoration**
 - Backfill and compaction
 - Asphalt, concrete, or paver restoration to pre-construction condition
 - Landscaping restoration
 - Driveway or fence replacement if disturbed
5. **Septic System Decommissioning**
 - Pumping and cleaning existing tanks
 - Filling or removing tanks per Title 13 requirements
 - Abandoning drainfield per health code
6. **Other Utility Coordination**
 - Coordination with other utilities for line crossing
 - Relocation of water, gas, or electric lines if necessary

B. On-Site Sewage System Bid Scope & Cost considerations

Costs for a bid often include:

1. **Design and Engineering**
 - Site evaluation and soil logs per WAC 246-272A and BOH Title 13
 - Full system design package with reserve area identified
 - Electrical design for pumps or ATU systems
2. **Permits and Fees**
 - Health department OSS plan review & permit fees
 - County/city grading permit if required
 - Electrical permit if needed
 - Plumbing permit if the stubout requires relocation
3. **Construction**
 - Tank purchase and installation (septic, pump, ATU as applicable)
 - Drainfield or other dispersal component installation
 - Electrician for the pump or control panel installation
 - Necessary piping, risers, and inspection ports
4. **Surface and Site Restoration**
 - Backfill and compaction
 - Minimal landscaping restoration to pre-construction condition
5. **Operation and Maintenance Costs**
 - Pumping frequency and cost
 - Inspection frequency and cost
 - Electrical use (if applicable)
 - Routine replacement parts (pumps, blowers, filters)
6. **System Decommissioning (if temporary)**
 - Pumping and tank removal/filling if later abandoned for sewer connection

Worksheet for Understanding Your Sewer Utility Cost Estimate

Cost Type	Amount (\$)	Payment Structure (e.g. upfront, financed, monthly)	Financing Available?	Cost Sharing Available?
Permit or Application Fee(s)			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
General Facility			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Connection Fee			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Inspection Fee			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Right-of-Way or Restoration Fee (if any)			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
LID (Local Improvement District) Charge			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Late Comer or Payback Fee			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Local Facility Charge			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other (describe): _____			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other (describe): _____			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

King County Wastewater Treatment Division

Cost Type	Amount (\$)	Payment Structure (e.g. upfront, financed, monthly)	Financing Available?	Cost Sharing Available?
Capacity Charge (if applicable)			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Connecting to sewer can be costly. Ask your sewer utility if they offer financial assistance, low-interest financing, or cost-sharing opportunities. Sometimes, neighbors who connect at the same time can share costs and lower expenses for everyone.