

# News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, August 29, 2017**

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**Commissioners Look to Renew, Update Fee Charges for Henderson Watershed Program**  
*Set public hearing for September 12*

OLYMPIA – There will be a public hearing on Tuesday, September 12 at 5:30 p.m. in Building 1, room 280 to receive public testimony on a proposed ordinance to re-enact rates and charges to fund the successful Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District on-site sewage system work plan.

**What:** Public Hearing to re-enact rates and charges for Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District

**When:** Tuesday, September 12, at 5:30 p.m.

**Where:** Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia WA, Building 1, Room 280

The Shellfish Protection District in Henderson Inlet was established in 2001 in response to shellfish harvesting downgrades and impaired surface water quality. A septic system monitoring and maintenance program followed in 2007, which is set to expire December 31, 2017.

“The program expires at the end of the year unless re-enacted,” said Art Starry, Environmental Health Division Director who has been involved with the program since it was first established in 2007. “Since the program started, we identified some gaps and learned how we can make the program better.”

Septic system owners in the Henderson Inlet are charged to fund programs and services. There currently is a single charge per parcel, regardless of the number of septic systems. The proposal calls for a \$10 charge for each additional residential septic system or unit of volume of sewage on a property. This charge helps pay for the additional time needed to review records and oversee monitoring and maintenance of these additional systems on a property.

There is no cap on the \$10 charges. While charges would increase \$10 to \$30 for most properties with more than one septic system, about 29 properties would have increases of \$100 or more. The largest would be for a property with 135 septic systems. County staff estimate 418 parcels in the Henderson area, about six percent of the total, have more than one septic system; most of these have 2-4 systems.

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The proposed base charges per on-site septic system or unit volume of sewage for 2018 are:

**Low risk system:** \$40 (an increase of \$2/year)

**High risk system:** \$110 (an increase of \$6/year)

**Community system dispersal component:** \$185

This represents a five to six percent increase for Low Risk and High Risk Systems. Under the current proposal, rate adjustments for subsequent years can be made.

From 1984 - 2005, the Washington State Department of Health restricted shellfish harvesting on 657 acres in Henderson Inlet due to water contamination from fecal coliform bacteria. The septic program created an inventory of local systems and provides education and training along with monitoring and direct follow-up with residents. According to Washington State Department of Ecology and Department of Health studies, the program has contributed to water quality improvements, resulting in the re-opening of 366 acres of commercial shellfish harvesting.

“Eighty-six percent of systems in Henderson are current with inspections and maintenance,” said Starry. “This compares to twenty-six percent for systems outside of Henderson and Nisqually that do not have operational certificates. This is one of the highest, if not the highest, success rate in the Puget Sound area. It’s all the more impressive when you consider that it covers an area with 6,700 systems.”

In addition to rate changes, the proposed ordinance amends the Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District and Nisqually Reach Shellfish Protection District Consolidated Work Program to specify work financed by the rates and charges. It also includes additional water quality testing in an attempt to identify sources of pollution contributing to fecal coliform contamination in the Henderson Inlet Shellfish Protection District.

Public testimony will be accepted at the September 12 hearing. The public may submit written comments in lieu of testimony at the hearing. Written comments can be emailed to Ramiro Chavez, County Manager, at [chavezr@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:chavezr@co.thurston.wa.us), or hand delivered or mailed to:

Thurston County Board of County Commissioners  
Attn: Ramiro Chavez  
2000 Lakeridge Drive SW  
Olympia, WA 98502

The deadline for *written* comments is 5:00 p.m. Monday, September 11, 2017. The Board of County Commissioners may choose to move forward with the proposed ordinance at the end of the September 12 public hearing, or they may request staff to provide more information prior to making the decision.