

Possible Assumption of Ronald Wastewater District by City of Shoreline

1. What is assumption?

Assumption is the process by which a city may acquire (assume) portions of a sewer or water district that are within the city's boundaries. Although state law allows for assumption, a city that does not already operate a sewer utility must obtain voter approval before it starts providing sewer utility service for the first time.

2. Who decides if the City of Shoreline will assume Ronald Wastewater District?

The citizens of Shoreline would decide this important question. State law is clear that if a city like Shoreline, with no prior sewer experience, wishes to acquire or construct a sewer system it must (1) pass an ordinance that includes a plan for the utility and declare the estimated cost; and (2) ask the citizens to vote to ratify or reject the ordinance.

3. Has Ronald Wastewater District agreed to be assumed by the City of Shoreline?

No. In October of 2002, the District and City Council entered into an agreement that provided that the City would not assume the District for a period of 15 years (October of 2017). The agreement provides for an extension for an additional five years. The agreement also requires the District to pay an annual interlocal operating fee to the City. The operating fee for 2012 is \$761,000.

4. If there is an agreement between the City and Ronald Wastewater District regarding assumption, does the City still need a public vote to assume the District?

Yes. The agreement does not modify or restrict the right of the citizens to vote on which public entity will provide them with sewer service. The statute that guarantees the public's right to vote was passed by our state's very first Legislature in 1890. Our state's founders understood that it is a big deal when a city gets into the utility business for the first time. A public vote is required because utilities such as water and sewer are complex. A sewer system is expensive to construct and maintain. It requires expertise to operate and the expense and complexity of operating a sewer utility has only increased in the last 120 years. A city council ordinance is simply not enough.

5. Does the City of Shoreline believe that it can assume Ronald Wastewater District without a public vote?

That question is best directed to the City Council. However, during candidate forums before the November 2011 election, several City Council members affirmed that the City would not assume Ronald Wastewater District without voter approval. This is consistent with the Council's commitment that it will ask voters to decide if the City should purchase the Seattle Public Utilities water system. As stated on the City's website, "the Council has decided that an issue this significant should be made by the citizens of Shoreline."