

Preserve PWAA fund, revenue

LOCAL VIEW

BY NORM HARKER, DENNY KIGGINS AND DAN CLARK

Washington's communities are growing, aging and facing rising costs — just like the households and businesses that depend on them.

At the same time, lawmakers in Olympia are weighing a budget proposal that would sweep an additional \$75 million from the Public Works Assistance Account, effectively sidelining one of the state's most successful infrastructure financing tools. This would be a costly mistake.

For decades, the Public Works Board program, funded through the PWAA, has been a national model for helping local governments finance essential infrastructure — clean water systems, wastewater treatment, roads and stormwater facilities — at affordable rates. These are not optional investments. They protect public health, enable housing and economic growth, and ensure communities can function safely and efficiently.

Here in Clark County, the impact is tangible. Clark Regional Wastewater District has relied on Public Works Board loans to deliver critical infrastructure projects while keeping costs manageable for residents and employers. Over the past several years, the district has received more than \$39 million in low-interest Public Works Board financing, saving local ratepayers an estimated \$7 million compared to traditional public borrowing.

Those savings matter. They reduce upward pressure on utility rates for families and operating costs for businesses while ensuring safe, reliable wastewater service. These funds have supported transformative projects — septic system elimination, treatment plant expansion and collection system improvements in rapidly growing communities such as Ridgefield. They also underpin long-term investments tied directly to economic growth, including infrastructure needed along the I-5 Discovery Corridor and the decommissioning of aging facilities.

Over the next 20 years, more than \$400 million in wastewater infrastructure investments are planned in our service area alone. Without access to affordable state financing, those costs will land squarely on local ratepayers — or projects will be delayed altogether.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time the PWAA has been tapped to solve unrelated budget challenges. In 2025, \$288 million was diverted from the account. The governor's current proposal to sweep an additional \$75 million would push the fund toward inactivity, undermining its reliability and purpose. Once this revolving account is destabilized, it becomes far harder for local agencies to plan, finance, and deliver infrastructure projects efficiently.

Short-term budget fixes should not come at the expense of long-term economic health. Infrastructure is the gateway to Washington's future — supporting housing, industry, job creation and environmental protection. Weakening the Public Works Assistance Account erodes a proven tool that has helped communities invest strategically and responsibly for generations. We urge legislators to reject further sweeps of the PWAA and preserve both the fund and its dedicated revenue streams for their intended purpose: Helping local governments build and maintain the infrastructure Washington's people and economy depend on.

Let's not dismantle a nationally recognized success story in the name of shortterm thinking. Our communities — and our future — deserve better.

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