

Responses to Questions for Andrew Lee's Reconfirmation as GM/CEO Of Seattle Public Utilities

Background and Vision

1. *You have been General Manager and CEO of Seattle Public Utilities since June 2022- what are your primary goals for SPU? How have they changed since your initial appointment?*

Most of my primary goals for SPU remain the same as they were back in 2022. We are steadfast in our goals of reliably and affordably delivering the highest drinking water quality to the City of Seattle and region, reducing pollution from wastewater and stormwater discharges to the environment, and advancing our zero-waste mission for our solid waste utility. Over the past four years, I have gained a deeper appreciation of the challenges we face to affordably and reliably deliver our services for the next 50-60 years.

SPU has had significant success in the past four years maintaining predictable rate increases for our drinking water and solid waste utilities. Our greatest challenge over the next decade will be in managing rate increases for our wastewater utility, where projected increases in King County's treatment rates are expected to be 12.75% per year for the next four years. It is imperative that SPU and the region are fully engaged in King County's management of the regional wastewater system to ensure that there is responsible management of their capital improvement program and expenditures are kept to what is necessary. SPU should consider all options related to future regional wastewater treatment services, including significant governance changes that would transfer more responsibility for regional wastewater treatment to the City of Seattle.

In addition to affordability, I have a greater awareness of how SPU's policies around growth and development can either positively or negatively impact housing supply in the city. I am committed to policies that will remove barriers to increasing housing supply in the city, such as the mainline extension cost sharing program that the City Council passed in 2025 and was implemented in 2026.

Lastly, I have a far deeper appreciation of the powerful role that SPU plays in advancing the city's goals in creating positive transformation in neighborhoods throughout the city. SPU has a pivotal role in neighborhoods like South Park, Aurora, Delridge, and Lake City – where investments in stormwater infrastructure, creek floodplain reconnection, sea level rise mitigation, natural drainage systems, water and sewer main rehabilitation, and solid waste management can work hand in hand with transportation, parks, and public safety investments to bring positive change to neighborhoods.

I am incredibly excited to continue leading the utility in advancing positive change in the city while maintaining our strong position as a world class utility.

2. What do you think are the biggest opportunities and challenges for SPU? What are the top one or two things you would like to accomplish in your second term as General Manager and CEO?

Opportunities

- i) Stormwater Treatment in the Duwamish: One of the biggest opportunities for SPU will be partnering with King County on opportunistic stormwater treatment at the Duwamish combined sewer overflow (CSO) wet weather treatment plant. The County is in the design phase for a once-in-a-generation, \$3.3 billion wet weather treatment plant in South Downtown that will operate approximately 30 times per year. With some additional investment in stormwater infrastructure, SPU could convey its largest stormwater discharge from the Diagonal Outfall into the Duwamish to the County's wet weather treatment plant with the potential to treat approximately 1.5 billion gallons of stormwater each year. This would significantly reduce stormwater pollution to the Duwamish, reduce the risk of sediment recontamination after the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund cleanup, and simultaneously address decades of environmental justice issues in the Duwamish. During my second term as General Manager and CEO, I hope to enter into an agreement with King County to partner on this historic project. I also hope to obtain agreement from Ecology and EPA on the project and negotiate a modification for both the City and County's consent decrees that improves rate affordability for the next 15 years for the region.
- ii) Water Conservation: In the last four years, we have experienced historically low snowpack in the region and drier and hotter spring and summer seasons. The effects of climate change are here and now, and it is imperative that the region begin preparing for a future where water supply is not as plentiful. Although the City is in a healthy water supply position in the state, there is an opportunity to strengthen our position even more by implementing aggressive water conservation programs to prepare the City and the region for the next 30-50 years of climate change. I hope to work with our regional water purveyors in the next 2-3 years to fund water conservation programs that will aggressively reduce water demand forecasts for the next 60 years.
- iii) Sea Level Rise Adaptation in the Duwamish: The lasting effects of the December 27, 2022, Duwamish river overtopping event in South Park still weigh heavily on the community and SPU. Over the next four years, I believe there is an

opportunity to leverage funding from the King County Flood Control District and other potential sources (e.g., Federal earmark funding) to construct structures on publicly owned land along the Duwamish waterfront to protect South Park from future sea level rise and King tide events. I hope to get funding from the King County Flood Control District to implement a set of projects in South Park by 2030 that will provide sea level rise protection for the community for the next 100 years.

Challenge

The single biggest challenge for SPU will be managing rates in the face of King County's planned 12.75% per year regional wastewater treatment rate increases for the next 5 years. The County's biggest driver for its double-digit rate increases is tied to its federal consent decree requirements. Over the next four years, I intend to work with the County and our state and federal regulators to gain agreement on a pathway to reduce the County's future rate pressure, while providing greater benefit to the environment.

3. *During your first term as General Manager/CEO, you have had the opportunity to work with other departments to find ways to deliver services more effectively and efficiently. Can you describe any successes you are particularly proud of and how you will build on that collaboration in the coming years?*

I am incredibly proud of the ways that SPU has partnered with other City departments over the past four years to efficiently and effectively deliver services to our customers. Listed below are some highlights of our partnerships:

- i. Evaluation of Customer Affordability Programs with Seattle City Light (SCL) and Human Services Division (HSD): In 2024, SPU, SCL and HSD completed a comprehensive evaluation of our utility assistance programs with the goal of identifying actions to increase enrollment in the programs. Many of the recommendations from that evaluation are currently being implemented.
- ii. Community engagement partnership with Department of Neighborhoods (DON): Over the past four years, SPU partnered with DON on neighborhood outreach and engagement on SPU's 2024 Strategic Business Plan, the Bitter Lake Reservoir project, and environmental education programs to historically marginalized communities in the Cedar River Watershed. We have leveraged DON's community liaison program to reach out to marginalized communities throughout the city in support of our outreach efforts.
- iii. Tribal Engagement with Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR): SPU has worked together with OIR's Tribal Relations Director to engage with the Muckleshoot

Indian Tribe on activities to restore sockeye salmon runs on the Cedar River. SPU also attended the Tribal Nations Summit together with OIR and other City departments.

- iv. Workforce Development Planning with Office of Economic Development (OED): SPU worked alongside OED and other City departments in 2024-25 to develop a Workforce Development Plan for the region.
- v. Seattle Municipal Tower (SMT) Restack with Finance and Administrative Services (FAS): SPU is working with FAS to renovate 6 SMT floors with modern floorspace designs, with the goal of reducing our SMT footprint from 10 floors to 6 floors.
- vi. Snow Plowing and Joint Infrastructure Project Partnering with SDOT: SPU has a number of partnerships with SDOT, including joint projects to replace aged underground infrastructure or add green stormwater infrastructure while repaving streets. SPU completed South Park Phase 1 roadway and drainage improvements in 2022, and is working on the planning for South Park Phase 2 roadway and drainage improvements to be completed by 2030. SPU also has a seasonal partnership to support SDOT's snowplowing efforts during major snowstorm events.

In the coming years, I am excited to continue strengthening and leveraging our relationships with other departments to provide added value at lower costs to our customers. We plan to partner with DON on the community engagement for the future site planning at the former Talaris site in NE Seattle. We will continue partnering with SCL to expand access to our utility affordability programs and reduce the cost and time to administer the program. We also plan to work in partnership with SDOT to address permitting and construction issues on utility projects in the right-of-way, and create time savings for customers working on mainline extensions.

4. How is SPU preparing for the hundreds of thousands of fans coming to Seattle for the FIFA World Cup? Do you have a long-term strategy for building on the gains made during the games in terms of waste reduction and keeping needles and other waste from city streets?

During the World Cup, SPU is aiming to prevent waste, reduce litter, and strengthen Seattle's reputation as a global sustainability leader. These efforts build on existing work and will continue long after the World Cup ends.

We are working actively with venues, businesses, and event organizers to limit single-use items, prevent food waste, and make recycling and composting easy and accessible for residents and visitors. Examples of our efforts include: driving the adoption of reusable cups and dishware at fan celebrations and watch parties, running

a zero-waste events training for businesses, partnering with downtown hotels on food waste prevention, collaborating with the Port of Seattle on a multi-agency waste reduction communications campaign, and upgrading seven water refill stations to promote Seattle’s pure drinking water and reduce single use plastic bottles in the downtown core.

SPU’s Clean City Division is preparing for an influx of more than 750,000 visitors by scaling up proven strategies that prevent waste, reduce litter, and protect public health. These efforts expand on our year-round Clean City Division services and successful approaches used during major events like the MLB All-Star game, Club World Cup 2025, and past large-scale city activations such as the recent Super Bowl parade. During the World Cup, we will increase trash collection, sanitation services and targeted cleaning operations in high-traffic areas to ensure the city remains clean, healthy and accessible. In 2025, SPU and partners removed over 5.3 million pounds of waste and more than 661,000 sharps from the public right-of-way, demonstrating both scale and capability across our programs. Our work is not just about the World Cup. These investments and operational improvements will continue to benefit Seattle long after the event. Our goal is simple: ensure Seattle looks and feels clean every day for residents and during major events.

Major events like the World Cup are an opportunity for SPU to test new approaches (like reuse and food donation at events) at scale. We are being intentional about these insights, and what we learn here will directly inform future large events and day-to-day operations across the city. These efforts are also strengthening long-term partnerships with businesses and community partners across the city.

Rate Impact to Customers

- 5. SPU typically proposes rate increases each year to keep up with inflation and to pursue needed capital projects. The City is also impacted by decisions made by other jurisdictions – in particular wastewater treatment charges from King County. How will you ensure that SPU services are delivered at the lowest possible cost to its customers? How do you envision managing rate impacts from external entities?**

SPU recognizes the importance of rate affordability, and we prioritize delivering our high quality utility services at the lowest possible cost. Towards that end, SPU’s Executive Team is actively engaged throughout the year in reviewing rate proposals for our three lines of business, scrutinizing biennial budgets for savings, and developing and updating our Strategic Business Plan every three years to guide our 6- year rate path. Within each of these processes, we strive to live within our means, focusing on essential service delivery, regulatory requirements, and sound asset management. We

always strive to live within the rate path that is adopted by the City Council in the Strategic Business Plan (SBP), and for the last 13 years, SPU has kept its rates at or below the Strategic Business Plan 6-year rate path.

Rate impacts from external entities are the number one challenge we face in meeting our 6-year rate commitment. Specifically, rate increases from King County are projected at 12.75% per year for the next four years. Two years ago, the County projected those rates at between 5-9%. The lack of reliability in the County's rate forecasting creates huge challenges for SPU and other regional utilities to plan our rates and manage increases for our customers.

We must consider all options for addressing the County's proposed rate increases. Currently, the City has very little governance authority over the County's rate increases. All of the governance lies with the County Executive and the County Council, even though the City pays for approximately 40% of the budget for the County's Wastewater Treatment Division. The City should continue supporting adoption of a multi-year regional wastewater treatment rate, as opposed to the County's current practice of approving a new rate each year. In addition, the City should advocate for greater governance authority over the Wastewater Treatment Division's budget, rates, and capital improvement program, potentially through a change in the County charter. Lastly, the City should look at other options for regional wastewater treatment, including a long-term agreement to transfer the West Point Treatment Plant System from the County to the City.

6. *For Seattle to continue to thrive it must be a place that families, including our most vulnerable residents, can afford. Can you tell us how utility services fit into the overall affordability of the city and what actions SPU is taking to keep its revenue requirement and rates as low as possible?*

Utility rates are a non-negotiable, essential cost for households, together with housing, food, electricity, and other basic living costs. While utility costs alone do not drive affordability in the city, they are a critical component of the entire affordability picture for every household trying to make ends meet in an increasingly expensive city. SPU strives to keep its revenue requirements and rates as low as possible through the following actions:

- i) Sound Infrastructure Asset Management: SPU has robust programs to maintain, repair, and replace aged assets, so that we are not saddled with catastrophic failures and costly emergencies in the future because of deferred maintenance or insufficient asset replacement.

- ii) Long-Term Financial Planning: Rate affordability requires deliberate financial planning based on long-term investment needs, with the goal of sustainably increasing rates at a uniform level, rather than adopting volatile rate increases every year.
- iii) State and Federal Advocacy: Maintaining affordability requires that SPU advocate for strong federal and state investment in water/wastewater/stormwater infrastructure and adoption of state and federal policies and laws that consider affordability as new regulatory requirements are passed.
- iv) Continuous Improvement Culture: SPU has embraced a continuous improvement culture that embraces a mentality of reducing waste in our department.
- v) Technology Adoption: Throughout our department, we consistently evaluate technology as a means to deliver greater value to our customers at lower costs.
- vi) Affordability Programs: Affordability also involves having robust affordability programs. SPU has two programs that are models for the country: our Utility Discount Program (UDP) and our Emergency Assistance Program (EAP). These programs are critical in keeping our rates affordable for our most vulnerable households, and SPU is committed to funding these programs and removing barriers to accessing them.
- vii) Flexible Payment Arrangements: Lastly, affordability involves providing flexibility for our customers, who will experience emergencies and other unplanned circumstances that require programs to address their specific needs. This includes flexible payment plans, donation programs, and systems that reinforce responsible payment of utility bills. SPU began partnering with Promise Pay in 2025, an online solution which customizes payment plans for customers based on their unique circumstances. It also provides timely notifications to help customers to consistently pay their bills and exit the cycle of repeated delinquencies.

7. Last year, City Council approved a Statement of Legislative Intent requesting SPU work with City Light and HSD to expand eligibility for the two utilities' ratepayer assistance programs. What, in your view, are the biggest obstacles to increasing enrollment in the UDP and EAP and what actions should the council consider to eliminate those barriers?

In 2024, SPU engaged a consultant to evaluate our Utility Assistance Programs. The study found multiple obstacles to increasing enrollment in the Utility Discount Program

(UDP) and the Emergency Assistance Program (EAP), including burdensome income verification and recertification procedures, issues with digital literacy for some households, lack of program awareness, barriers of government trust especially for communities of color, and language access issues for immigrant populations.

As a result of the study, SPU and SCL have centered their efforts on improving enrollment in UDP and EAP on the following core actions:

- i. Reduce barriers to enrollment: Simplify program application and reduce required documentation.
- ii. Increase customer retention: Implement an effortless approach for customer retention to ensure income eligible customers maintain continuous access to benefits.
- iii. Expand enrollment pathways: Pre-qualify customers who have been income verified by other government programs, auto-enrolling when possible, and expand community partnerships to support to customer enrollment.
- iv. Expand income eligibility: Recommend legislative changes to offer a spectrum of utility assistance to households with incomes up to 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) while balancing access to assistance with the overall impact of expansion on the affordability of utility rates.

SPU and SCL are committed to addressing these barriers and are focusing on the following activities in 2026 to achieve the goal of increasing UDP enrollment and EAP utilization:

- Shifting from handing out flyers to events where staff work directly with customers to get them enrolled.
- Creating new partnerships with affordable housing providers and Seattle-King County Public Health to leverage their income verification processes to streamline enrollment through data sharing and/or onsite enrollment events
- Working with the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and HSD's cohort of Community Connectors to provide education and improved processes to support community organizations who help customers enroll
- Training a cohort of Community Liaisons to support utility assistance staff with in-language engagement at enrollment events
- Testing program changes and updated communication materials directly with community to inform better outcomes

- Developing and testing a redesigned paper application to ensure technology is not a barrier to enrollment
- Redesigning our processes and program requirement to reduce burdens on customers when they apply or renew their eligibility.
- Assessing options for technology improvements to streamline enrollment.

We look forward to engaging with the City Council to discuss changes to eligibility thresholds for both the UDP and EAP in June 2026.

8. *As we work on the Comprehensive Plan and plan for increased density, what utility infrastructure needs do you believe are needed to accommodate this growth. How much more capacity do we need now, and in the coming years?*

Densification through redevelopment will create utility infrastructure needs throughout the city. The greatest utility infrastructure needs to accommodate densification will be new drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater pipes in approximately 25% of the roads in Seattle that currently do not have them. In some cases, development will trigger replacement of an existing main or upsizing of a pump station where the existing infrastructure does not have sufficient capacity to serve more households. Existing system capacity is highly dependent on the location, size and condition of pipes on each block of the city. Currently, only 10% of new developments in the city require a mainline extension or replacement of an existing pipe.

With respect to overall system capacity, SPU is in the very favorable position of having sufficient water supply to accommodate new growth for the next 40-50 years. This is largely due to conservation efforts over the past 30 years. On the wastewater side, King County also has sufficient capacity at the West Point Treatment Plant to serve the majority of the city's growth.

9. *Additionally, what are the options for providing these infrastructure needs? Do you have ideas for creative solutions to meet these needs?*

In 2025, the City Council passed legislation that increased system development charges (SDCs) for drinking water and created new SDCs for wastewater and stormwater. Simultaneously, the City Council passed legislation allowing SPU to use the revenue generated from SDCs to fund mainline cost sharing agreements with developers.

SPU began collecting revenue from the new SDCs at the beginning of 2026 and also began entering into agreements with developers for mainline extension cost sharing. In

the first four months of the 2026, SPU has invoiced approximately \$4M in revenue from the program and entered into 19 mainline cost-sharing agreements. The program will be funding approximately one mile of new water, sewer, and storm mains in the city to promote growth and redevelopment. In a very short time, the program has been incredibly successful and is achieving its goal of promoting growth and development in the city.

Based on feedback from developers, SPU has heard that the Street Improvement Permit (SIP) process is still a significant barrier to taking advantage of the program. Developers try to avoid properties that will require a SIP, because the process can take years. In the next several years, I hope to work together with SDOT to remove this barrier, so that developers can take full advantage of the program.

Executive and Staff Management

10. SPU has around 1,600 employees implementing a Council-approved budget of almost \$1.8 billion. What are the three most important things that you will focus on during your next term to ensure that SPU continues to provide efficient and equitable delivery of drinking water and processing of solid waste to its customers?

The three most important things I will focus on during my next term to ensure that SPU provides efficient and equitable delivery of drinking water, drainage and wastewater, and solid waste services to our customers are as follows:

- (i) Implement a Comprehensive Infrastructure Asset Management Program: Efficient and equitable delivery of drinking water, drainage and wastewater, and solid waste services begins with responsible management of our infrastructure. This includes maintaining, repairing, and replacing aged assets, so that we are not saddled with catastrophic failures and costly emergencies in the future because of deferred maintenance or insufficient asset replacement. Over the next four years, I will continue to focus on implementing our core Asset Management Programs across our three lines of business to ensure that we are being responsible stewards of our infrastructure.
- (ii) Promote a Continuous Improvement Culture: SPU has embraced a continuous improvement culture that instills a mentality of reducing waste in our department. “Lean” practices are being adopted throughout the department, promoting continuous improvements in areas such as customer service, infrastructure design and project management, front-line crew response times

to high priority emergencies, solid waste collection, and customer engagement. Over the next four years, I will focus on utility-wide adoption of continuous improvement practices.

- (iii) Embrace Technology Adoption: Throughout our department, we consistently evaluate technology as a means to deliver greater value to our customers at lower costs. In recent years, we have improved our customer portal, providing more information to our ratepayers as well as greater ease of accessing our services. We have also implemented solutions like Genesys in our contact center, which provides customer service representatives with enhanced tools to swiftly serve our customers while on calls. We are also currently evaluating Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI), which will provide customers with near real-time water consumption data, including automated detection of leaks, while reducing our reliance on meter readers. Over the next four years, I will focus on creating a thriving innovation culture when it comes to technology adoption.

11. You've had the opportunity to work with the City Council over the last few years – what have you learned? Has your general philosophy for working and communicating effectively with the City Council changed? How do you plan to ensure that Councilmembers and their staff receive timely and actionable information from your department to make policy and financial decisions? How will you be responsive to Council requests, specifically regarding priorities that may differ from those of the Executive Branch?

I have a deep appreciation for each city councilmember and their priorities, as well as the unique set of constituent needs that they bring to their positions. Over the past four years, I've learned the importance of engaging Councilmembers early on to seek their input on legislation. I've also learned the importance of being responsive to constituent needs, inquiries, and issues that are raised to Council offices. I understand that engaging with constituents early and proactively and allowing stakeholders to influence proposed legislation before it comes to the Council can help move legislation forward. I've learned that the timing of legislation is important, and we should consider what other pieces of legislation are moving forward at the same time by other departments. I strive to listen intently to what Councilmembers are saying, both in our direct conversations and in other venues, with the understanding that there is oftentimes cross-over between SPU's issues and the broader issues facing the City. Lastly, I appreciate the importance of keeping Councilmembers well informed on important

issues affecting SPU and minimizing or avoiding surprises, especially those that involve the news media.

My general philosophy for working and communicating with the City Council has not changed. It is my role, working together with our Council liaison, to ensure that Councilmembers are well informed, engaged, and provided with every opportunity to influence important issues and legislation affecting SPU. I am ultimately responsible for addressing the utility-related needs of each Councilmembers' constituents, to the extent feasible. Lastly, it is my role to look for opportunities to advance Councilmembers' interests.

With respect to ensuring timely and actionable information to make policy and financial decisions, SPU works to create a calendar of legislation that provides adequate time to delve into important policy and financial decisions with the Council. We strategically plan our legislative calendar to space apart potentially contentious legislation, with the goal of providing adequate time for dialogue both during and outside of Council committee meetings. We also strive to consider the timing of non-SPU legislation (e.g., Seattle City Light rates, other levies, etc.) in scheduling our proposed legislative calendar.

With respect to being responsive to Councilmember requests where they may differ from the priorities of the Executive – I believe it is my role to seek common ground between the interests of the Council and the Mayor, with the goal of advancing work that provides a win-win opportunity for both branches of government. While this may not always be possible, I have found that oftentimes there is enough overlap in the interests of both the Executive and Council to provide an opportunity to work collaboratively to advance legislation that addresses the priorities of both offices.

Race and Social Justice

12. Please discuss how you will further incorporate the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative into SPU's governing procedures and organizational culture, and into your leadership of SPU. How will you improve racial equity through your management of the Department?

In 2025, SPU began the process of co-creating an Equity Strategic Framework (ESF) for the department with input from equity leaders across the organization. The ESF centers on a Race and Social Justice vision, a set of guiding principles, and five focus areas for our RSJ efforts for the next 4 years:

- i) Embed internally: Ingrain racial equity and social justice practices and a culture of belonging into the work of individuals, teams, processes, programs, outcomes, and community engagement, so all employees can contribute to and benefit from the Utility’s RSJ efforts.
- ii) Align and advise: Align equity efforts across SPU and with other City departments, and advise and provide leadership for RSJ with public utilities nationwide.
- iii) Center community: Ensure that all Seattle communities and regional customers access the waste and water utility services they need and have meaningful voice and power in shaping SPU’s services and decisions.
- iv) Deliver EJ solutions: Deliver investments, projects, programs and policies that acknowledge the interconnectedness of people and planet through addressing past harms, prioritizing current environmental and human health, and planning for a resilient future.
- v) Reshape economy: Create equitable economic systems by investing in community-led solutions, entrepreneurship, and pathways that build a more inclusive and less wasteful economy, increase local wealth, and improve affordability.

SPU will be using this framework to strategically guide our RSJ work across the department and in community over the next 4 years. Following the framework, we will be moving forward with a broad set of RSJ actions, such as advancing internal training on appreciative inquiry and belonging, strengthening relationships with local tribal governments, advancing community-centered climate adaptations and solutions, and directing targeted investments to minority and women-owned business and towards historically underserved and underrepresented communities.

13. City leaders are responsible for ensuring that all residents, including those with limited English proficiency, immigrants and refugees, or those who might not be fully documented, have access to City services. How will you manage SPU to ensure all these demographics are well served?

Whenever SPU is developing a policy or strategic plan, planning for a capital improvement project, or updating technology, we proactively apply a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) lens to ensure that all of our customers, especially those who are most marginalized, are adequately represented and considered in our decisions.

Through our RET process, we develop innovative solutions to meet the varying needs of our customers. We learn and iterate and show up in ways that are meaningful to our community. We utilize language access translations and plain language in our

communications. We consider the safety concerns and fears within our community – particularly among some immigrants and refugees – as we plan our outreach and prepare our frontline staff.

In the past four years, through our partnership with the Department of Neighborhoods (DON), SPU has collaborated with Community Liaisons (CLs) on nearly 15 programs and projects, which have helped shape our decisions with a community-centered lens, meet customers where they are, and grow cohorts of resident-volunteers and advocates. The CLs reflect various ethnic, racial, and linguistic communities, as well as disabled, low-income, and unhoused residents. The DON partnership has also successfully embedded engagement advisors within projects across the utility, helping us conduct in-language research and technical surveys, lead and participate in large resident-led collaborations (e.g., Longfellow Starts Here), develop and grow community engagement programs (e.g., Watershed Equity Tours), and meet our regulatory and compliance obligations (e.g., Seattle Overflow Action Plan) – all with the diversity of community needs and perspectives at the center.

SPU recently reviewed our data collection to ensure that we have the necessary data to serve customers. We collect name, billing information and resident address to serve our customers. Information beyond core billing information is voluntary and SPU is a local agency, meaning all immigration enforcement actions are not held by our agency; that is a federal action. Our charge is clean water, drainage, and solid waste collection. SPU customer data is safe and limited to what we need to deliver our services.

We work closely with known organizations and leaders in the Duwamish Valley and South Park, in Lake City, in South Seattle, in the Chinatown International District, along Delridge, in Bitter Lake, and more to become trusted partners. These help grow our programs, implement capital improvement projects, and build a green workforce, all within diverse communities that have historically been underserved and underrepresented by government.

With up to one quarter of the general population having some form of disability, SPU is committed to providing equitable access to all those who use our services. SPU has invested significant resources toward making our website and other digital media accessible to assistive technologies, and in Plain Language to be more easily understood and translated. SPU will continue to work towards utilizing best practices in digital accessibility and maintaining ADA Title II compliance by developing a SPU Digital Accessibility Program with regular oversight, staff training, and governance policy.

14. I know you are committed to addressing institutionalized racism and race-based inequities in SPU's programs and services. Can you look over the horizon a bit and tell us what you think the future challenges and opportunities will be as the leader of an organization that exists to meet the basic needs of its customers? How will you ensure SPU's workforce is prepared for these challenges?

The single greatest challenge SPU faces in the future is the long-term sustainability of the cost of our services. Even with the best rate-planning, the cost of SPU's services will continue to increase faster than inflation. This is primarily driven by two factors: (1) aging assets will require future replacement at high costs; and (2) regulations will demand a higher level of service when it comes to environmental and health outcomes. Advances in technology could conceivably mitigate future cost increases, but we have yet to see significant decreases in costs from technological advancements in the last 50 years.

We estimate that up to 30% of households in Seattle currently qualify for our utility assistance programs. This number is expected to grow as we expand eligibility for accessing these programs, and as the wealth gap between the rich and the working class continues to increase in our city. Adding faster-than-inflation rate increases will only accelerate the increase in households that cannot afford utility services. Twenty or thirty years down the road, we may face a situation where up to 50% of Seattle households qualify for rate assistance programs. That raises the question of whether we have a sustainable model for paying for utility services.

Solutions to this issue of long-term rate affordability will be a national topic of discussion over the next two decades. As utility rates continue to increase, it is possible that alternative financing models for managing wastewater, stormwater and solid waste will materialize. Already in the solid waste arena, extended producer responsibility (EPR) bills are being passed in a number of states including Washington state, requiring producers of paper and packing materials to pay for the costs of recycling those materials. By 2030, SPU will start to receive funding from paper and packing producers to manage our recycling costs which will translate to savings on our customers' solid waste bills. Although a similar model does not yet exist in the drainage and wastewater utility, there may be an opportunity to pass on costs for stormwater treatment to oil or tire companies, who are the sources of many pollutants in our waste streams. Alternative decentralized technologies for treating and reclaiming wastewater at a household level may also become more cost effective, leading to less reliance on costly centralized infrastructure.

SPU is actively engaged in research on future industry-transformative trends that will help address the affordability issues of our day. I sit on the board of the Water Research Foundation (WRF), which is the leading professional organization for water and wastewater research in the United States. Our participation on research projects and our advocacy efforts at the state and federal level on affordability issues will ensure that SPU is well prepared to tackle the affordability challenges of the next several decades.

Environment and Sustainability

15. What is SPU's role and responsibility with respect to environmental issues, particularly environmental education, and sustainability?

Restoring and protecting the environment and promoting environmental education and sustainability is core to SPU's mission, vision, and values. As the drinking water provider, we strive to conserve our precious water resources, steward and protect our drinking water watersheds, promote adequate stream flows for fish in both the Cedar River and South Fork Tolt River, increase sockeye salmon runs in the Cedar River, and educate the public on their role in protecting our water supply for future generations. As the drainage and wastewater utility, we are committed to reducing pollution to the environment by reducing combined sewer overflows, promoting source control of pollutants to prevent them from entering our wastewater or stormwater, cleaning up contaminated sediment in waterways such as the Duwamish, removing harmful stormwater pollutants from stormwater discharges, and slowing the flow of stormwater through creeks by implementing codes and projects. Finally, as the solid waste utility, our mission is to eventually become a city that produces zero waste, through comprehensive cradle-to-grave management of materials, including reduction of waste at the source, recycling and reuse of materials, diverting food waste from the landfill, and promoting producer responsibility and circular economies which eliminate waste from the life-cycle of materials.

All of our environmental sustainability efforts rely heavily on environmental education. We cannot achieve our water conservation, pollution-reduction, or zero waste goals without engaging the public in our efforts. Towards that end, we implement a number of different pathways to engage the public in our environmental goals. Those pathways include school-based programs in partnership with Seattle Public Schools, that involve early education of students on the importance of composting and recycling or the life-cycle of salmon in our creeks. We also bring both students and families to our Cedar River Watershed Education Center for educational programs on their drinking water

source, the impact of climate change on our water supply, and how they can conserve water. We are constantly engaged in education of commercial businesses on waste diversion, recycling of construction and demolition debris, and programs to reduce stormwater pollution to the environment. Recently, we provided a workshop to businesses in the University District our solid waste services and how to properly disposal of cooking oil. Lastly, we are engaged in the Saving Water Partnership, a regional consortium that promotes drinking water conservation in the greater King County region through education and rebates.

Together, these programs are enabling SPU to make tremendous strides in conserving water, reducing pollution, and reducing waste. We use less water today than we did in the 1990s, even with considerable growth in our population. Our per capita waste generation rates are the lowest in the country. And, we've seen the return of salmon to our creeks. Our partnership with community is our pathway to realizing our environmental sustainability goals.

16. What experience do you have developing resilient, forward-thinking policies around climate change (including climate resiliency/adaptation) and what role does SPU play in implementing those policies?

Seattle Public Utilities has been working to characterize and address climate change and environmental stewardship issues since its establishment in 1997. SPU has incorporated climate science into water supply and stormwater planning since 2002 and advancing policies to reduce our operational greenhouse gas emissions since 2013.

SPU's climate action is embedded in our daily operations and planning. Our climate work is comprised of a portfolio of activity that, in addition to addressing climate impacts, includes greenhouse gas emissions reduction, carbon sequestration, water and waste circularity, green stormwater infrastructure, continuity of service during weather emergencies, ecosystem and species stewardship, green and blue workforce development, affordability, an intergenerational perspective, and environmental justice.

SPU is investing in flexible, innovative, cost-effective, and equitable climate solutions. This includes efforts like:

- i. Citywide emissions reductions through waste prevention and diversion
- ii. Nature-based solutions that foster healthy and resilient ecosystems in urban creeks and shorelines
- iii. Adaptive management for water supply planning
- iv. Climate-resilient capital projects to ensure that projects build today will continue to serve communities for decades into the future

v. Wildfire risk reduction strategies for our drinking water supply watersheds

SPU is prioritizing neighborhoods that are most at risk from climate impacts. In our climate work, SPU has a chance to invest in, partner with, and support communities so that they will not disproportionately bear the brunt of climate impacts. SPU is leading with racial justice, honoring communities' priorities to build resilience, and equitably serving Seattle neighborhoods.

SPU is seeking balance in our relationship with the planet and with people. It is a re-remembering that everything is connected, and we must work together within our means. Partnerships – with sister departments, with Seattle communities and non-profits, with peer utilities, and with climate scientists – are some of our most powerful levers for change.

17. How is SPU preparing for extreme weather events and risks exacerbated by climate change and ensuring we have enough water for our growing city and region?

In the last five years Seattle and our region have experienced a wide array of climate impacts which reinforce the fact that the effects of climate change are here and now. These include the shrinking snowpack in the Cascades; the catastrophic river flooding in 2025 in King, Snohomish, and Skagit Counties; the 2022 Loch Katrine and Bolt Creek Fires, which were mere miles away from SPU's South Fork Tolt Watershed; the devastating December 2022 King Tide flooding in South Park; and 2021 Pacific Northwest Heat Dome, as well as the global context of environmental and public health inequities. . SPU is engaged in the following actions to manage the risks that changing climate pose to our drinking water and drainage and wastewater utilities:

- i. Long-Term Planning for Changing Weather: We have incorporated the effects of climate change on precipitation patterns and snowpack projections into our long-range planning for both for our drinking water utility and for our drainage and wastewater utility.
- ii. Operational Changes to Water Supply Management: SPU has implemented adaptive reservoir refill and drawdown strategies in light of lower seasonal snowpack and in preparation for drier springs and summers. That has enabled SPU to avoid water curtailments even in the face of historically low snowpack the last four years.
- iii. Designing and Constructing Infrastructure to Handle Larger Storms: We have revised our design criteria for stormwater and wastewater facilities (e.g., pipes, storage facilities, pump stations) to account for more frequent, intense storm events.

- iv. Implementing Adaptive Solutions: We are constructing more green stormwater infrastructure to manage stormwater, because of its climate mitigation properties and the ability to scale up such facilities more easily than traditional “grey” infrastructure.
- v. Promoting Conservation: We continue to proactively implement a strong regional water conservation program, which reduces water system demands per capita, especially with regional growth projections.
- vi. Plan for Future Water Supply Options: While our long-range forecasts suggest that we have sufficient water for the next 40-50 years, SPU is still engaged in strategic planning for future water supply options.
- vii. Preparing for Wildfire Risk: We are working to manage wildfire risk in our watersheds by creating defensible spaces, implementing forest thinning practices, and maintaining a trained and well-prepared wildland fire fighting crew.
- viii. Planning for Sea Level Rise: Together with community and industry, we are developing and implementing a sea level rise adaptation strategy for the lower Duwamish, primarily for the South Park and Georgetown neighborhoods. This includes our annual work of creating a flood barrier during king tide events each winter. It also includes plans for creating permanent flood barriers on public lands in South Park, including roadways, street-ends, and city-owned parcels (e.g. parks, Port of Seattle property, SPU pump station and water quality facility properties).