

Quilcene Community Septic Feasibility Study

Interview Summary

Prepared by Triangle Associates, Inc.

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Bob Wheeler and Rachel Aronson from Triangle Associates (Triangle, facilitation team) interviewed residents of Quilcene in-person and by phone in June, July, and August 2016. Triangle was able to interview 24 people. Attachment 1 includes the people interviewed.

Interview Summary

The following is a summary of themes and comments heard in the live and phone interviews Triangle conducted with residents, property owners, and business owners of the unincorporated Quilcene area regarding their thoughts and opinions about the development of a community septic system for the management of wastewater within the Quilcene Rural Village Center (RVC). The summary is arranged by topic area and does not attribute comments to individual people. A few individual comments that represent the wide range of ideas expressed during the interviews are also included.

It is important to recognize that for these interviews Triangle attempted to interview enough individuals with a variety of interests to capture the different perspectives that exist in Quilcene. With that said, perspectives captured represent only the interviewed sample of Quilcene residents and does not represent a community-wide complete survey. It is important to recognize that this interview process is only a preliminary indication of the perspectives on this topic.

Overview

Almost all the interviewees mentioned that Quilcene is a divided community, and that broad community consensus is very difficult to achieve because of this. A common theme mentioned in this respect relates to those who are long-term Quilcene residents (even multi-generational) and those who are more recent arrivals. This does not indicate who does or does not support the potential new community septic system, but it is an important community characteristic to be aware of.

The opinions of interviewees regarding a potential community septic system for Quilcene were generally in three categories:

- 1) Very much in favor.
- 2) In favor, as long as they personally do not have to pay for or use such a system.
- 3) Very much against.

The major interview themes reflect this diversity in opinion.

Major Interview Themes:

The following major themes came through clearly in most of the Quilcene interviews:

- **Economic development:** Some people would like to see new businesses in Quilcene, such as a bakery or retirement home, and would like to expand current businesses and create new jobs.

Some businesses could not meet new standards for septic systems and had to close.

“There is no use doing anything with vacant buildings until you can flush a toilet.”

People expressed a desire to capture more economic benefits from the Highway 101 traffic that already comes through Quilcene (1.6 million trips/year), and to draw in new visitors. The gas station is unable to advertise their existence on DOT signs because they do not have a public restroom.

Habitat for Humanity would like to build low-income housing in Quilcene but will not work in places that do not have some sort of public wastewater system.

However, a number of people feel that Quilcene does not need more businesses, and expressed skepticism over the number and type of jobs that would result, and whether these jobs would be significant in terms of living wage positions. People also would like Quilcene to retain its affordability.

It was pointed out that the food bank on Wednesdays draws 250 to 300 people, and the Quilcene schools are 44% assisted lunch program. Anything that can help economically is important to the health of the community.

- **Costs of an individual septic system vs. a community septic system:** Among interviewees who do live, work or own property in the RVC, we heard that the cost of a new individual septic system that would meet their needs on their own property ranges from \$15,000-\$50,000 including design. We heard that people would tie their properties into a community system if their personal costs were below the cost of their own installation. We also heard that the county is quite strict in the approval process of new personal septic systems and some people had had their individual plans/permit applications rejected multiple times.
- **Affordability of a system:** We heard that many residents/businesses of the RVC would likely need grants or low-income support for the installation of a new system, decommissioning of their old system and ongoing costs of a new system.
- **Water quality is important:** Coast Seafoods is the only large employer in Quilcene, and they have a strong interest in clean water for aquaculture. Many people also fish in the river and want to see the fish population stay healthy. All of these require good water quality. Some wells supplying structures with potable water are within 30 feet of a leach field system, whereas the requirement for separation is approximately 100 feet. One interviewee stated that, *“the public health benefit is common ground.”*

Information Desired from Project Team:

Quilcene residents would like to have the feasibility study answer such questions as:

- How will local expertise and opinion factor into any decisions that are made?
- Who will make the decision and what will they use to make the decision?
- What might a community septic system cost to install? Will users be able to pay those costs over time?
- What might the ongoing costs for a property be? What would future fee increases look like, if there were any?
- Could the system be a nonprofit? If not, who would be profiting?
- Who would run the system? Could it be run locally? Will it be maintained professionally?
- Would people who do not connect to the system have to pay?
- What is a potential schedule for next steps and construction?
- Will it smell?
- Will it be resilient to sea level rise and flooding?
- How big does a system need to be?
- Would it be expandable later on?
- Could several drainfield sites be used instead of one large drainfield?

Thoughts on Potential Community Septic System

Potential locations

- Interviewees suggested many parcels within the RVC to the project team for further investigation.
- Several of the suggested parcels are adjacent to but outside the RVC. The suggested parcels are owned by Jefferson County, the Forest Service, or individuals.

Two or more systems

- A suggestion was made by multiple people to consider two or more smaller septic systems instead of one large system. Benefits of multiple systems could include:
 - Ability to put systems on opposite sides of the highway so no highway digging/boring is needed to cross the highway.
 - Starting with a smaller system would allow people to see if it works and bring in more support for the next system.
 - Backup in case one fails.

Communications

Below are some of the initial ideas Quilcene residents had for communications going forward:

- Recognize that Quilcene is a special and highly-loved place.
“Quilcene is paradise.”
- Emphasize how this project will be unique to Quilcene, and is not trying to make Quilcene like any other place.
- Use volunteers to get the word out, write grants, and help with labor.
- Make a simple video about the project.
- Get word to people that there may be benefits to the community that they will not have to pay for.
- Remind people that the project team will not be assessing their current septic systems.
- Get information out early, not just at decision times.
- Anyone who wants to hold a public meeting can do so at the community center.
- Post information at community congregation sites, such as the Post Office, Community Center, US Bank, Logger’s Rest, Peninsula Foods, etc.
- The Facebook group “I’ve Heard of Quilcene” is a good place to post information, as well as “Quilcene Conversations” email listserv.

Miscellaneous Comments

- A few comments were heard about the water system and that completion of that system was supposed to reduce the need for a community drainfield system.
- Opinions of the Highway 101 improvement project are also sharply divided.
- Quilcene has the only warm salt water beach in Puget Sound area; that could be a draw for visitors.
- Public restrooms are needed in Quilcene.
- Some people are concerned about what can keep Quilcene from becoming a ghost town.
- Quilcene has a strong community of volunteers who do help on other community projects and may be able to help on a construction project.

Attachment 1: Interview Participants

Name
Alvin Ackerman
Anne Ricker
Bob Rosen
Charles Thrasher
Charlie Brown
Chris Jones
Cindy Kay
Clayton White
Jim Munn
Kathleen Wright
Keith Meyer
Kit Kittredge
Linda Herzog
Linda Oen
Lorna Ward
Lyle Courtsal
Mary Schmidt
Paul Schmidt
Robert Alexander
Sally Brown
Sharon McClain
Stan Nealey
Tom Brotherton
Wally Peterson