Public Comment King County Flood Control Advisory 7/24/2026

The King County Flood Control District's 2026 budget, financial plans, and capital planning documents collectively reveal a widening and increasingly unsustainable mismatch between projected revenue and long-term financial obligations. At the same time, the documents demonstrate growing concern within District leadership about the County's ability to effectively manage, prioritize, and implement the massive volume of projects already funded or proposed.

The District's long-term financial projections make clear that current spending commitments substantially exceed anticipated revenues. Although annual levy revenue remains stable in the $84–88 million range through 2031, projected expenditures accelerate dramatically year over year. The result is a financial trajectory in which the District's cash balance turns negative by 2028 and deteriorates to more than negative $135 million by 2031. Even more alarming, the District's projected "budgetary fund balance" reaches negative $841 million by 2031, reflecting a massive accumulation of unfunded or overcommitted obligations.

These projections are not hidden within technical appendices; they are directly acknowledged throughout the governing documents. Multiple sections of the Staff Report and adopted resolution openly discuss the need to:

- reduce expenditures,
- reprioritize projects,
- align spending with available revenue,
- and reconsider the overall structure of the Capital Improvement Program.

This language amounts to an institutional acknowledgment that the District's current capital pipeline is financially unsustainable under existing revenue conditions.

Equally important, the documents reveal that the problem is not simply a lack of revenue. The County and District are also struggling to effectively manage and deploy the resources already appropriated.

Several indicators point to systemic implementation and management failures:

- enormous mid-cycle capital revisions,
- large gaps between appropriated and expended funds,
- repeated references to "right-sizing" expenditures,
- staffing and organizational capacity studies,
- new mandatory reporting requirements,
- escalating oversight controls,
- and concern over project reprioritization and cost drift.

The District's own work program repeatedly references the need to improve:

- implementation efficiency,
- contract management,
- expenditure scheduling,
- staffing structure,
- and capital delivery oversight.

The adopted resolution imposes unusually strict administrative controls requiring:

- staged engineering approvals,
- monthly reporting by service providers,
- variance reporting for project cost increases above twenty percent,
- and expanded executive oversight of capital implementation.

These measures strongly suggest that District leadership no longer has confidence that existing systems are adequately controlling project execution, timelines, or financial exposure.

At the same time, the County continues expanding long-term obligations through additional project commitments, basin-wide planning efforts, climate adaptation initiatives, repetitive-loss acquisition programs, levee setbacks, and corridor-wide capital investment strategies extending well beyond the formal six-year planning horizon.

The documents therefore expose a dangerous structural contradiction:
the District is simultaneously overcommitted financially and underperforming operationally.

Rather than slowing expansion until implementation capacity and financial stability improve, the District appears to be preparing to solve the problem through debt financing. Multiple documents reference development of a formal bonding and financing policy for major capital projects, including large-scale flood infrastructure investments.

In effect, the District is moving toward borrowing money to sustain a project portfolio it is already struggling to manage under existing cash-funded conditions.

This creates significant public policy concern. Bonding may temporarily preserve project momentum, but it also risks masking deeper structural problems:

- chronic overcommitment,
- weak expenditure discipline,
- implementation bottlenecks,
- and insufficient alignment between revenues, staffing capacity, and project delivery capability.

Taken together, the documents portray a flood control system under mounting institutional strain—one that is accumulating obligations faster than revenues can support them, while simultaneously demonstrating increasing difficulty converting appropriated funds into timely, disciplined, and accountable project execution.

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