

# SHAPE OUR WATER COMMUNITY VISION

CREATING A  
WATER-RESILIENT FUTURE  
IN SEATTLE



Seattle  
Public  
Utilities

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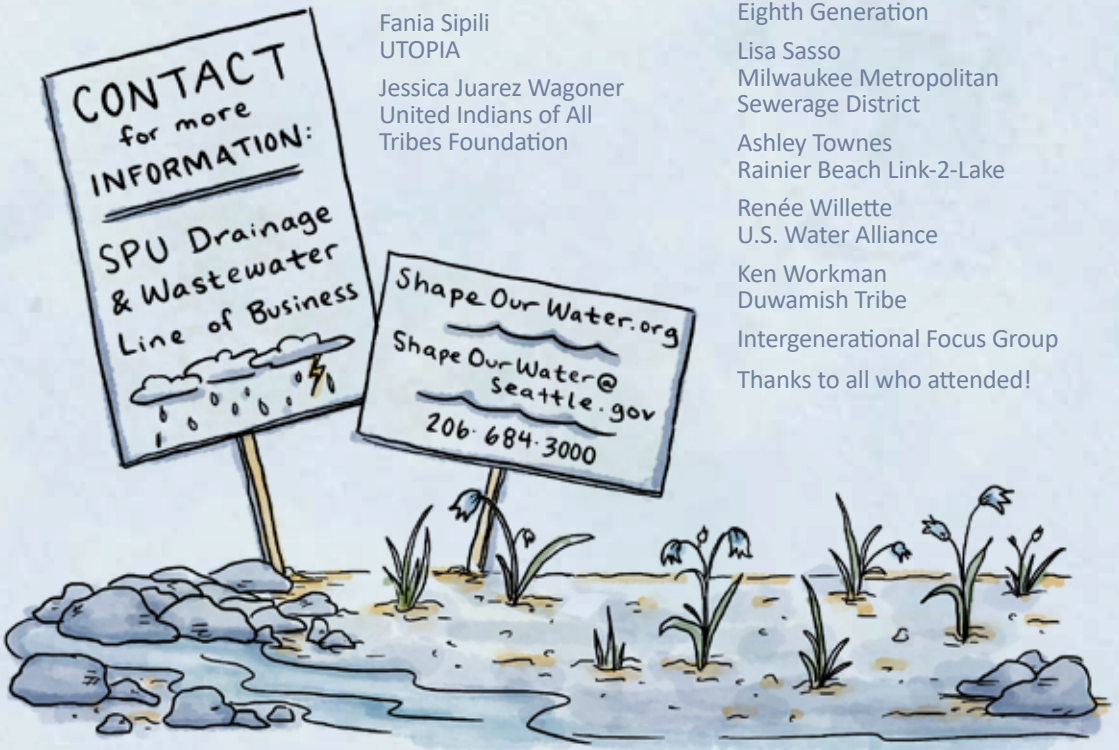
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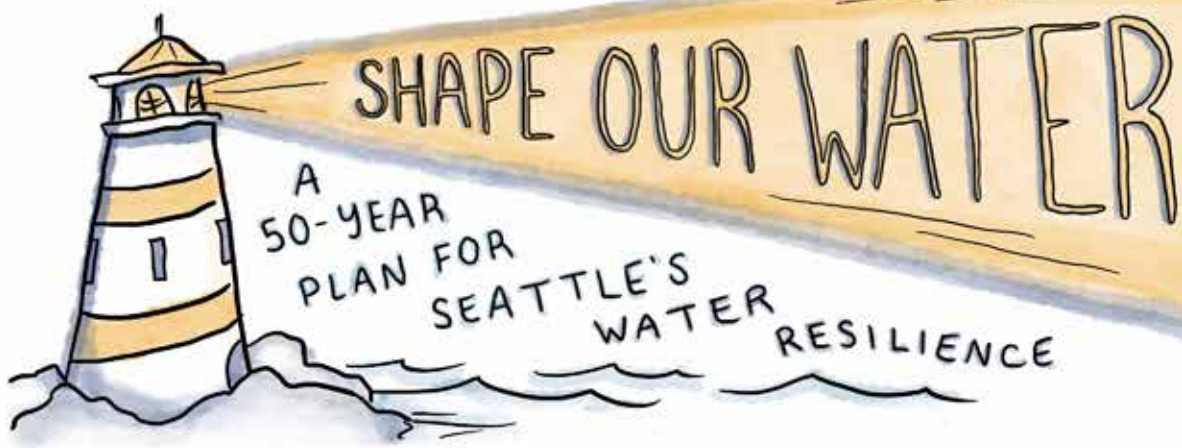
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Images throughout this  
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Shape Our Water is a 50-year plan for Seattle's water resilience. It is anchored by a community vision and set of goals that will guide drainage and wastewater investments that will help transform our city.

Shape Our Water focuses on community-centered, long-term investments in infrastructure, policies, and programs that will ensure Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) continues to provide exceptional services. Shape Our Water creates opportunities for infrastructure to support safe, healthy communities that resist displacement, thriving local businesses, and dynamic public spaces. Shape Our Water is a plan for Seattle to become a more resilient city that supports all its residents.

## A NEW APPROACH



Seattle is facing major environmental, social, and economic challenges from climate change, seismic risks, racial injustices, population growth, and affordability. As stewards of public infrastructure, SPU's Drainage and Wastewater Line of Business is responsible for protecting the environment and the community's health. SPU knows investment in infrastructure can provide multiple benefits in neighborhoods across Seattle. To develop truly multi-benefit investments, it is necessary to shift how projects and programs are designed by moving toward a collaborative planning process that includes communities and cross-sector partners.

Shape Our Water is SPU's catalyst to do things differently - from confronting and responding to embedded systemic racism and injustice in past planning decisions to recognizing that Seattle's problems are not singular issues and applying a holistic and adaptive management lens. Shape Our Water is working to create a more equitable and resilient future through drainage and wastewater investments.





# CREATED BY COMMUNITY



The Shape Our Water community vision is born of the effort, enthusiasm, knowledge, lived experience, talent, and inspiration of many individuals and organizations.



Seattle Public Utilities is grateful to all Shape Our Water contributors who participated during a global pandemic - many while experiencing unprecedented uncertainty, economic and health hardships, and social isolation. The contributions and commitments of co-creators, delivered through their own resilience in uniquely challenging times, will help SPU build a more water resilient Seattle.

Shape Our Water engagement activities were co-created with a variety of community members who shared their expertise in social and environmental justice, public health, storytelling, and sustainability. Shape Our Water prioritized engagement with historically underrepresented Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) groups and worked to incorporate and elevate voices from youth, artists, grassroots organizers, and representatives from community groups. Together with SPU, these co-creators designed and hosted engagement activities, distilled community values, and helped create this vision.

# ENGAGING COMMUNITY

This document is the culmination of two years of engagement focused on understanding the community's vision and goals for long-term resiliency, racial and environmental justice, and personal and community well-being.

Outreach occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and, following public health safety protocols, relied on events, tools, and technology that supported multi-faceted and socially distanced participation.

## SHAPE OUR WATER EVENTS AND RESOURCES

### **Get to Know SPU: Your Drainage and Wastewater Services booklet**

introduced drainage and wastewater basics

**Three-part virtual gatherings**  
with national and local thought leaders to discuss innovative approaches to water systems planning and community-led frameworks for multi-benefit investments

### **Lived-experience water stories**

told by BIPOC community partners and an intergenerational focus group

### **Interactive maps**

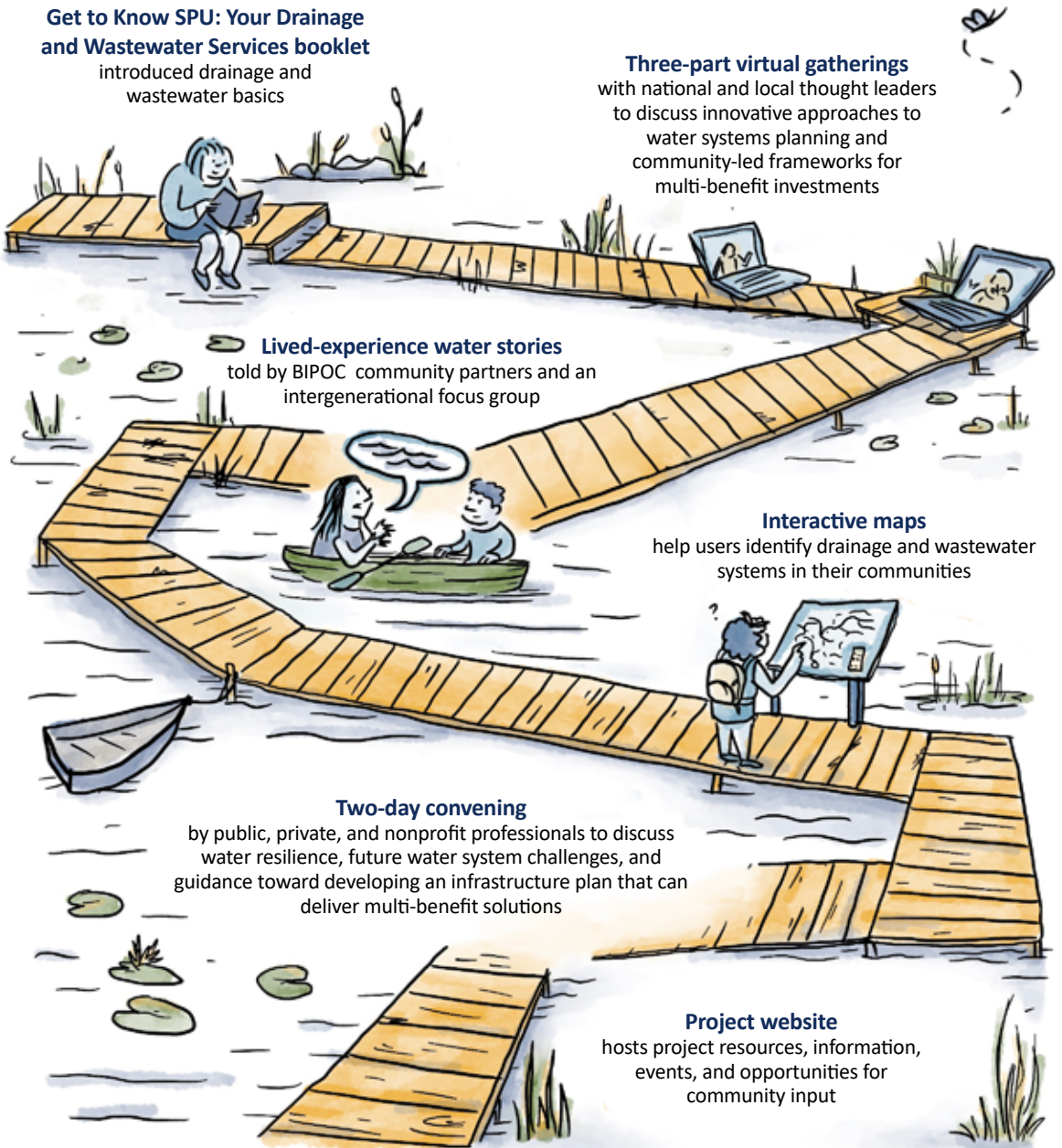
help users identify drainage and wastewater systems in their communities

### **Two-day convening**

by public, private, and nonprofit professionals to discuss water resilience, future water system challenges, and guidance toward developing an infrastructure plan that can deliver multi-benefit solutions

### **Project website**

hosts project resources, information, events, and opportunities for community input

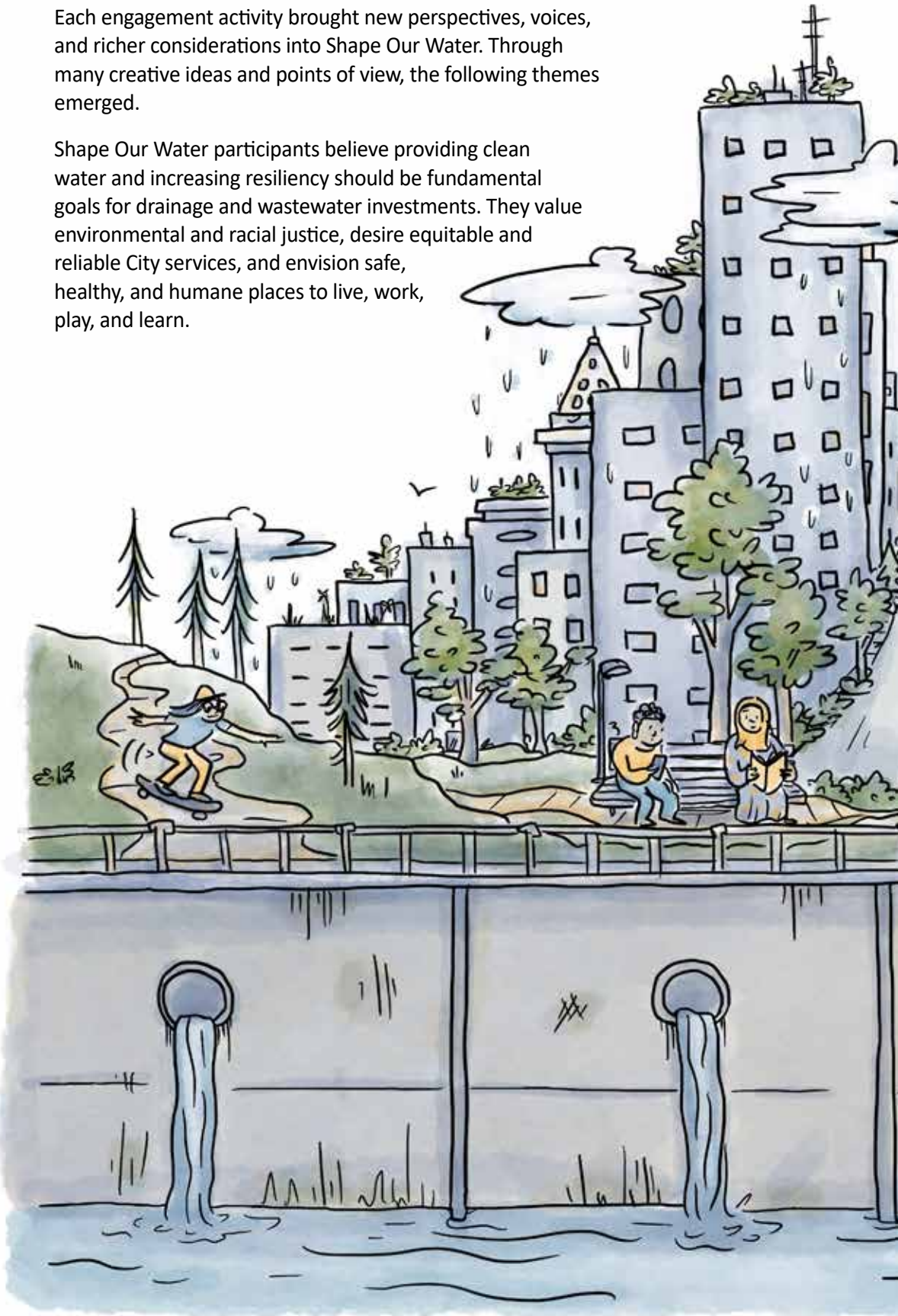




# COMMUNITY WISDOM

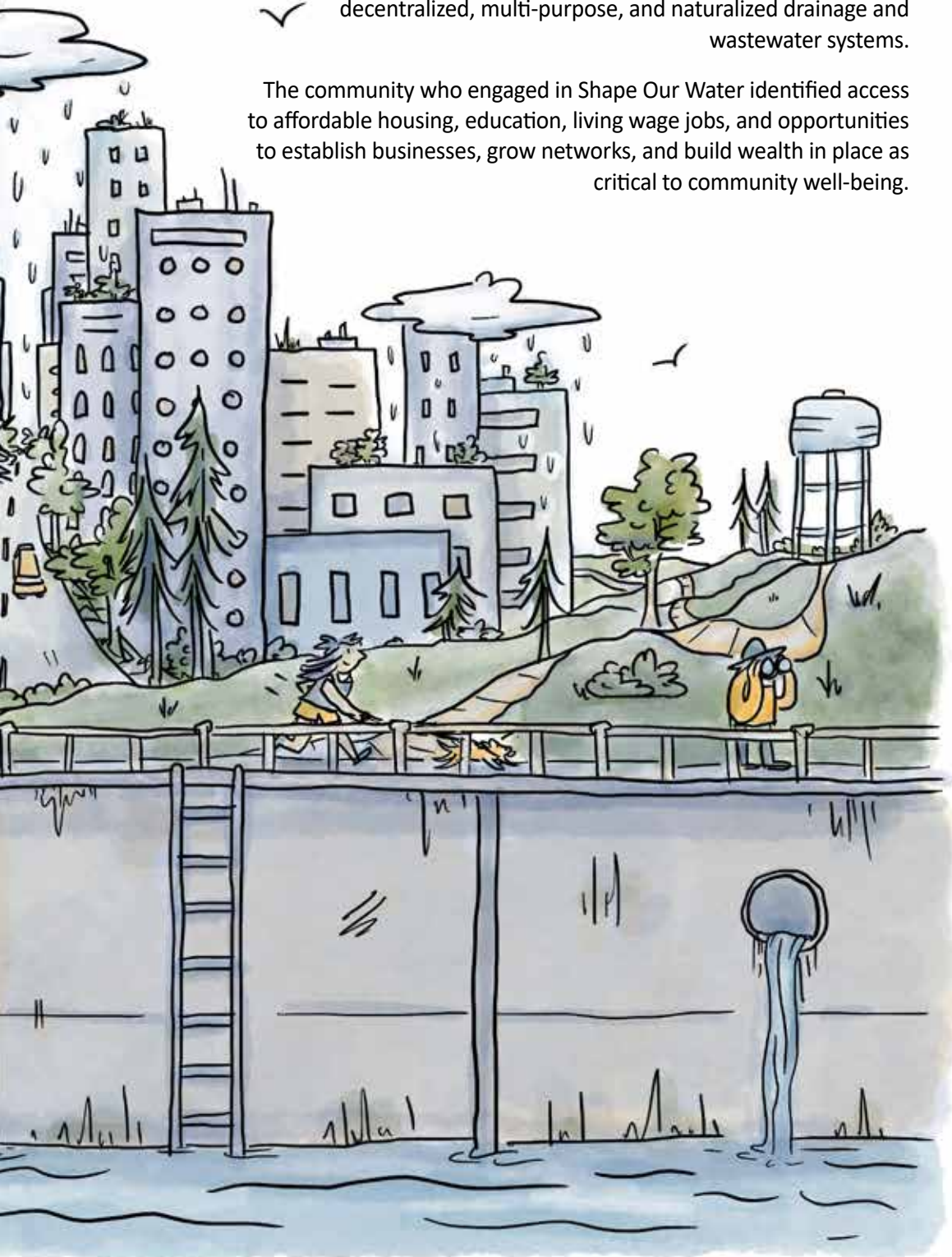
Each engagement activity brought new perspectives, voices, and richer considerations into Shape Our Water. Through many creative ideas and points of view, the following themes emerged.

Shape Our Water participants believe providing clean water and increasing resiliency should be fundamental goals for drainage and wastewater investments. They value environmental and racial justice, desire equitable and reliable City services, and envision safe, healthy, and humane places to live, work, play, and learn.



Shape Our Water participants expect universal access to environments that support physical, mental, and spiritual well-being for individuals and communities. They broadly support actions that protect Seattle's people and places against future seismic and climate-related challenges, like increasing the number of decentralized, multi-purpose, and naturalized drainage and wastewater systems.

The community who engaged in Shape Our Water identified access to affordable housing, education, living wage jobs, and opportunities to establish businesses, grow networks, and build wealth in place as critical to community well-being.

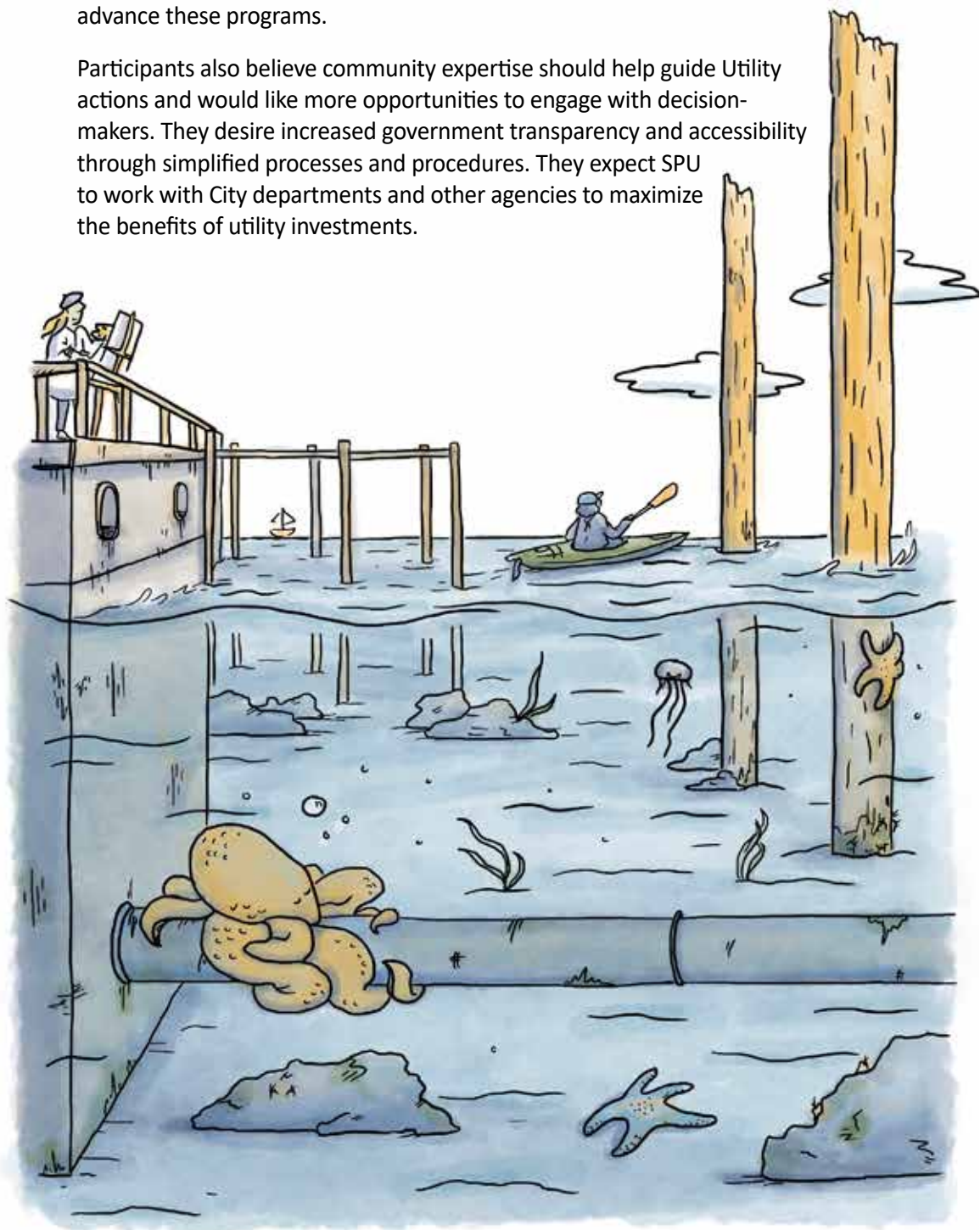




Themes identified by stakeholders provide guidance for ways the Utility can help support community priorities - like expanding neighborhood-based recruitment for SPU's apprenticeships or helping students discover drainage and wastewater-related career paths through workshops, mentorship, and school outreach.

Participants favor programs that help their neighbors afford utilities without interruptions, provide services for those experiencing homelessness, and protect residents and businesses against displacement. They suggest building partnerships to advance these programs.

Participants also believe community expertise should help guide Utility actions and would like more opportunities to engage with decision-makers. They desire increased government transparency and accessibility through simplified processes and procedures. They expect SPU to work with City departments and other agencies to maximize the benefits of utility investments.





# COMMUNITY VISION

Shape Our Water participants envision a promising future for their city:

Seattle is a climate-resilient city shaped by water. There is ample access to restored lakes, streams, the Duwamish river, and the Puget Sound. Healthy natural systems tie together a network of diverse and vibrant neighborhoods where race and economic status are no longer a predictor of outcomes. Seattle is a hub for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship that provides opportunities to build wealth in place for our communities.



# SHAPE OUR WATER GOALS

Community feedback inspired the following goals, which will guide SPU's next 50 years of transformative programs and investments in water infrastructure.

## COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

1. Protect water quality, improve aquatic health, and solve problems at the source to benefit all life that relies on our local waterbodies
2. Reduce impacts from flooding and sewer backups - especially in neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment
3. Provide accessible and affordable drainage and wastewater services to community members regardless of economic or housing status
4. Treat all water as an essential resource and ensure it is managed in a sustainable and integrated way
5. Broaden the public health outcomes of drainage and wastewater investments to include social and environmental health considerations

## RESILIENCE

1. Invest in drainage and wastewater infrastructure that can adapt to future environmental challenges and build system resiliency - especially in areas most vulnerable to environmental hazards
2. Maintain and adaptively manage Seattle's existing drainage and wastewater systems and resources to continuously provide essential public services
3. Increase Seattle's seismic and climate preparedness by aligning future projects and programs with city and regional partners
4. Support sustainable land use and development that improves urban water management





## MULTI-BENEFIT INVESTMENTS

1. Maximize the community benefits of drainage and wastewater investments
2. Increase community connection to our waterbodies and natural systems
3. Align investments with mobility, open space, and livability improvements
4. Fund community entrepreneurship and wealth building programs that focus on environmental stewardship and infrastructure management
5. Invest in the growth and development of a local workforce with a variety of skills, experiences, and knowledge in water management

## COMMUNITY-CENTERED PARTNERSHIPS

1. Honor the expertise and experiences of indigenous and historically underrepresented communities of all ages to achieve more equitable outcomes
2. Implement community-driven processes that promote shared decision-making in drainage and wastewater investments
3. Actively partner with other city departments, government agencies, tribal governments, and community organizations to create and participate in projects



# COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

The City of Seattle and SPU are committed to addressing the legacy of systemic racism and injustice in municipal governance. Institutionalized discrimination has led to racialized policy decisions that continue to impact communities of color and low-income communities in significant ways.

SPU's drainage and wastewater investments in environmental protection and preservation have not benefited all communities equally. Specifically, communities of color and low-income communities have not been able to reap equal benefits from investments in their communities.

These communities experience disproportionate burdens from environmental hazards that can lead to poor health outcomes and many lack access to health-promoting resources. This has caused communities of color and low-income communities to be the most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Shape Our Water will confront these disparities head-on by prioritizing equitable community health and well-being in planning the next 50 years of drainage and wastewater investments. SPU will center racial equity and the voices of those most harmed by environmental injustice and climate change.



# EQUITY PRINCIPLES

SPU is committed to embedding racial equity into this planning effort and to applying these principles during Shape Our Water's next phase of planning.



## LEAD WORK WITH A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

Prioritize the experiences of historically underserved communities and ensure services do not create or perpetuate disproportionate access or barriers along racial lines

## BE INNOVATIVE

Create solutions that go beyond the status quo by listening and learning from diverse perspectives

## BE WILLING TO CONFRONT SYSTEMS

Question long-standing policies and programs that continue to produce disparate outcomes

## WORK BOLDLY AND COURAGEOUSLY

Commit to continual learning, willingness to make mistakes, and not being held back by the fear of failure

## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND WORK COLLABORATIVELY

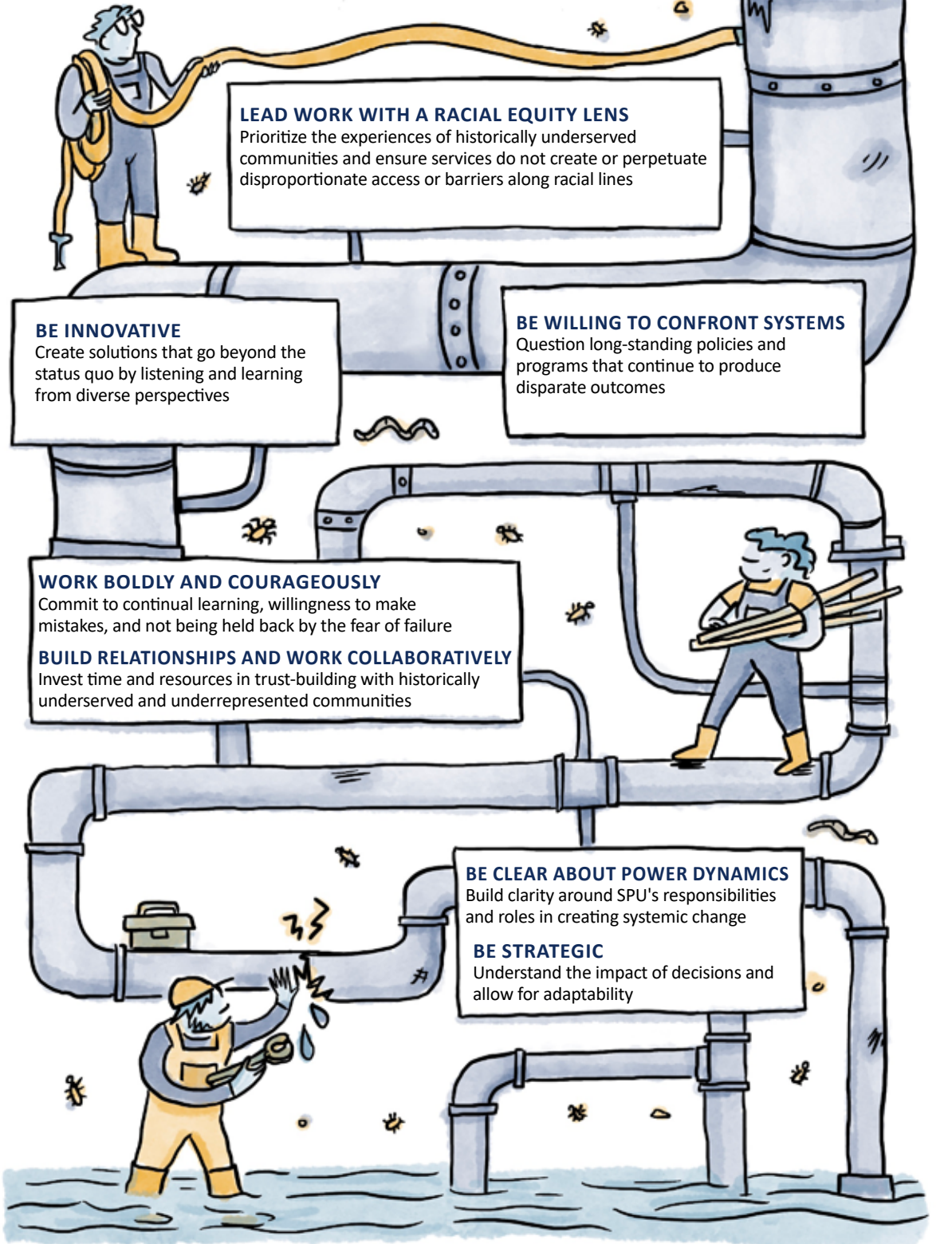
Invest time and resources in trust-building with historically underserved and underrepresented communities

## BE CLEAR ABOUT POWER DYNAMICS

Build clarity around SPU's responsibilities and roles in creating systemic change

## BE STRATEGIC

Understand the impact of decisions and allow for adaptability



# LOOKING FORWARD

SPU is focused on being a community-centered, one water, zero waste utility that delivers affordable and essential services for our community's health and well-being.

The next step of Shape Our Water SPU will brainstorm new ideas and solutions for Seattle's future challenges. Solutions will build on the ideas that arose during visioning - from efficient resource use and reuse, like stormwater harvesting, to expanding partnerships that support skill-building and job opportunities. After that, SPU will bring those strategies together to understand how well solutions will meet community goals while addressing drainage and wastewater system needs. Then, a preferred set of solutions will be selected and an implementation plan will be developed that includes near-term and long-term actions needed to adaptively implement Shape Our Water.

SPU cannot do this alone. Throughout the next steps in planning, there will be many opportunities to co-create and evaluate future solutions with community-based organizations, other City departments, government agencies, and Tribal governments. You and your community can help guide future investments and help SPU shape our water.





# Water Reflects

A poem by Monique Franklin

I give thanks, honor and respect to the puddle, the pool, the brook, the pond, the lake, the rain, the waterfall, the river, the snow, the iceberg, the sea, the ocean, the groundwater, the still water, the well water, the reservoir, and this body I call home.

Water reflects, it gives back.

Water is a mirror on its surface:  
a motion picture of what it sees.

Water reflects.

Like we reflect on the passion, the collective wisdom, and the voices we have heard. Those who have painted the pages of “what should we do and how should we do it” with vivid imagery and thoughtful purpose.

Our reflections became clear, we saw through, and like water we recapped a mountain of thoughts, ideas, and strategies. This is our waterlog, our record of resilience.

If there is magic to be found in convening, it is partnership.  
For in partnership, we multiply our waves when we include the wind.  
In partnership, we have the opportunity to reflect upon what others can see that we cannot.

In partnership, we lovingly hold each other accountable to a greater purpose.  
Community is a special kind of partnership that must be saturated with shared power and sustained by an equilibrium of equity to lead to a liquid flow of new ideas and innovations. We have the power to promote equity.

Decolonizing our minds is not a statement to be made, it is a commitment to personal and institutional growth, change and evolution. It is a daily question, it is a daily choice, it requires daily action until it becomes our personal habit, until it becomes our organizational habit until it becomes our culture.

I ask you to do  
what water cannot do,  
to reflect on what is absent.

Absorb that there are voices  
we have not heard.

The voices of communities who have not yet been engaged,  
the voices of our environmental family like trees and animals.

I ask you to see our waterlog as a water-color painting with vast spaces left blank as an opportunity for those voices to represent themselves in hues to contribute to this collective artwork we call water resilience.

Absorb.

Soak up.

Sink in.

Reflect.



Shape Our Water is SPU's plan for community-centered water investments that help make Seattle a more resilient city that supports all its residents.

Learn how you can help shape our water at:

**SHAPEOURWATER.ORG**

**SHAPEOURWATER@SEATTLE.GOV**



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