

KING COUNTY PARKS LEVY – EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Executive proposing?

Acting on recommendations from a citizen task force, the King County Executive is proposing a Parks Levy ballot measure for the August 6, 2013 primary election to replace the current parks levies, which expire at the end of 2013. The measure would enable King County's 26,000-acre system of parks and 175 miles of regional trails to remain clean, safe and open while making strategic investments in the system's infrastructure.

How much would be levied under this proposal?

The Executive's proposal to replace the current parks levies would authorize a CPI-indexed property tax levy lid lift of 18.91 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for the period of 2014 through 2019. The proposal would cost an estimated \$64 per year for the owner of a home valued at \$340,000 and is expected to generate a minimum of \$360 million over the six-year period.

What did the citizen task force recommend?

Convened by the King County Executive in June 2012, the 21-member King County Parks Levy Task Force – a panel of business and civic leaders – prioritized keeping the County's parks and trails clean, safe, open and accessible. The task force recommended connecting and expanding trails and open space and repairing critical and aging public recreation facilities. It unanimously recommended a levy rate of 19.01 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value. Read the task force's findings and recommendations at www.kingcounty.gov/parks/levy.

How is this proposal different from what the citizen task force recommended?

The Executive's proposal shares the vision of the Task Force's recommendations and both were in strong agreement on the goals of the parks levy:

- Taking care of King County's existing system of parks and trails;
- Stewarding regional open space and natural lands, connecting habitat important for fish and wildlife, and providing recreation opportunities;
- Improving regional trails and mobility, ensuring essential connections are completed and existing trails are maintained; and
- Making parks and recreation opportunities more accessible for all King County residents to enjoy.

The Executive is proposing a levy rate slightly lower than that recommended by the Task Force. The major differences result from a refined estimate of the work to be accomplished in the next six years on the Eastside Rail Corridor, as well as from an updated REET forecast, which indicates a slight improvement in the local housing economy, offsetting the some of the amount of levy proceeds needed to address infrastructure repair and replacement. In addition to lowering the overall levy rate, these adjustments make it possible for the levy to fund additional open space acquisition, enforcement and safety measures at parks and trails, and peak season maintenance.

Why is this proposal different from the levies approved by voters in 2007?

About 80 percent of the levy would continue the levels of service provided by the current levies, which are collecting more than 13 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value in 2013. General fund support for the Parks Division was eliminated as of 2011, and shrinking funding sources such as Real Estate Excise Tax revenue due to a struggling economy mean the County must levy additional funds just to attain the same level of maintenance to parks and trails.

What's more, the Parks Division has delayed major maintenance to some facilities in order to keep its parks clean, safe and open. For example, repair or replacement of 14 historic bridges and trestles throughout the trails system is now critical. Continued delay of repair or replacement could lead to safety hazards or closure within the next six years, which would disrupt more than 40 trail miles.

How does the levy improve parks and trails for King County residents?

In addition to maintaining and operating its current 200 parks, 175 miles of trails, and 26,000 acres of open space, which provide countless recreation opportunities and contribute to King County's quality of life, the levy would make strategic investments to take care and improve King County's system for the future.

How does the levy address our region's open space needs?

The levy would provide enough funding to acquire roughly 450 acres per year of critical open space (in fee or through easements), or 2,700 acres over the six-year period, preserving forests and other habitat, protecting water quality for fish and wildlife, and providing recreation opportunities. This is the equivalent of acquiring and protecting an area nearly the size of Seattle's Discovery Park for our region every year for six years.

Will this levy improve trails?

Yes – the levy would provide funding to take care of King County's 175-mile Regional Trails System, while completing missing links and connecting to trails in cities and to transit and civic hubs. King County is also working with nine south county and eastside cities to lay the groundwork for two major new trail corridors, which when completed, will add more than 20 new miles of trails to the County's existing 175-mile regional trail network. Levy proceeds would help move the Lake to Sound Trail and Eastside Rail Corridor projects forward.

What will this levy do to improve public access?

By developing trailhead facilities and parking lots, the levy would improve access to up to 8,400 acres of existing parks, such as at Cougar Mountain and Pinnacle Peak, which feature 140 miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Is there funding for parks in King County cities and for Woodland Park Zoo?

Yes – an estimated \$4.2 million per year would be distributed among all of King County's 39 cities and would fund park and trail improvements in local communities. Another \$4.2 million per year would support the Zoo's conservation and environmental programs and to help ensure some 80,000 school children from all parts of King County can visit and learn at the regional Woodland Park Zoo every year for free.

What happens if the levy is not approved?

The current operating levy, which expires at the end of 2013, provides approximately 70 percent of the Parks Division's operating revenue, with some 17 percent generated from entrepreneurial and enterprise activities. General fund support for the Division was eliminated as of 2011, and there are no other sources of funding available. This proposal would allow King County to continue operating and maintaining its parks and trails that offer a diversity of recreation opportunities for all County residents to enjoy.

How can I learn more?

Visit www.kingcounty.gov/parks/levy to learn more, and stay informed of all happenings at King County Parks on Facebook at www.facebook.com/iheartkcparks or by following the King County Parks blog at <http://kingcountyparks.wordpress.com>.