

February 15, 2013

The Honorable Larry Gossett
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Gossett:

This letter transmits an ordinance authorizing a measure to be placed on the August 6, 2013, primary election ballot. This measure replaces the current parks levies, which expire at the end of 2013, and will enable our 26,000-acre system of parks and trails to remain clean, safe and open while making strategic investments in our system's infrastructure.

Ten years ago, when King County was confronted with a \$52 million general fund crisis, the Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (Division) began a dramatic transformation, reorienting its mission to focus on providing regional trails, regional recreation facilities, regional natural area parks, and local rural parks. At that time, the County sought financial stability for the park system through a property tax levy and a commitment to generate business revenue through entrepreneurial and enterprise activities. Since then, the Division has successfully met its business revenue growth targets, and King County voters approved additional parks-related property tax levies in 2007, once again demonstrating their strong support for the benefits and services provided by the Division.

The ballot measure I am proposing will accomplish several King County Strategic Plan goals as well as the County's Strategic Climate Plan goals by:

- Taking care of King County's extensive existing system of 200 parks, 175 miles of regional trails and 26,000 acres of open space;
- Stewarding regional open space and natural lands, connecting habitat important for salmon and other wildlife and providing recreation opportunities;
- Improving the Regional Trails System (RTS) and regional 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.

My proposal was informed by the recommendations of the King County Parks Levy Task Force, whose report is included as an attachment, as well as by extensive public outreach conducted by the Division in 2011 and 2012 (see customer satisfaction report, also attached). The Task Force, which was made up of civic and business leaders from around the County, met from June to October 2012 and focused on answering the following questions:

- What should be done to preserve the County's 26,000-acre system of parks and trails after the current operating and capital levies expire at the end of 2013?
- What should be done to meet the future parks and recreation needs of King County residents?

The ballot measure I am proposing is consistent with the goals and priorities identified by the Task Force. Celebrating its 75th anniversary, King County Parks is at a critical point, needing to protect and preserve the assets King County residents have invested in over the past seven decades while preparing to meet the future needs of our residents and contribute to our region's thriving quality of life.

My proposal also takes additional steps toward meeting our goals for equity and social justice to ensure more equitable distribution of King County parks and trails particularly in south King County where the health outcomes of our residents are not as high as they are for other parts of our County. Our Community Partnerships and Grants program, which is increased by 20 percent, will also help to enhance the opportunity and access for underserved populations.

I am asking the Council to provide the public the choice to protect and enhance these investments. If approved by voters, the proposal will authorize a property tax levy lid lift of \$0.1891 per thousand dollars of assessed value for the period of 2014 through 2019. Roughly 80 percent of the proceeds of this levy continue the level of services provided by the current levies. The proposal would cost the owner of home valued at \$340,000 an estimated \$64 per year.

The current operating levy, which will expire at the end of 2013, provides approximately 70 percent of the 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. If this proposal is not placed on the ballot and approved, King County's parks system faces closure.

The current Open Space and Trails Levy has provided funds for open space acquisitions and trail development for King County, as well as its 39 cities, and has funded programs and capital improvements at the Woodland Park Zoo. My proposal carries forward funding for these types of investments, while funding the replacement and improvement of aging parks infrastructure and the development of trailhead facilities to increase access to parks and trails for all King County residents to enjoy. These types of infrastructure repairs and improvements were historically funded by Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) revenues; however, the severe decline in

REET over the past six years has meant that the Division has been left without a source of funding for these types of projects. With a 75-year-old system that includes buildings and bridges that are even older, we need to invest in this important public infrastructure.

The replacement levy measure I am proposing is fiscally responsible and strategic. It has been built on extensive engagement with community leaders, parks and trails visitors, representatives from local jurisdictions, and King County residents. It will preserve and protect our existing system and the public lands legacy in which King County residents have already invested, while making targeted enhancements to prepare us to meet our region's future needs.

All residents of King County have a stake in preserving our parks, trails and open spaces, as all of us gain from the human health, environmental, and economic benefits King County's system provides. King County voters deserve the opportunity to decide, as they have countless times over the past 75 years, whether to protect the regional legacy of our region's parks and trails. I respectfully request your support for placing this measure, as proposed, before the voters of King County this August.

If you have any questions or would like additional information on this matter, please contact Kevin Brown, Division Director of the Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, at 206-296-8631.

Sincerely,

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers
ATTN: Michael Woywod, Chief of Staff
Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council
Carrie S. Cihak, Chief Advisor, Policy and Strategic Initiatives, King
County Executive Office
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget
Christie True, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP)
Kevin Brown, Division Director, Parks and Recreation Division, DNRP