

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

King County Parks, Trails and Open Space Replacement Levy 2020-2025

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

Christie True, Director of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, will present an update on the County's proposal for a six-year parks, trails and open space replacement levy for 2020-2025. The current levy will expire at the end of 2019 unless voters approve a replacement. The King County Council must take final action on the proposed levy ordinance by April 30 in order for the levy to be placed on the August ballot.

**INFORMATION
ONLY**

The Regional Policy Committee (RPC) is scheduled for potential action on the levy ordinance at a March 28 special meeting. No formal position by Council on the proposed levy is being requested at this time. Tonight's presentation is an opportunity for Council to ask questions and provide feedback to Councilmember John Stokes who serves on the RPC, King County staff and Bellevue staff. If the King County Council acts to place the replacement levy on the ballot, Bellevue staff will return to Council for further direction.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Christie True, Director of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, will present an update on the County's proposal for a six-year parks, trails and open space replacement levy for 2020-2025. The first four-year King County parks levy was approved by voters in 2003 to support operations and maintenance of regional and rural parks. It was renewed and increased in 2007 and again in 2013 to support both operations and expansion of parks, open space and trails. If renewed again, the levy would extend from 2020 to 2025.

The current levy was approved by voters in 2013 at a rate of 18.77 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value and due to rising property values, it is being collected at a rate of 12.68 cents in 2019. It is estimated

that it will have generated a total of \$420 million over the six-year levy period of 2014-2019. Bellevue property owners contribute approximately \$8 million per year under the current levy. A home valued at \$1 million contributes about \$126 annually under the current levy.

2020-2025 King County Parks Levy Structure

The replacement levy is proposed at 16.82 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation with annual adjustments for inflation and population growth. It is estimated that this rate will generate approximately \$738 million countywide over six years. A home valued at \$1 million would contribute about \$168 per year under the new levy, compared to about \$126 currently. The proposed levy ordinance limits levy funds to the following objectives:

- Maintenance and operations of the existing King County Parks system, including parks, trails and open spaces
- Improving parks, recreation, access and mobility by acquiring open space and continuing to develop regional trails
- Repairing, replacing and improving local parks and trails in King County's cities
- Woodland Park Zoo maintenance and programming
- Seattle Aquarium capital construction

Each of these objectives carries forward from previous levies, with the exception of the Seattle Aquarium objective, which is newly proposed for 2020. Also, newly proposed is a focus on addressing disparities in access to parks, recreation and open space for underserved communities through a new Targeted Equity Grant Program.

As with past levies, a portion of the levy funds are passed through a formula allocation to incorporated cities in King County for local park acquisition and development projects consistent with the overall objectives of the levy. The allowed uses of levy proceeds by cities has expanded over the past several levy cycles. Cities have used levy distributions for projects including operations and maintenance, community parks and recreation, city trail projects and open space acquisitions

Proposed Levy Funding Plan

Of the projected \$738 million to be collected over the life of the levy, expenditures are proposed as follows:

- The Seattle Aquarium will receive \$8 million over four years specifically for its new Ocean Pavilion capital project.
- Of the remaining levy funds, 40 percent is allocated to King County Parks maintenance and operations. Within this amount, up to \$6 million will be distributed to local community projects through a new Targeted Equity Grant Program that will be used to provide "equitable opportunities and access to public parks and recreation for underserved communities".
- Another 47 percent of levy funding is allocated to King County Parks for acquisition of open

space, regional trail development and park system capital improvement. This funding will include a specific \$35 million open space allocation for cities that can be used for active recreation as long as at least 20 percent of the land remains open space, natural land or urban green space available for passive recreation.

- Five percent of levy proceeds will be distributed to the Woodland Park Zoo
- Cities within King County will receive eight percent for local park system projects. Funds will be allocated by formula:
 - All cities, regardless of size, will receive a minimum of \$25,000 annually
 - Cities with a population over 4,000 will receive a minimum of \$75,000 annually
 - Remaining funds are divided using a formula: 50 percent based on city population and 50 percent based on assessed value of parcels within a city

The total direct allocation for cities is proposed to increase from \$29 million in the 2014-2019 levy to \$60 million for 2020-2025. Bellevue received approximately \$2.7 million under the current levy and would receive about \$4.4 million under the proposed levy.

Proposed Parks Levy Projects in Bellevue

Park, trail and open space projects in Bellevue may receive parks levy funding in two ways. One is through the direct levy distribution to cities, mentioned above. Through the current levy, Bellevue received a total of \$2.7 million and used the distribution to support construction of the Downtown Park Complete the Circle project. The new levy would increase the total allocation to Bellevue to about \$730,000 per year or a total of about \$4.4 million over the six-year levy.

The second way that County levy funds will be used in Bellevue is through the County's investment in its regional trails system as it extends through Bellevue, including the Eastside Rail Corridor (ERC). The current levy is partially funding projects such as the ERC trail improvements south of I-90 that will be constructed concurrent with the Washington State Department of Transportation Renton to Bellevue I-405 project and the vegetated pedestrian bridge over I-405 that will reconnect the ERC at the site of the old Wilburton Tunnel.

The proposed 2020-2025 levy has a total of \$50.5 million allocated to ERC projects throughout the corridor. In Bellevue, the list of ERC projects includes:

- Trail connection to SR 520 Trail at Northup Way
- NE 8th Street Pedestrian Bridge crossing
- Wilburton Trestle preservation and trail retrofit
- Gateway trailhead improvements at the north end of the Trestle in Wilburton
- Interim connection to the I-90 Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail at 118th Avenue SE and SE 32nd Street

An additional \$700,000 from the proposed levy regional trails acquisition fund will help acquire property for the Mercer Slough Gateway at 118th Avenue SE.

Next Steps

As a countywide plan, the proposed levy is under mandatory “dual review” by the RPC and the King County Budget and Fiscal Management Committee. The RPC is scheduled for potential action on the levy ordinance at a March 28 special meeting. Due to King County rules for ordinances that are “dually referred” to the RPC, if the County Council amends the ordinance after the RPC’s approval, the ordinance must return to the RPC for review and action again. The King County Council must take final action on the proposed levy ordinance by April 30 in order for the levy to be placed on the August ballot.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

The current levy was approved by voters in 2013 at a rate of 18.77 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value and due to rising property values, it is being collected at a rate of 12.68 cents in 2019. It is estimated that it will have generated a total of \$420 million over the six-year levy period of 2014-2019. Bellevue property owners contribute approximately \$8 million per year under the current levy. A home valued at \$1 million contributes about \$126 annually under the current levy.

The replacement levy is proposed at 16.82 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation with annual adjustments for inflation and population growth. It is estimated that this rate will generate approximately \$738 million countywide over six years. A home valued at \$1 million would contribute about \$168 per year under the new levy, compared to about \$126 currently.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. 2020-2025 King County Parks, Trails and Open Space Replacement Levy Brochure and Proposed Project Map

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A