

2020 – 2025 King County Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Levy

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the 2020 – 2025 King County Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Levy?

A: The current 2014-2019 Parks Levy will expire at the end of 2019. The 2020-2025 King County Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Levy, approved by the King County Council in April 2019, is a ballot measure that would fund operation and maintenance of King County's parks and trails, support the growth and connection of regional trails, protect open space throughout the county, and establish grant programs to expand access to parks, trails and recreation. Proceeds from the levy would also directly support parks in King County's cities, the Woodland Park Zoo and the Seattle Aquarium.

Q: Why has this levy been proposed?

A: This levy is consistent with the County's practice of not using General Fund monies on parks, trails and open space. King County Parks has not received General Fund support since 2010. The current levy, which is the primary revenue source for King County Parks' operating and capital budgets, expires at the end of 2019. There are no other sources of funding identified at this time to operate and maintain King County's parks, trails and open space system.

King County voters approved parks levies three times since 2003, the first time such a measure was placed on a ballot.

Q: How much would the levy cost a King County homeowner?

A: The levy would replace the expiring parks levy and cost about \$7.60 per month for the owner of a home valued at \$500,000. This is about \$2.25 per month more than the current levy rate (in 2019 dollars). It is estimated that of total property taxes paid by a homeowner, approximately 1.5 - 2 percent would go towards this levy.

Q: How much money would the levy generate?

It is estimated that the levy will generate about \$810 million over the next six years. The effective rate is 18.32 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Q: How would proceeds from the levy be used?

A: This levy would focus on the following:

- Thirty-nine percent (\$319 million) would fund operations and maintenance of King County's existing system of 200 parks, 175 miles of regional trails, and 28,000 acres of open space. This includes day-to-day operations, as well as repairing and renovating park infrastructure such as play areas and ballfields.
- Twenty-four percent (\$193 million) would fund grant programs, which aim to make parks and recreation more accessible. Cities, park districts, and non-profit organizations would be eligible to apply, depending on the grant category. This would include support for pools, park and trail capital investments, open space acquisitions, recreation programming, and projects and programs that specifically serve historically underserved communities, including people with disabilities. This would also include direct allocations to cities and towns to support their local parks, as well as to regional facilities such as the Woodland Park Zoo and the Seattle Aquarium.
- Twenty percent (\$166 million) would fund the expansion and connection of regional trails, such as the Eastside Rail Corridor Trail and the Lake to Sound Trail.
- Fifteen percent (\$121 million) would fund the protection of open space through acquisition and support recreation opportunities along river corridors.

A map of levy investments can be found at www.kingcounty.gov/parks/levy.

Note: These amounts do not total \$810 million, as a small amount is set aside for costs associated with under-collection, exemptions, and election costs.

Q. What does King County hope to achieve with this levy?

A. Similar to the current levy, King County is seeking to:

- Help keep King County's parks and trail clean, safe and open
- Make parks and recreation more accessible
- Improve regional trails and mobility
- Grow and connect regional open space

Q: How does this levy differ from the current one?

A: While King County's goals for this levy remain similar to those of the current levy, this levy is different in that it would help address current and future population growth and development of the region. By 2025, King County is expected to add 150,000 new residents, which impacts demand for parks, trails, and recreation programs serving the residents of King County and for protection of forestlands, water quality, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

This levy would also establish grant programs that aim to make parks, recreation, trails, and open space more accessible; cities, park districts, and non-profit organizations serving King County residents would be eligible to apply. It also would establish grant programs that aim to expand access to parks, trails and recreation among historically underserved communities and people with disabilities.

In addition, the cost of operating and maintaining King County's parks and trails has increased, due to factors such as competitive market conditions, system growth, aging facilities, and inflation, which affects the cost of utilities and other operational costs of doing business.

Q: Who decided how levy proceeds would be used?

A: The levy ordinance was approved by the King County Council in April 2019, thereby placing the measure on the August 6, 2019 ballot. The levy was based upon a proposal put forth by King County Executive Dow Constantine, and reflects input gathered through engagement with more than 50 cities and community, recreation, and environmental organizations during the fall of 2018. This engagement process helped King County better understand the region's open space and recreation needs now and in the future and informed its decision to seek another levy as the means to best meet those needs.

Q: Who reviews how levy proceeds are spent and progress on achieving the levy?

A: As in past levies, the levy ordinance establishes a Parks Levy Oversight Board, which is appointed by the King County Council and consists of one representative from each of the nine County Council districts. The oversight board would meet annually to review Parks' levy expenditures from the previous year and make recommendations for implementation of the levy in the coming year.

Q: What happens if the 2020-2025 King County Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Open Space Levy is not approved?

A: The levy would fund about 80 percent of the operations and maintenance of King County's parks, trails, and open space system. This would include the repair or replacement of park facilities, buildings and trail bridges that are near, at, or have exceeded their engineered lifespans. There are no other revenue sources identified at this time for the day-to-day operations and maintenance.

Q: What is a property tax levy lid lift?

A: A property tax levy is a tool that local governments can use to generate revenue; the levy collects taxes based on the assessed value of someone's property. Rules governing the different types of levies, such as length and approval requirements, are set by the state. The "levy lid lift" allows for a property tax increase greater than what

is established by state law, which is currently a one percent growth compared to the prior year's total property taxes collected.

Q: How are levy proceeds collected?

A: Levy proceeds are included in the property tax bill distributed annually by the King County Treasury. King County collects property taxes on behalf of the state, county, cities, and other local taxing districts (such as school and fire districts), and distributes the revenue to these local entities.

Q: Are there special exemptions for people living on fixed income?

A: A new state law adopted in 2018 allows cities and counties to exempt people with qualifying fixed incomes from the tax increase resulting from levy lid lifts (see RCW 84.36.381). This includes people who are seniors with low incomes, disabled veterans with a service-connected disability, and other people who are disabled. This exemption is included in this levy proposition. To learn more, please visit the King County Assessor's website: <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/assessor/TaxRelief.aspx>

Q: How can I learn more?

A: To learn more about the King County Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Levy, visit www.kingcounty.gov/parks/levy.