

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

AGENDA TITLE:	Discussing the King County Land Conservation Initiative
PRESENTED BY:	Eric Friedli, PRCS Department Director Bob Burns, Deputy Director, King County DNRP Ingrid Lundin, Conservation Futures Coordinator, King County DNRP
ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

King County has a goal of working with cities to conserve more than 60,000 acres of high conservation value lands within a generation - including farmlands, forest lands, natural areas, and trails. King County is one of the fastest growing large counties in the U.S. More than 2 million people call King County home today, with an expected twenty-five percent increase in population by 2040. The region must act quickly to protect our most-important remaining conservation lands before prices escalate and we lose opportunities to development.

In November 2015, the King County Council, via Motion 14458, asked King County Executive Dow Constantine to develop a work plan for implementing a program to protect and conserve land and water resources – the King County Land Conservation Initiative (Initiative). The County Executive convened a Land Conservation Advisory Group to review and make recommendations on the County Executive’s *Land Conservation Work Plan*. The Advisory Group represents the business community, land conservation organizations, cities, the environmental community, and other stakeholders. The Advisory Group met nine times from September 2016 to January 2017, and issued a Phase 1 Report which provided feedback on the initial work and recommended additional planning and research needed during 2017. The Advisory Group will reconvene during Fall 2017 to review additional information and make final recommendations to the County Executive and King County Council.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact related to this discussion.

RECOMMENDATION

No formal action is required; this is a discussion item only.

Approved By: City Manager **DT** City Attorney **JA-T**

BACKGROUND

King County has a goal of working with cities to conserve more than 60,000 acres of high conservation value lands within a generation - including farmlands, forest lands, natural areas, and trails. King County is one of the fastest growing large counties in the U.S. More than 2 million people call King County home today, with an expected twenty-five percent increase in population by 2040. The region must act quickly to protect our most-important remaining conservation lands before prices escalate and we lose opportunities to development.

In November 2015, the King County Council, via Motion 14458, asked King County Executive Dow Constantine to develop a work plan for implementing a program to protect and conserve land and water resources. County Council Motion 14458 can be found at the following web link:

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/land-conservation/business-documents/motion-14458.pdf>

The County Executive prepared the requested plan and submitted it to the County Council in March 2016. The *Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan* (Work Plan) can be found at the following web link:

Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/natural-resources/land-conservation/king-county-land-conservation-workplan-march-2016.pdf>

Additional information on the County Executive's Work Plan be found at the following web link:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/water-and-land/land-conservation.aspx>.

To assist in this effort, the County Executive convened a Land Conservation Advisory Group to review and make recommendations on the County Executive's Work Plan. The Advisory Group represents the business community, land conservation organizations, cities, the environmental community, and other stakeholders. Information on the Land Conservation Advisory Group, including its membership, can be found at the following web link:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/water-and-land/land-conservation/advisory-group.aspx>

The Advisory Group met nine times from September 2016 to January 2017, and issued a Phase 1 Report which provided feedback on the initial work and recommended additional planning and research needed during 2017. The Phase I Report can be reviewed at the following web link:

Advisory Group Phase 1 Report

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/land-conservation/phase-1-report-land-conservation-advisory-group.pdf>

The Advisory Group will reconvene during Fall 2017 to review additional information and make final recommendations to the County Executive and King County Council.

King County staff met with Shoreline staff from PRCS and PCD twice since Fall 2016 to learn more about the initiative. During these meetings, PRCS staff presented the land acquisition priorities included in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS Plan) (the City Council authorized use of the PROS Plan for grant funding purposes only on 7/31/2017).

DISCUSSION

Why conserve land?

Our surrounding landscape gives King County a competitive economic advantage in the global marketplace. People want to live here and businesses want to be here, in part because of the natural beauty and accessible open space.

For King County to thrive, we need to keep our natural lands and river corridors intact, maintain viable working resource lands, and preserve great places for people to explore, relax and stay connected to the natural world.

Land preservation benefits include:

- **Climate change:** We are already seeing the effects of a changing climate on our region's natural and built systems. Open space and forests can mitigate and minimize the effects of extreme weather and natural disasters and absorb greenhouse gases.
- **Biodiversity:** Open space in developed regions like central Puget Sound is critical to supporting a diversity of species and their benefits to the region's economy, health and culture.
- **Social equity:** Historically, minority and low-income populations have been underserved and under-represented in open space planning and access. Open space planning which prioritizes equity can ensure that all residents benefit from conserved lands.
- **Human health:** "The quality of air, water and soil, healthy food and good nutrition depend on open space and it provides opportunities for physical activity, reduces stress and improves social connections. Access to nature improves health and well-being in many ways—physical activity, stress reduction, spiritual renewal, and more." - Howard Frumkin, UW School of Public Health
- **Economic development:** From supporting the timber, agriculture, recreation and tourism industries, to attracting anchor businesses, retaining their employees and boosting real estate values, open space plays a significant role in the region's economy. Balancing the preservation of open space with the demands of growth is a challenge now and will be for regional decision makers in coming years.
- **Competitive advantage:** "Some of our nation's most dynamic companies call this region home. One reason they choose to locate here is the open space at

our doorstep and the quality of life we enjoy. Open space is a competitive asset.”
- Maud Daudon, Seattle Chamber of Commerce

Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan

County Executive Constantine transmitted the Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan to King County Council in March 2016 (web link provided above).

Near-term actions of the Work Plan include:

- Refine the analysis of lands King County seeks to protect.
- Identify existing and new opportunities for revenue streams to support and achieve the conservation goal.
- Look for opportunities to forge public and private partnerships.
- Collaborate with cities in King County to identify their priorities for conserving land.
- Provide opportunities for public engagement and input.
- Convene an advisory group to provide input on King County’s overall land conservation goal; input and recommendations on financial strategies; and approaches and timing considerations for achieving the goal.

Areas of focus

Based on the King County Council’s direction, King County’s conservation efforts were originally focused in five major categories, which taken together benefit nature and people.

- Natural lands for clean water, clean air, passive recreation opportunities, healthy communities, salmon recovery and wildlife, and resilience in an uncertain future.
- Farmland for healthy local food and a thriving agricultural economy.
- Forestland for clean water, clean air, salmon recovery and wildlife, and a sustainable timber industry.
- River valley and nearshore land for flood safety, salmon recovery, recreation, and a healthy Puget Sound.
- Trail corridor connections to complete a world-class regional trail network to increase mobility, improve human health and reduce pollution.

A sixth area of focus was added by the Advisory Group: urban green space in its Phase 1 Report (web link provided above). This category was recommended to be generally consistent with King County’s five land categories identified above and should be defined through work with cities and historically underserved communities in the next several months before the Advisory Group is reconvened.

The Advisory Group’s other Phase 1 recommendations include:

- Working with cities to complete a list of urban priority lands and trails in the next six months, and to ensure ongoing funding is available to cities to preserve both

high value conservation lands and urban green space that cities may identify later.

- Working to better define and quantify the interest of some cities in finding revenue sources for restoration of urban green spaces already in public ownership, as well as city needs for park land maintenance dollars.
- Incorporating equity and social justice considerations into the Initiative, including addressing disparities that exist amongst some communities regarding access and proximity to open space and green space, and working with historically underserved communities to identify the types of urban green spaces that they value most.
- Refining cost assumptions with respect to the 66,000 acres of identified King County priority land, and the acreage yet to be identified inside cities.
- Working to better describe and effectively communicate the broad range of environmental, human health, community resilience and economic prosperity benefits that could be derived from this Initiative.
- Ensuring that acceleration of funding is available so that quick action can be taken to preserve lands under threat of development.
- Developing a strategy that will ensure both success of the Initiative as refined over the next several months, and renewal of the current King County Parks Levy.
- Leaving four potential public funding sources on the table for now, pending further work to refine the scope and cost of the Initiative. Of the four public funding options discussed, the Advisory Group is most strongly supportive of Conservation Futures Tax.
- The group expressed a lesser degree of support for new real estate excise tax authority, another property tax levy or general obligation bonds as Initiative funding sources.
- Doing additional work to test the assumptions about the role of private funding in supporting the Initiative.
- Proceeding with a sense of urgency, as development pressures continue to grow.

Next Steps

King County is pursuing several paths of inquiry before finalizing the action plan for the Initiative. As outlined in Advisory Group's Phase 1 report, issues that will be addressed in a "Phase 2" effort which is currently underway include:

- City engagement to identify city land conservation priorities, expand upon the definition of the urban green space category we propose, explore funding options.
- Community engagement, particularly around equity and social justice issues, to ensure that benefits of the initiative can be broadly realized and we can further take the opportunity to address open space deficiencies in underserved communities.
- Equity mapping analysis to support equity and social justice goals—identify how and where we can address limited green space in underserved communities through the Initiative.

- Explore private funding opportunities and test expectations for how private funding can support the Initiative.
- Planning for next Parks Levy cycle to develop a preferred strategy that can ensure the County parks system stays open and explore ways in which the levy renewal may be integrated with the Initiative.
- Update cost modeling incorporating city priorities so that we can most accurately size the funding gap, including consideration of revised scope and the need for some degree of funding acceleration.
- Buildable Lands Impact Analysis incorporating data on city-identified lands.
- Model potential funding packages considering the full projected cost over time.
- Develop targets and metrics of success to ensure accountability to the voters and confirm the goals to be accomplished.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact related to this discussion.

RECOMMENDATION

No formal action is required; this is a discussion item only.