

**KING COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND PARKS  
WATER AND LAND RESOURCES DIVISION**

**Report to the King County Hearing Examiner for Property  
Enrollment in the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs)**

**March 20, 2025 – Public Hearing**

**APPLICANTS: Thomas and Barbara Koch**

**File No. E24CT012**

**A. GENERAL INFORMATION:**

1. Owners: Thomas and Barbara Koch  
22834 196th Avenue SE  
Renton, WA 98058
2. Property location: 22834 196th Avenue SE  
Renton, WA 98058
3. Zoning: RA5
4. STR: NW-17-22-6
5. PBRs categories requested by the applicant and *suggested by program staff*:

**Open space resources**

Aquifer protection area

**\*\*Farm and Agricultural conservation land**

Rural stewardship land

**\*\*Significant wildlife or salmonid habitat**

\*Surface water quality buffer

\*Watershed protection area

**Bonus category**

**\*\*Resource restoration**

NOTE: \*Staff recommends credit be awarded for these PBRs categories.

\*\*Award of these PBRs categories is also possible but will be dependent upon specific category requirements being met (see resource category discussion under Section E, page 6).

**EXHIBIT 1**

6. Parcel:	172206-9163
Total acreage:	7.60
Requested PBRS:	6.60
Home site/excluded area:	2.40
<b>Recommended PBRS:</b>	<b>5.20*</b>

NOTE: The portion recommended for enrollment in PBRS is the entire property less the excluded areas as measured. The attached 2023 aerial photo outlines the parcel in yellow and the areas proposed to be excluded from PBRS in blue. In the event the Assessor's official parcel size is revised, PBRS acreage should be administratively adjusted to reflect that change.

**\*If the farm and agricultural conservation land category is awarded and an approved plan is implemented for the additional 1.12-acre portion of the property outlined in orange on the attached map, the enrolling acreage could increase to maximum of 6.33 acres.**

## B. FACTS:

1. Zoning in the vicinity: Properties in the vicinity are zoned RA5.
2. Development of the subject property and resource characteristics of open space area: The property contains a single-family residence, well house, garden shed, septic system and drain field, and driveway. The open space consists of both pastureland and a mix of coniferous and deciduous forest with mostly native understory. There are three wetlands on the property (all Category III) located on the west, center and east side of the parcel.
3. Site use: The property is a single-family residence and farm.
4. Access: The property is accessed from 196th Avenue SE.
5. Appraised value for 2024 (based on Assessor's information dated 7/25/2024):

<u>Parcel #172206-9163</u>	<u>Land</u>	<u>Improvements</u>	<u>Total</u>
Appraised value	<b>\$381,000*</b>	\$1,105,000	\$1,486,000
Tax applied	<b>\$4,305</b>	\$12,101	\$16,406

NOTE: \* Participation in PBRS reduces the appraised land value for the portion of the property enrolled resulting in a lower taxable value.

## **C. REQUIREMENTS SPECIFIED BY KING COUNTY CODE (KCC):**

### **KCC 20.36.010 Purpose and intent.**

It is in the best interest of the county to maintain, preserve, conserve and otherwise continue in existence adequate open space lands for the production of food, fiber and forest crops, and to assure the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty for the economic and social well-being of the county and its citizens.

It is the intent of this chapter to implement RCW Chapter 84.34, as amended, by establishing procedures, rules and fees for the consideration of applications for public benefit rating system assessed valuation on "open space land" and for current use assessment on "farm and agricultural land" as those lands are defined in RCW 84.34.020. The provisions of RCW chapter 84.34, and the regulations adopted thereunder shall govern the matters not expressly covered in this chapter.

### **KCC 20.36.100 Public benefit rating system for open space land – definitions and eligibility.**

- A. To be eligible for open space classification under the public benefit rating system, property must contain one or more qualifying open space resources and have at least five points as determined under this section. The department will review each application and recommend award of credit for current use of property that is the subject of the application. In making such recommendation, the department will utilize the point system described in section B. and C. below.
- B. The following open space resources are each eligible for the points indicated:
  - 1. Active trail linkage – fifteen or twenty-five points
  - 2. Aquifer protection area – five points
  - 3. Buffer to public or current use classified land – three points
  - 4. Ecological enhancement land – eighteen points
  - 5. Equestrian-pedestrian-bicycle trail linkage – thirty-five points
  - 6. Farm and agricultural conservation land – five points
  - 7. Forest stewardship land – five points
  - 8. Historic landmark or archaeological site: buffer to a designated site – three points
  - 9. Historic landmark or archaeological site: designated site – five points
  - 10. Historic landmark or archaeological site: eligible site – three points
  - 11. Public recreation area – five points
  - 12. Rural open space – five points
  - 13. Rural stewardship land – five points
  - 14. Scenic resource, viewpoint, or view corridor – five points
  - 15. Significant plant or ecological site – five points
  - 16. Significant wildlife or salmonid habitat – five points
  - 17. Special animal site – three points
  - 18. Surface water quality buffer – five points, eight or ten total points
  - 19. Urban open space – five points
  - 20. Watershed protection area – five points

- C. Property qualifying for an open space category in subsection B. of this section may receive credit for additional points as follows:
1. Conservation easement or historic preservation easement – eighteen points
  2. Contiguous parcels under separate ownership – minimal two points
  3. Easement and access – thirty-five points
  4. Public access - points dependent on level of access
    - a. Unlimited public access - five points
    - b. Limited public access because of resource sensitivity - five points
    - c. Seasonal limited public access - three points
    - d. Environmental education access – three points
    - e. None or members only – zero points
  5. Resource restoration – five points

**D. 2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICIES AND TEXT:**

**E-101** In addition to its regulatory authority, King County should use incentives to protect and restore the natural environment whenever practicable. Incentives shall be monitored and periodically reviewed to determine their effectiveness in terms of protecting natural resources.

NOTE: Monitoring of participating lands is the responsibility of both department PBRs staff and the landowner. This issue is addressed in the Resource Information document (page 4) and detailed below in Recommendation #B11 and 12.

**E-112a** The protection of lands where development would pose hazards to health, property, important ecological functions or environmental quality shall be achieved through acquisition, enhancement, incentive programs and appropriate regulations. The following critical areas are particularly susceptible and shall be protected in King County:

- a. Floodways of 100-year floodplains;
- b. Slopes with a grade of 40% or more or landslide hazards that cannot be mitigated;
- c. Wetlands and their protective buffers;
- d. Aquatic areas, including streams, lakes, marine shorelines and their protective buffers;
- e. Channel migration hazard areas;
- f. Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas;
- g. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas; and
- h. Volcanic hazard areas.

**E-421** Terrestrial and aquatic habitats should be conserved and enhanced to protect and improve conditions for fish and wildlife.

NOTE: PBRS is an incentive program provided to encourage voluntary protection of open space resources and maintain high quality resource lands.

**E-429** King County should provide incentives for private landowners who are seeking to remove invasive plants and noxious weeds and replace them with native plants, such as providing technical assistance or access to appropriate native plants.

NOTE: Participation in PBRS requires landowners address invasive plant and noxious weed control and removal within enrolled portions of a property. Replacement with native vegetation is also encouraged via the implementation of approved forest stewardship, rural stewardship or resource restoration plans.

**E-443** King County should promote voluntary wildlife habitat enhancement projects by private individuals and businesses through educational, active stewardship, and incentive programs.

**E-476** King County should identify upland areas of native vegetation that connect wetlands to upland habitats and that connect upland habitats to each other. The county should seek protection of these areas through acquisition, stewardship plans, and incentive programs such as the Public Benefit Rating System and the Transfer of Development Rights Program.

**E-504** King County should protect native plant communities by encouraging management and control of nonnative invasive plants, including aquatic plants. Environmentally sound methods of vegetation control should be used to control noxious weeds.

NOTE: Lands participating in PBRS provide valuable resource protection and promote the preservation or enhancement of native vegetation. Addressing nonnative vegetation (invasive plant species), through control and eradication is a PBRS requirement.

**E-449** King County shall promote retention of forest cover and significant trees using a mix of regulations, incentives, and technical assistance.

**R-605** Forestry and agriculture best management practices are encouraged because of their multiple benefits, including natural resource preservation and protection.

NOTE: The implementation of an approved forest stewardship, farm management or rural stewardship plan benefits natural resources, such as wildlife habitat, stream buffers and groundwater protection, as well as fosters the preservation of sustainable resources.

## E. PBRs CATEGORIES REQUESTED and DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

### Open space resources

- Aquifer protection area  
To be eligible for this category, a property must have a minimum of one acre of which native plants are dominant that is located within a designated critical aquifer recharge area. This property is not located in an area that is designated as a critical aquifer recharge area therefore credit for this category cannot be recommended.
- Farm and agricultural conservation land  
For the 1.12 acres, outlined in orange on the attached map, to qualify for this category and enroll the additional acres into PBRs, an approved farm management plan must be implemented. The owners would like to work with the King Conservation District to develop a farm management plan. At this time, because a plan has not been provided, credit for this category cannot be granted and the area cannot be enrolled. However, **if a plan is provided to the department by October 31, 2025, and approved by the department by December 31, 2025 then credit for this category and additional acres could be awarded administratively.** Award of this category also requires an annual progress report from the landowner (see below, Section B. 11.), which should be sent to PBRs staff by either email or other agreed to method.
- Rural stewardship land  
In order to be awarded credit for this category, a rural stewardship plan must be provided and approved. Because credit for this category cannot overlap with the resource restoration category, receipt of a plan is not realistic. Credit for this category is not recommended.
- Significant wildlife or salmonid habitat  
Although credit was not requested, the enrolling area of the property is nearly all pastureland and award of this category typically requires undisturbed areas of open space consisting of sufficient habitat for a qualifying wildlife species. However, the Washington Department Fish and Wildlife indicates the property supports foraging and important habitat for Elk, which is defined in King County Comprehensive Plan as a Species of Local Importance. The pastureland and clearings provide foraging and bedding opportunities. Award of this category would be consistent with habitat as defined by KCC 20.36.100, section C 16.a (3). Credit for this category is dependent upon credit for the farm and agricultural conservation land category. At this time, because a plan has not been provided, credit for this category cannot be granted. However, if a plan is provided to the department by October 31, 2025, and approved by the department by December 31, 2025 then credit for this category could be awarded administratively.
- Surface water quality buffer  
The property contains a portion of forested wetland, likely Class III, located in the northeast corner of the property. As required by county code (KCC 21A.24.325.B), the likely buffer width required for this type of wetland is 110 feet. In order to be eligible for this category, the participating land must provide a buffer greater than 1.5 times that required (or 165 feet) for five points to be awarded, provide a buffer greater than two times that required (or 220 feet) for eight points to be awarded, or provide a buffer

greater than three times that required (or 330 feet) for ten points to be awarded. The owner is providing a qualifying buffer of native vegetation to the east of this wetland that averages 790 feet in width, which is greater than three times that required. Credit for this category is therefore recommended at the 10-point award level.

- Watershed protection area

The enrolling forested area consists of additional forest cover beyond that required by county or applicable local government regulation and must be at least one acre or sixty-five percent of the property acreage, whichever is greater. The enrolling open space contains 5.20 acres of native forest cover which is more than 65% (4.94 acres) of the total property acreage and there are no additional forest retention regulations in place for this property. Credit for this category is recommended.

### **Bonus Category**

- Resource restoration

The property could benefit from restoration activities to increase species diversity and improve the overall health of the forest. Restoration of these areas however is not required for its participation in PBRS. At this time, credit for this category cannot be recommended because a plan has not been provided. **However, if a resource restoration plan is provided by August 1, 2025, and approved by the department on or before October 1, 2025, then credit for this category should be awarded administratively.** Award of this category may allow forestry activities to occur in the participating open space area. It is the landowner's responsibility to apply for and receive the necessary approvals from the applicable state and local governmental agencies for forestry activities that require a permit or approval, such as clearing and grading. It should be noted that this restoration activity must be completed within a three-year period. Award of this category requires an annual progress report from the landowner (see below, Section B. 11.), which should be sent to PBRS staff by either email or other agreed to method.

NOTE: It is important to note that enrollment in the PBRS program requires the control and removal of invasive plant species. This issue is addressed in the Resource Information document (page 3) and below in Recommendation #B6.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. CONCLUSIONS:**

1. Approval of the subject request would be consistent with the specific purpose and intent of KCC 20.36.010.
2. Approval of the subject request would be consistent with policy E-101 of the King County Comprehensive Plan.
3. Of the points recommended, the subject request meets the mandatory criteria of KCC 20.36.100 as indicated:

**Open space resources**

Aquifer protection area	0
Farm and agricultural conservation land	*
Rural stewardship land	0
Significant wildlife or salmonid habitat	*
Surface water quality buffer	10
Watershed protection area	5

**Bonus category**

Resource restoration	**
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**TOTAL 15 points**

NOTE: \*If credit for the farm and agricultural conservation land category is awarded, which requires the 1.12 acres (outlined in orange) be farmed according to an approved farm management plan, then the point total increases to 25 pts (80% savings) as the significant wildlife and salmonid habitat category is contingent on the award of the farm and agricultural land category.

\*\*If credit for this category is also awarded, the point total would increase to 30 points. An approved restoration plan provides flexibility to allow for restoration activities to occur in the participating open space area. The savings will remain at 80%.

**PUBLIC BENEFIT RATING**

For the purpose of taxation, 15 points result in 40% of market value and a 60% reduction in taxable value for the portion of land enrolled. If the contingent category (\* and \*\*) are awarded, the property would qualify for a maximum of 30 points, which results in a 20% of market value and an 80% reduction.

**B. RECOMMENDATION:**

APPROVE the request for current use taxation "Open space" classification with a Public Benefit Rating of 15 points, subject to the following requirements:

**Requirements for Property Participating in the  
Public Benefit Rating System Current Use Assessment Program for Open Space**

1. Compliance with these requirements is necessary for property participating ("Property") in King County's Public Benefit Rating System ("PBRS"), a current use assessment program for open space. Failure to abide by these requirements can result in removal of PBRS designation and subject Property owner ("Owner") to penalty, tax, and interest



provisions of RCW 84.34. King County Department of Assessments (“DoA”) and King County Water and Land Resources Division, Agriculture, Forestry, and Incentives Unit, PBRS Program or its successor (“PBRS Program”) may re-evaluate Property to determine whether removal of PBRS designation is appropriate. Removal shall follow the process in Chapter 84.34 RCW, Chapter 458.30 WAC and Chapter 20.36 KCC.

2. Revisions to any of these requirements may only occur upon mutual written approval of Owner and granting authority. These conditions shall apply so long as Property retains its PBRS designation. If a conservation easement acceptable to and approved by King County is granted by Owner in interest to Department of Natural Resources and Parks, King County or a grantee approved by King County, these requirements may be superseded by the terms of such easement, upon written approval by PBRS Program.
3. The PBRS designation for Property will continue so long as it meets the PBRS criteria for which it was approved. Classification as open space will be removed upon a determination by PBRS Program that Property no longer meets PBRS criteria for which it was approved. A change in circumstances, which diminishes the extent of public benefit from that approved by King County Council in the open space taxation agreement, will be cause for removal of the PBRS designation. It is Owner's responsibility to notify DoA and PBRS Program of a change in Property circumstance, which may impact PBRS participation.
4. When a portion of Property is withdrawn or removed from the program, the remaining Property shall be re-evaluated by PBRS Program and DoA to determine whether it still meets the criteria for PBRS categories as approved.
5. Notwithstanding the provisions of [Section 16], tree(s) posing a hazard to a structure, road or property access may be removed from Property, provided that Owner shall first notify the PBRS Program prior to taking such action. Native vegetation must be introduced for any tree(s) removed and must be planted within a reasonable location of where the tree(s) previously existed. It is Owner’s responsibility to apply for and receive any necessary consent from applicable state and local governmental agencies for activities that may require a permit or approval.
6. If an area of Property becomes or has become infested with noxious weeds or non-native species, Owner may be required to submit a control and enhancement plan to PBRS Program in order to remove such vegetation and, if necessary, replace with native vegetation.
7. If it is determined by PBRS Program that Property vegetation near structures is prone to wildland fire and poses a fire hazard, management activities as allowed under KCC 16.82.051 may be implemented as long as those activities do not cause significant adverse impact to the resource values of awarded PBRS categories. Prior to undertaking any wildfire risk reduction activities on Property, a summary of any proposed work must first be submitted to and approved by PBRS Program.

8. There shall be no motorized vehicle driving or parking allowed on Property, except for medical, public safety or police emergencies, or for an approved management activity (such as forestry, farm, or restoration activities) detailed in an approved plan.
9. Grazing of livestock is prohibited unless Property is receiving credit for the farm and agricultural conservation land or resource restoration PBRs categories. In those cases, grazing may occur in areas being farmed as defined in the approved farm management plan or to be restored as defined in the approved resource restoration plan.
10. For Property receiving credit for ecological enhancement land, farm and agricultural conservation land, forest stewardship land, rural stewardship land, or resource restoration, activities that are defined in associated approved plan(s) shall be permitted as long as those activities do not cause significant adverse impact to the resource values of other awarded PBRs categories.
11. Owner of Property participating in PBRs may be required to submit a monitoring report on an annual or less frequent basis as requested by the PBRs Program. This report must include a brief description of how Property still qualifies for each awarded resource category. It must also include photographs from established points on Property and any observations by Owner. If requested, Owner must submit this report to the PBRs Program by email, through the PBRs monitoring form provided on the PBRs Program's website, or by other mutually agreed upon method annually by December 31 or as directed by the PBRs Program. An environmental consultant need not prepare this report.
12. Owner of Property receiving credit for farm and agricultural conservation land, ecological enhancement land, forest stewardship land, or rural stewardship land must provide an annual monitoring report that describes progress of implementing associated approved plan(s). The report must include a brief description of activities taken to implement the plan and photographs from established points on Property. Owner must submit this report to the PBRs Program by email or other mutually agreed upon method annually by December 31 or as directed by the PBRs Program. An environmental consultant need not prepare this report.
13. No alteration of Property or resources shall occur without prior written approval (such as an approved plan) by PBRs Program, except for selective cutting for personal firewood, maintaining areas for approved passive recreational uses (such as walking or horseback riding trails) or for removal of non-native species. **Any unapproved alteration may constitute a departure from an approved open space use and be deemed a change of use, and subject Owner to the additional tax, interest, and penalty provisions of RCW 84.34.080.** "Alteration" means any human-induced action that adversely impacts the existing condition of Property or resources including, but not limited to, the following:
  - a. erecting structures;
  - b. grading;
  - c. filling;

- d. dredging;
  - e. channelizing;
  - f. modifying land or hydrology for surface water management purposes;
  - g. cutting, pruning, limbing or topping, clearing, mowing, or removing native vegetation;
  - h. introducing non-native species (as defined in KCC 21A.06.790);
  - i. applying herbicides or pesticides or any hazardous or toxic substance, without prior written approval;
  - j. discharging pollutants except for stormwater;
  - k. paving or application of gravel;
  - l. storing or dumping equipment, construction materials, garbage, vehicles, household supplies, or compost;
  - m. engaging in any other activity that adversely impacts existing native vegetation, hydrology, wildlife, wildlife habitat, or awarded program categories.
14. Participation in PBRS does not exempt Owner from obtaining any required permit or approval for activity or use on Property.

**TRANSMITTED** to the parties listed hereafter:

Office of the King County Hearing Examiner  
Thomas and Barbara Koch, applicants  
Carrie King, King Conservation District  
Elenore Bonyeau, King County Department of Assessments



2023 Aerial Photo

0.85 acres

0.27 acres

0.01 acre

1722069163

1.26 acres