



**Signature Report**

1200 King County Courthouse  
516 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

**Ordinance**

**Proposed No.** 2019-0084.1

**Sponsors** Balducci, von Reichbauer and  
Kohl-Welles

1 AN ORDINANCE providing for the submission to the  
2 qualified electors of King County at a special election to be  
3 held in King County on August 6, 2019, of a proposition  
4 authorizing a property tax levy in excess of the levy  
5 limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW for a period of  
6 six consecutive years, at a total rate of not more than  
7 \$0.1682 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation in  
8 the first year and limiting annual levy increases by the King  
9 County inflation plus population index published by the  
10 King County office of economic and financial analysis, or  
11 the chapter 84.55 RCW limitation, whichever is greater in  
12 years two through six, for the purpose of maintaining and  
13 operating King County's park system; improving parks,  
14 recreation, access and mobility by acquiring open space  
15 and continuing to develop regional trails; repairing,  
16 replacing and improving local parks and trails in King  
17 County's cities; funding environmental education,  
18 maintenance and conservation programs at the Woodland  
19 Park Zoo; and funding capital construction at the Seattle

20                   Aquarium, for all King County residents.

21                   STATEMENT OF FACTS:

22                   1. King County owns and operates a system of regional and local parks  
23                   and trails that consists of twenty-eight thousand acres of parklands and  
24                   more than one hundred seventy-five miles of regional trails. The county  
25                   provides regional trails, regional recreational facilities, regional natural  
26                   area parks and local parks in unincorporated areas. Examples of regional  
27                   county parks and trails include Marymoor park, Cougar Mountain  
28                   Regional Wildland park, the Weyerhaeuser King County Aquatic Center  
29                   and the Sammamish River trail.

30                   2. Public parks, natural areas and trails contribute to a high quality of life.  
31                   A robust system of parks and trails provides physical, social and mental  
32                   health benefits to individuals; economic opportunity through recreation  
33                   and tourism; economic growth for private businesses that must attract and  
34                   retain skilled workers; and environmental benefits and cultural resource  
35                   protection through open space conservation. King County's parks system  
36                   provides all these benefits to King County residents and businesses.

37                   3. The 2002 Parks Business Transition Plan, adopted by the King County  
38                   council and enacted by Ordinance 14509, became the blueprint for  
39                   establishing the regional parks system we have today. The parks and  
40                   recreation division of the department of natural resources and parks has  
41                   successfully focused its lines of business on regional parks and trails,  
42                   backcountry trails, natural lands and local parks in unincorporated King

43 County and has implemented business practices that generate revenue  
44 from park system assets by implementing or increasing user fees and  
45 establishing corporate and community partnerships that enhance park  
46 amenities and leverage public and private dollars to improve parks and  
47 increase access to parks.

48 4. Consistent with the recommendations of past parks-related task forces,  
49 the county has sought voter-approved levies on three prior occasions: in  
50 2003, enacted by Ordinance 14586, to provide maintenance and operating  
51 funding for the parks and recreation division for 2004 through 2007; in  
52 2007, enacted by Ordinance 15759, to provide funding for maintenance  
53 and operations as well as funding for open space acquisition, regional trail  
54 development, the Woodland Park Zoo and for King County cities for use  
55 in open space acquisition and city trail projects for 2008 through 2013;  
56 and in 2013, enacted by Ordinance 17568, to provide funding for  
57 maintenance and operations as well as for open space acquisition, asset  
58 maintenance and improvement, parks and trails projects, the Woodland  
59 Park Zoo and for King County cities for local parks and recreation for  
60 2014 through 2019. Voters approved the funding measures on all three  
61 occasions that they were on the ballot. The voter-approved levies have  
62 helped keep the parks system clean, safe and open.

63 5. The 2014 through 2019 voter-approved parks, trails and open space  
64 replacement levy provides approximately eighty percent of the operating  
65 budget of the parks and recreation division with approximately thirteen

66 percent generated through business activities and entrepreneurial efforts.

67 King County general fund support to the parks and recreation division was  
68 eliminated as of 2011.

69 6. The community partnerships and grants program enacted by Ordinance  
70 14509 enhances parks amenities by partnering with parks and recreation  
71 organizations. Since the inception of the community partnership and grant  
72 program in 2003 more than sixty projects representing more than sixty  
73 million dollars worth of new, enhanced, or preserved public recreation  
74 facilities have been completed with only eighteen million dollars of King  
75 County capital investment.

76 7. The Woodland Park Zoo received distributions from the past two voter-  
77 approved levies to supplement zoo operating revenue for education and  
78 conservation programs, horticulture and maintenance and capital  
79 improvements. Levy proceeds distributed to the zoo provided  
80 environmental education, programming and transportation focusing on  
81 accessibility for underserved areas, supported thousands of students  
82 annually and benefitted residents throughout King County. Levy proceeds  
83 also provided conservation and animal care for threatened Pacific  
84 Northwest species.

85 8. King County cities received funding from the past two voter-approved  
86 levies. In 2008 through 2013, cities could use levy proceeds for open  
87 space and natural lands acquisition and development of city trail projects  
88 that supported connections to the regional trail system with distributions

89 being contingent upon an equal or greater contribution of matching monies  
90 from the recipient city for the same project. In the 2014 through 2019  
91 levy, types of uses for the distribution to King County cities were  
92 broadened to provide flexibility and better meet the parks and recreation  
93 needs of cities. Levy proceeds currently can provide support for local  
94 parks and recreation capital purposes. King County cities have used  
95 distributions for projects including operations and maintenance,  
96 community parks and recreation, city trail projects and open space  
97 acquisitions.

98 9. Parks levy oversight committees were established to monitor the  
99 expenditures of the proceeds from the 2004 through 2007, 2008 through  
100 2013 and 2014 through 2019 levies. Annual committee review has  
101 concluded that the county has complied with all levy requirements.

102 10. King County is growing rapidly as a region. In 2017, King County's  
103 population increased by close to fifty thousand people and over the next  
104 ten years, the region is expected to grow by another one hundred eighty  
105 thousand people. Recent surveys have indicated that since 2008, the  
106 number of people who hike in natural area parks has doubled. More and  
107 more people are using the King County parks and trails, which puts  
108 greater pressure on an aging system. As development increases to  
109 accommodate population growth, the risk of losing natural lands and green  
110 spaces throughout the county grows. Those valuable lands contribute to  
111 King County residents' high quality of life. The cost of land to

112 accommodate this growth and preserve open spaces is also increasing.  
113 Today is the opportune time to address future needs of residents by  
114 investing in our parks and trails and accelerating conservation of open  
115 space.

116 11. In King County, many communities have experienced a history of  
117 unequal and limited regional investments in parks, open space and trails,  
118 limiting the ability of residents to lead healthy lives. Five hundred  
119 thousand King County residents live without ready access to nature, parks  
120 and open spaces. There is a need to address disparities in access to parks,  
121 recreation and open space for underserved communities. This proposal  
122 provides an opportunity to address parks and recreation needs of  
123 underserved communities.

124 12. Recognizing growth in population, increased use of parks and trails  
125 and the need to address disparities in preparation for the 2020 through  
126 2025 levy, the parks and recreation division conducted outreach to obtain  
127 feedback on the current park system and future parks and recreation needs  
128 for all King County residents. From August through November 2018,  
129 parks and recreation division staff conducted fifty-four in-person  
130 engagement meetings with groups representing all geographic areas of the  
131 county including cities, business, recreation, community and  
132 environmental interests. An online survey was also conducted from  
133 November to December 2018, and received one thousand nine hundred  
134 thirty-four responses from the public, representing all geographic areas of

135 the county.

136 13. The feedback from the engagement meetings and online survey  
137 showed support for the King County parks system. Engagement findings  
138 showed support for maintenance and operations of the parks system, as  
139 well as critical infrastructure repair and replacement, and the acquisition,  
140 conservation and stewardship of open space, as such lands can provide for  
141 passive or active recreation opportunities and protection of habitat and  
142 water quality, and the development of and improvements on regional trail  
143 corridors. Feedback supported King County cities' local parks and  
144 recreation programs; the Woodland Park Zoological Society education and  
145 conservation programs and horticulture, maintenance and capital  
146 improvements; and recognized the Seattle Aquarium as a regional asset.

147 14. The King County executive took into consideration information  
148 obtained from this outreach, the region's growing population, increased  
149 use of parks and trails across King County, and the lack of parks and open  
150 space in some communities, and has put forth this proposal which  
151 acknowledges the changing landscape and the need to grow the parks  
152 system to keep up with demand from the region. This proposal is also  
153 consistent with the goals and priorities of past levy task forces.

154 15. This proposal would exempt low-income senior citizens, disabled  
155 veterans and other people with disabilities from the regular property tax  
156 increase on their residences resulting from a levy authorized by this  
157 ordinance, if they have been approved for a senior exemption under RCW

158 84.36.381.

159 BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

160 SECTION 1. Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this  
161 ordinance unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

162 A. "Community partnerships and grants program" means the program through  
163 which King County provides monies to recreation-oriented groups, sports associations  
164 and community-based organizations to undertake any combination of developing,  
165 operating or maintaining a public park or recreation facility in unincorporated King  
166 County and King County cities for public benefit.

167 B. "Conservation futures tax program" means the program defined in K.C.C.  
168 chapter 26.12.

169 C. "Levy" means the levy of regular property taxes, for the specific purposes and  
170 term provided in this ordinance and authorized by the electorate in accordance with state  
171 law.

172 D. "Levy proceeds" means the principal amount of monies raised by the levy, any  
173 interest earnings on the monies and the proceeds of any interim financing following  
174 authorization of the levy.

175 E. "Limit factor" means the most recent published King County office of  
176 economic and financial analysis King County inflation plus population index, or the  
177 limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW, whichever is greater.

178 F. "Parks system" means any building or other structure, park, open space,  
179 natural area, resource or ecological land, trail, or other property owned or otherwise  
180 under the jurisdiction of the parks and recreation division of the department of natural



181 resources and parks.

182           G. "Targeted equity grant program" means the program through which King  
183 County provides monies in order to achieve equitable opportunities and access to public  
184 parks and recreation for underserved communities located in unincorporated King County  
185 and King County cities.

186           SECTION 2. Levy submittal to voters. To provide necessary monies for the  
187 purposes identified in section 4 of this ordinance, the King County council shall submit to  
188 the qualified electors of the county a proposition authorizing a regular property tax levy  
189 in excess of the levy limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW for six consecutive  
190 years, with collection commencing in 2020, at a rate not to exceed \$0.1682 per one  
191 thousand dollars of assessed value in the first year of the levy period. The dollar amount  
192 of the levy in the first year shall be the base upon which the levy amounts in year two  
193 through six shall be calculated. In accordance with RCW 84.55.050, this levy shall be a  
194 regular property tax levy subject to the limit factor.

195           SECTION 3. Deposit of levy proceeds. The levy proceeds shall be deposited  
196 into a dedicated subfund of the parks and recreation fund, or its successor.

197           SECTION 4. Eligible expenditures. If approved by the qualified electors of the  
198 county, levy proceeds shall be used for the following purposes:

199           A. Costs incurred by the county that are attributable to the special election called  
200 for in section 5 of this ordinance.

201           B. Up to eight million dollars to the Seattle Aquarium from the first four years of  
202 the levy. Levy proceeds for the Seattle Aquarium shall solely be for capital costs for the  
203 Ocean Pavilion project except as provided in subsection C.5. of this section.

- 204 C. The remainder of levy proceeds shall be used for the following purposes:
- 205 1. Forty percent of levy proceeds for maintenance and operations of King
- 206 County's parks system and the targeted equity grant program, but no more than six
- 207 million dollars may be used for the targeted equity grant program;
- 208 2. Forty-seven percent of levy proceeds for:
- 209 a. acquisition, conservation and stewardship of additional open space lands,
- 210 natural areas, resource or ecological lands and urban green spaces;
- 211 b. acquisition of rights of ways and development of regional trails;
- 212 c. major maintenance repair, replacement and improvement of parks system
- 213 infrastructure; and
- 214 d. community partnerships and grants program;
- 215 3. Eight percent of levy proceeds for distribution to cities in King County for
- 216 their local parks system projects, of which amount twenty-five thousand dollars shall be
- 217 distributed annually to each city; seventy-five thousand dollars shall be distributed
- 218 annually to cities with a population greater than four thousand; of the remainder, fifty
- 219 percent shall be distributed based on city population and fifty percent shall be distributed
- 220 based on the assessed value of parcels within a city;
- 221 4. Five percent of levy proceeds for distribution to the Woodland Park Zoological
- 222 Society shall be used solely for: environmental education with an emphasis on
- 223 accessibility to traditionally underserved populations throughout the county; horticulture
- 224 and maintenance of buildings and grounds; conservation of threatened species; and
- 225 development of conservation and education strategies to mitigate impacts to animals and
- 226 habitats from climate change;

227           5. Of the levy proceeds in subsections B., C.3. and C.4. of this section, a portion  
228 shall be retained by the county to be used for expenditures related to administration of the  
229 distribution of levy proceeds. Eligible administrative expenditures shall include all costs  
230 and charges to the parks and recreation division or the county associated with or  
231 attributable to the purposes listed in subsections B., C.3. and C.4. of this section as well  
232 as sections 6 and 7 of this ordinance. Consistent with RCW 84.55.050, as it may be  
233 amended, levy proceeds may not supplant existing funding.

234           SECTION 5. Call for special election. In accordance with RCW 29A.04.321,  
235 the King County council hereby calls for a special election to be held in conjunction with  
236 the primary election on August 6, 2019, to consider a proposition authorizing a regular  
237 property tax levy for the purposes described in this ordinance. The King County director  
238 of elections shall cause notice to be given of this ordinance in accordance with the state  
239 constitution and general law and to submit to the qualified electors of the county, at the  
240 said special county election, the proposition hereinafter set forth. The clerk of the council  
241 shall certify that proposition to the King County director of elections in substantially the  
242 following form:

243           The King County council passed Ordinance \_\_\_\_ concerning replacement  
244 of an expiring parks levy. If approved, this proposition would provide  
245 funding for county and city parks, open space, trails and recreation, and  
246 for zoo operations and an aquarium capital project. It would authorize an  
247 additional six-year property tax beginning in 2020 at \$0.1682 per \$1,000  
248 of assessed valuation with the 2020 levy amount being the base for  
249 calculating annual increases in 2021 - 2025 by the King County inflation

250 plus population index or the 84.55 RCW limitation, whichever is greater.

251 Should this proposition be:

252 Approved? \_\_

253 Rejected? \_\_

254 **SECTION 6. Distributions.** Each distribution of levy proceeds to a King County  
255 city or metropolitan park district, the Woodland Park Zoological Society or the Seattle  
256 Aquarium, or its successor, for the eligible purposes identified in section 4 of this  
257 ordinance shall be subject to the execution of a contract between the county and each  
258 entity for the same project. Distribution of levy proceeds to King County and King  
259 County cities and metropolitan park districts for open space conservation and acquisition  
260 purposes shall be in accordance with the open space, natural lands and urban green space  
261 acquisition guidelines, which are included as Attachment A to this ordinance.

262 Distribution of levy proceeds for the targeted equity grant program shall be in accordance  
263 with guidelines set forth in Attachment B to this ordinance.

264 **SECTION 7. Parks levy oversight board established.**

265 A. If the proposition in section 5 of this ordinance is approved by the qualified  
266 electors of King County, a parks levy oversight board shall be appointed by the  
267 executive. The board shall consist of nine members. Each councilmember shall  
268 nominate a candidate for the board from the councilmember's district no later than ninety  
269 days from the start of the first year of collections. If the executive does not appoint  
270 within sixty days of the nominations a person who has been nominated by a  
271 councilmember, the executive must request that the councilmember should within thirty  
272 days of the request nominate another candidate for appointment. Members shall be

273 confirmed by the council. Members shall be residents of King County and may not be  
274 elected or appointed officials of any unit of government, except that individuals serving  
275 in a civic capacity on a local board or commission would be eligible to serve on the parks  
276 levy oversight board.

277         B. The board shall review the allocation of levy proceeds and progress on  
278 achieving the purposes of this proposition. On or before December 31, 2021, the board  
279 shall review and report to the King County executive, the King County council and the  
280 regional policy committee on the expenditure of levy proceeds for 2020. Thereafter, the  
281 board shall review and report to the King County executive, the King County council and  
282 the regional policy committee annually. Any report to the King County council under  
283 this section shall be made in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the  
284 clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all  
285 councilmembers. The parks and recreation division shall provide the board with all  
286 reports on division activities that the division transmits to the King County council in  
287 accordance with K.C.C. 7.08.090. The board expires December 31, 2026.

288         SECTION 8. Exemption. The additional regular property taxes authorized by  
289 this ordinance shall be included in any real property tax exemption authorized by RCW  
290 84.36.381.

291         SECTION 9. Ratification. Certification of the proposition by the clerk of the  
292 King County council to the director of elections in accordance with law before the  
293 election on August 6, 2019, and any other acts consistent with the authority and before  
294 the effective date of this ordinance are hereby ratified and confirmed.

295         SECTION 10. Severability. If any provision of this ordinance is held invalid,

296 the remainder of the ordinance or the application of the provision to other persons or  
297 circumstances is not affected.  
298

KING COUNTY COUNCIL  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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Rod Dembowski, Chair

ATTEST:

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Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council

APPROVED this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

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Dow Constantine, County Executive

**Attachments:** A. Open Space, Natural Lands and Urban Green Space Acquisition Guidelines, B. Targeted Equity Grant Program Guidelines