June 27, 2019

The Honorable Rod Dembowski

Chair, King County Council

Room 1200

C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Dembowski:

This letter transmits three related ordinances and a motion that together advance the work of King County’s Land Conservation Initiative (LCI). This legislative package will implement the LCI’s strategy to accelerate the pace of open space protection to finish the job of land conservation within the next thirty years, and strengthen policies and focus investments to ensure that King County’s residents have access to health-promoting greenspaces. This important work will enhance the livability, ecological integrity, and economic prosperity of King County for generations to come.

The LCI Advisory Group concluded that “While we live in a region with a strong history of protecting open spaces, not all of our communities have experienced the benefits of past investments.” Many of the communities that lack access to open space simultaneously experience the lowest incomes and poorest health. Through the LCI, King County seeks to eliminate these disparities in access to open spaces.

This legislation builds on the decades-long success of the County’s Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) levy by accelerating protection of the region’s vital forest, farm, urban greenspace, and habitat lands through process improvements and bond financing, and with new revisions that integrate equity and social justice principles and practices so that CFT is also adding open spaces in communities with the greatest and most acute needs.

Specifically, the three ordinances will:

* Amend King County Code chapter 26.12 to explicitly integrate equity and social justice principles into the CFT levy grant program;
* Amend King County Code chapter 26.12 to modernize the CFT program’s processes and remove antiquated code language;
* Modernize the CFT program’s interlocal agreement with cities to provide process efficiencies for partner jurisdictions receiving CFT funds from the County; and
* Accelerate the pace of open space protection by exercising CFT bonding capacity for land acquisition projects that are ready to close in the near future.

As a companion to these ordinances, the Motion included in this transmittal will repeal and replace the existing CFT Motion that was adopted in 2001 and provides the evaluation criteria for the CFT Advisory Committee to recommend funding allocations to open space projects. The new Motion adds a new criterion for open space equity to align with the amendments provided in revised K.C.C. chapter 26.12, and makes minor updates such as allowing small playgrounds. The Conservation Futures Advisory Committee’s Recommendations for the Allocation of 2020 Conservation Futures Tax Levy and Parks Levy Open Space Acquisition Funding report is attached for reference.

The legislation reflects significant time, energy and thoughtful input over the last year from the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee and the Open Space Equity Cabinet. I convened the Open Space Equity Cabinet, composed of 21 community members representing 12 different community based organizations, as a result of the LCI Advisory Group’s recommendation in early 2018. The Open Space Equity Cabinet submitted a final report with recommendations to my office and the County Council in March 2019. They met 13 times throughout 2018 and into 2019 to provide the equity focused revisions to CFT code chapter 26.12 included in this transmittal, and multiple other programmatic and operational recommendations that the Department of Natural Resources and Parks has begun implementing.

The legislation furthers the goals of key County plans and initiatives as follows:

* The legislation furthers the King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative goal of expanding access to open spaces and trails for historically under-served communities.
* The legislation furthers many important goals in the King County Strategic Plan, including protecting and supporting healthy and productive farms, forests, and open spaces; reducing disparities and improving overall health and personal well-being to create thriving communities; and increasing non-motorized transportation options.
* The legislation furthers the Strategic Climate Action Plan goal of permanently conserving remaining high-priority farm, forest, and other open spaces.
* The legislation implements the Rural Economic Strategies Plan and has the following impacts on unincorporated area residents: It preserves the character of rural areas and promotes sustainable forestry and agriculture and seeks to add greenspace in unincorporated urban areas currently lacking such neighborhood infrastructure.

Thank you for your consideration of these ordinances and the motion. These important pieces of legislation will allow us to continue the work of protecting our region’s open spaces, and our collective quality of life.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Bob Burns, Deputy Director of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, at 206-477-4520.

Sincerely,

Dow Constantine

King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Carolyn Busch, Chief of Staff

Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council

Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget

Christie True, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP)

Bob Burns, Deputy Director, DNRP