



KING COUNTY

1200 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Signature Report

May 14, 2002

Motion 11426

Proposed No. 2002-0157.3

Sponsors Edmonds

1 A MOTION exploring options to achieve long-term stable
2 funding for county park and recreation services and
3 establishing a work program for the executive and the
4 department of natural resources and parks.

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WHEREAS, King County owns over twenty-five thousand acres of park,
recreation and open space lands and over one hundred miles of trails, including one
hundred eighty-three different parks, sixteen pools, six community centers, a golf course
and an aquatic center, and

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WHEREAS, as King County has increased in population, the county has worked
aggressively to acquire new parks and open space lands, which are an important
component of the quality of life in the region, and

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WHEREAS, the public has enthusiastically supported a series of major park
acquisition efforts over the years, beginning with the Forward Thrust campaign in the late
1960s, and continuing on with open space campaigns and other initiatives, and

17 WHEREAS, the parks and recreation division estimates that some three million
18 people visit King County parks each year, with visitor and user levels growing steadily
19 with population growth, and

20 WHEREAS, King County has seen a remarkable growth in general population
21 and particularly in the incorporated population over the last twenty years, and

22 WHEREAS, the trend toward incorporation and urbanization has impacted county
23 revenue generating ability and the cost of running county government, and

24 WHEREAS, King County is required by state law to provide a number of services
25 out of its general unrestricted revenues, and

26 WHEREAS, the rate of growth in the cost of providing state mandated services in
27 King County has far exceeded the rate of growth of county general unrestricted revenues
28 that constitute the majority of the current expense fund, and

29 WHEREAS, the county cannot continue to sustain its current expense fund
30 programs at existing levels, given the projected growth in cost of services and revenues,
31 and currently estimates a fifty-million-dollar shortfall in current expense in 2003, with
32 additional shortfalls of thirty-five and thirty million dollars, respectively, in the
33 succeeding two years, and

34 WHEREAS, the county has repeatedly sought legislative support for structural
35 changes to match the county's revenue generating ability to its mandated service
36 obligations but thus far has not been successful in securing new revenue options, and

37 WHEREAS, King County responded to the budget crisis by cutting services and
38 drawing down reserves, instituting a hiring freeze in November 2000, consolidating
39 departments and reducing staff, and

40 WHEREAS, because the county must provide state-mandated services, and
41 although all current expense programs will be scrutinized in this ongoing budget crisis,
42 discretionary services are most at risk to lose funding, and

43 WHEREAS, King County is not required by state law to provide a parks and
44 recreation system, and

45 WHEREAS, the 2002 budget for the parks and recreation division reflects a deep
46 round of cuts, including cutting back on maintenance, staffing cuts, and program cuts,
47 including the unprecedented seasonal closure of forty-four county parks in the fall of
48 2001, and

49 WHEREAS, an additional one million dollars in cuts to the division were
50 announced in February 2002, including the continuing closure of twenty parks on a year-
51 round basis, and

52 WHEREAS, because of the long-term, ongoing severity of current expense fund
53 shortfalls impacting so many county programs, it is not reasonably possible for the
54 county parks and recreation system to continue to be adequately funded over time
55 through current expense revenues, and

56 WHEREAS, although it is too early to know precisely how much revenue will be
57 available to fund the parks and recreation division, its parks, facilities and programs in
58 2003, significant additional parks closures are virtually inevitable and a worst case
59 scenario would require mothballing of all parks facilities as early as November 2002, and

60 WHEREAS, the metropolitan parks task force has been created and tasked to
61 recommend to the county council and the executive, by June 2002, ways to keep King
62 County parks and recreation facilities open to the public and eliminate the reliance of

63 these parks and facilities on county current expense revenues, while considering the long
64 and short-term effects of recommended actions and working with affected stakeholders,
65 and

66 WHEREAS, some local jurisdictions and the Suburban Cities Association have
67 expressed concern about the process and membership of the metropolitan parks task force
68 since the issues that will be evaluated by task force could potentially impact the residents
69 of these cities, and

70 WHEREAS, the metropolitan parks task force, the council and the executive are
71 all committed to addressing these concerns and ensuring appropriate input from
72 concerned local jurisdictions and the public on any final recommendations, and

73 WHEREAS, while the work of the metropolitan task force will be critical to
74 identifying options and proposing solutions to the challenges facing the King County
75 parks system, final decisions on whether or not to implement the recommendations of the
76 task force will be made by the council and the executive, and

77 WHEREAS, King County believes it is in the interest of its parks system and park
78 users, the residents and taxpayers of King County, to find a way to ensure that the parks
79 and facilities now owned by the division can be financially secure over the long term;

80 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

81 A. King County's top priority for parks is to explore all reasonable alternatives to
82 keep County parks and recreational facilities open to the public.

83 B. The only long-term, stable option to keep county parks and facilities open to
84 the public is to identify alternatives to the county's current expense fund to provide
85 support for park lands, operations and maintenance as soon as possible.

86 C. The process of examining alternatives should identify policy issues that need
87 to be addressed by the county council and seek to identify sound business proposals,
88 considering both the long-term and short-term effects of these proposals.

89 D. The exploration of alternatives should at a minimum:

90 1. Identify all reasonable ways to reduce costs and increase non-current expense
91 revenues to support the existing facilities and seek to implement these to the extent
92 possible. This includes identifying new ways of operating facilities and exploring the
93 permanent transfer and/or divestiture of facilities to other entities or other non-current
94 expense-supported divisions of King County. Where there is a willing city partner, a
95 priority should be placed on the potential for transferring parks facilities located within
96 cities to those cities, consistent with the county's adopted growth management policies;

97 2. Consider ways to increase the self-sufficiency of parks and recreation
98 facilities through:

- 99 a. private sector partnerships;
- 100 b. creation of parks foundations;
- 101 c. use of volunteers;
- 102 d. fee increases;

103 and similar means;

104 3. To the extent that cost strategies, revenue strategies and transfer and
105 divestiture strategies are unsuccessful in eliminating the need for additional cuts and
106 closures, explore additional seasonal closures and, as a last resort, mothballing of
107 facilities in a manner that will minimize the cost of later reopening these facilities but
108 retaining public access where feasible;

109 4. Develop criteria for prioritizing the allocation of available funding to types of
110 county parks and recreation facilities, taking into account:

- 111 a. The ability to maximize revenue from facility operations;
- 112 b. The numbers of persons impacted by closure of the facility;
- 113 c. The availability of alternative recreation opportunities;

114 5. Take into consideration the safety of parks users and liability issues
115 associated with any alternative;

116 6. Include coordinated outreach to all affected user groups, stakeholders and
117 employees as well as other governments, including the state and federal governments,
118 cities and school districts; and

119 7. Explore all mechanisms currently available under state law to provide stable
120 revenues for operation of parks and recreation facilities, and identify possible changes to
121 state law that would increase revenue options.

122 E. By July 15, 2002, the executive shall transmit to the council a report outlining
123 the progress made in achieving each of these actions. The report shall include:

- 124 1. A status report on each of the actions outlined in this motion;
- 125 2. Recommendations developed by the executive as a result of the evaluations
126 of the alternatives to keep county parks and recreational facilities open to the public;
- 127 3. Identification of potential legislative actions required by the county to
128 implement any proposed recommendations or actions;
- 129 4. The report from the metropolitan parks task force;

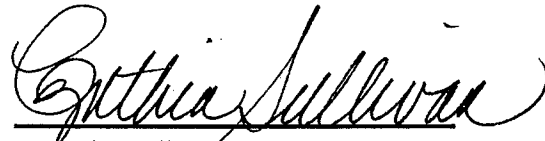
Motion 11426

130 5. Recommendations from the executive as to which actions proposed by the
131 metropolitan parks task force should be supported by the council, the justification for the
132 executive recommendations, and the steps necessary to implement those actions.
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Motion 11426 was introduced on 4/8/2002 and passed as amended by the Metropolitan King County Council on 5/13/2002, by the following vote:

Yes: 12 - Ms. Sullivan, Ms. Edmonds, Ms. Lambert, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Pelz,
Mr. McKenna, Mr. Constantine, Mr. Pullen, Mr. Gossett, Ms. Hague, Mr.
Irons and Ms. Patterson
No: 0
Excused: 1 - Mr. von Reichbauer

KING COUNTY COUNCIL
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Cynthia Sullivan, Chair

ATTEST:



Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Attachments None