

2012 King County Parks Levy Task Force

July 10, 2012 Meeting Summary
As approved by Task Force on July 17, 2012

Levy Task Force Members Present: Shiv Batra, Leda Chahim (representing Gene Duvernoy), Julie Colehour, Karen Daubert, Mike Deller (representing Roger Hoesterey), Hilary Franz, Terry Higashiyama, Al Isaac, Terry Lavender, Gordon McHenry, Jr., Louise Miller (co-chair), Matthew Pruitt, Kathy Surace-Smith (co-chair), Jim Todd, Justin Vander Pol, Jeff Watling (co-chair).

Levy Task Force Members Absent: David Burger, Joey Martinez, Charles Ruthford, Chukundi Salisbury, Sili Savusa.

Parks and Recreation Division Staff and others present: Christie True, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP); Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget (PSB); Kevin Brown, Director, Parks and Recreation; Katy Terry, Assistant Division Director, Parks and Recreation; Don Harig, Parks Resource Manager; Jerry Hughs, Parks Finance Manager; Monica Leers, Parks CIP Program Manager; Debbie Udycz, Parks Human Resources Manager; Jessica Emerson, Parks Enterprise Team Manager; Helen Subelbia, Parks Program Manager; Sue Sweany, Parks Finance Officer; Frana Milan, Parks Program Manager; Cristina Gonzalez, Parks Deputy Finance Manager; Macile Assink, Parks Finance Officer; Hazel Bhang Barnett, Parks Project Manager; Rosanna Snyder, Parks Project Manager; Tricia Davis, Budget Supervisor, PSB; Carolyn Duncan, DNRP; Tim O'Leary, DNRP; AJ McClure, Aide to Councilmember Julia Patterson; Karen Reed, meeting facilitator; David Schaefer, Woodland Park Zoo.

Summary:

Karen Reed convened the meeting at 4:05pm.

Co-chair Kathy Surace-Smith led introductions of everyone present. Ms. Reed reviewed a suggested amendment to the ground rules, limiting public comment speakers to three minutes per organization. Members approved this amendment and the previous meeting's summary as presented. Ms. Reed confirmed that August meetings are scheduled for the 7th and the 21st and she noted that members' King County emails are still not available.

Kevin Brown gave a brief recap of the previous meeting, including a description of the division's operating and capital funding sources (including two levies to fund operating and open space and trails) and that an 8.4-cent levy rate in 2014 would be required to maintain current levels of service. Mr. Brown provided a funding sources matrix handout, showing past and current sources of operations and capital funding, and where there would be gaps if the current levies are not replaced.

Dwight Dively of the Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget, provided a presentation on the county's fiscal health. He noted that all county agencies are required to assume financial forecasts adopted by the King County Forecast Council. He indicated that the most recent forecast, adopted in March 2012, projects 2013 to be the fourth straight year of decline in assessed value (AV); that AV is not projected to reach its previous peak until 2018; and that new construction is projected to be at historic lows through 2016 which limits property tax revenue growth. Sales tax revenue, the county General Fund's second greatest source of revenue, is expected to increase slightly in 2013 and 2014, following dramatic decreases in previous years. Mr. Dively noted that Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) revenue forecasts are dismal and are projected to remain flat into the future. He described the Executive's policy for agencies to find 3% efficiencies in each year to drive down cost growth to more closely match projected revenue growth, but he indicated that finding efficiencies becomes more challenging in each subsequent year.

Mr. Dively reminded members that the Parks Division was previously funded primarily by the General Fund, but that the 2001 recession led to a cut of most General Fund support to Parks and that the most recent recession led to the full elimination of General Fund support by 2011. He described the county's legal property tax levying capacity, noting that while at the county level there is still capacity, increases by the county could at some level force junior taxing districts to reduce their levies. Mr. Dively provided a brief list of funding options beyond levy lid lifts, including parks and recreation districts, metropolitan parks districts, and annual excess property tax levies. He then answered various questions from members.

Mr. Brown reviewed the mission of the Task Force, the division's vision and lines of business. Don Harig then further explained the division's lines of business, including: the Regional Trails System (RTS), regional-active parks, regional-natural parks, local parks, and two public service programs. He described the general levels of maintenance required for each line of business. He noted that regional-active parks require high levels of maintenance due to the types of amenities there and for litter pick-up, garbage collection, bathroom cleaning, mowing and landscaping, and customer service efforts due to the high levels of visitors, while other activities such as noxious weed removal and backcountry trail maintenance are high in natural parks. Mr. Harig noted that local parks are smaller in size than regional parks, but are expensive due to the high level of activity, vandalism and other challenges associated with an urban area. He further indicated the immense impact of volunteers across the system, noting the division's more than 50,000 volunteer hours each year.

Mr. Harig described other public safety challenges, including gang activity, park rule violations, storm damage, property management challenges (including theft, arson and vandalism), illegal and damaging off-road vehicle use, illegal camping (including homeless encampments) and dumping, and the challenge of acquiring new lands in poor condition (e.g. infested with noxious weeds).

Mr. Harig also explained that the division uses the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Maintenance Standards modes to define levels of maintenance across the system. He noted that currently the division's parks are generally at a level between Modes III and IV, while the division would need to aim for Modes II and III in order to be better in-line with the parks of other jurisdictions in the region. Mr. Harig explained that due to funding restrictions, the division operates in "emergency repair mode" and has no preventative maintenance program.

Mr. Brown noted the division's planning documents, including the King County Strategic Plan, the King County Comprehensive Plan, the King County Open Space Plan, and the Parks and Recreation Division 2002 Business Transition Plan, all drive decision-making. He described the division's customer satisfaction initiative and outreach efforts (including focus groups, site and on-line surveys and internal staff meetings) over the past year to gather data on the needs of county residents for parks and recreation facilities and services. Common themes gathered from these outreach efforts include that: King County Parks is a wise investment; the Regional Trails System is a good fit for the county; geographic inequities exist; and partnerships are critical.

Mr. Brown reiterated that an 8.4 cent levy rate in 2014 would be required to maintain current levels of service and that, based on stakeholder feedback, the division has modeled costs for various enhancements to the system, including: improving service standards; enhancing and maintaining facilities; adjusting annual business revenue growth targets from 5% to a more reasonable 3%; enabling the division to maintain the eastside rail corridor anticipated to be purchased by the county; and funding a renewed county fair. Mr. Brown provided costs and benefits associated with each option and indicated that the estimated cumulative levy required to support all these enhancements would be 11.6 cents (8.4 cents to maintain the current level of service plus an additional 3.4 cents), with an estimated \$39/household /year cost. He noted that these additions would allow the system to increase from an NRPA Mode of IV to between Mode II and III.

Task Force members asked a number of questions about the information presented, including: additional explanation of how the 8.4 cent levy maintenance levy estimate is derived; the per-household cost of the levy in 2008, 2012 and 2014; other competing ballot items anticipated in 2013; at what point would an additional County levy begin to force junior taxing districts to reduce their levies? Staff answered various questions from members and committed to providing information for outstanding questions.

No public comment was given. Ms. Reed noted that the next meeting would include a discussion of the division's capital funding sources and needs. She adjourned the meeting at 6:05pm.