

## 2012 King County Parks Levy Task Force

July 24, 2012 Meeting Summary  
*As approved by Task Force on August 7, 2012*

**Levy Task Force Members Present:** Mike Deller (representing Roger Hoesterey), Terry Higashiyama, Al Isaac, Terry Lavender, Louise Miller (co-chair), Matthew Pruitt, Charles Ruthford, Kathy Surace-Smith (co-chair), Jim Todd, Justin Vander Pol, Jeff Watling (co-chair).

**Levy Task Force Members Absent:** Shiv Batra, David Burger, Julie Colehour, Karen Daubert, Gene Duvernoy, Hilary Franz, Joey Martinez, Sili Savusa, Gordon McHenry, Jr., Chukundi Salisbury.

**Parks and Recreation Division Staff and others present:** Rhonda Berry, Assistant Deputy County Executive; Christie True, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP); Kevin Brown, Director, Parks and Recreation Division; Katy Terry, Parks Assistant Director; Tom Koney, Deputy Director, Executive Services Division; Jerry Hughs, Parks Finance Manager; Frana Milan, Parks Program Manager; Cristina Gonzalez, Parks Deputy Finance Manager; Jennifer Lehman, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget; Tim O’Leary, DNRP; Carolyn Duncan, DNRP; David Schaefer, Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ); Dick Deal, Director, Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services, City of Shoreline; Daryl Faber, Director, Department of Parks, Arts and Recreation, City of Auburn; Karen Reed, meeting facilitator.

### **Summary:**

Co-Chair Louise Miller convened the meeting at 4:10pm and led introductions.

Karen Reed reviewed the agenda for the meeting. Members approved the previous meeting’s summary notes as presented. Ms. Miller announced the date and time of the next field trip for members and she noted that King County email addresses for members are still not available, and that public comment may also be made at [www.parksfeedback.com](http://www.parksfeedback.com).

Rhonda Berry of the Executive’s Office gave an overview of the King County Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) initiative. She noted that while the initiative began under Executive Ron Sims, Executive Dow Constantine strongly supports the ordinance, adopted by the County Council in 2010, and has led the county’s ESJ efforts. Ms. Berry also noted that the principles of “fair and just” are embedded within the county’s Strategic Plan. She noted that by considering equity and social justice impacts of the levy on county residents, the Task Force can help guide how resources are distributed, in order to help ensure that all residents can lead quality, meaningful lives regardless of race, income level, or

place of residence. Katy Terry spoke specifically about the division's progress, opportunities and challenges in responding to the ESJ ordinance and presented maps indicating regional variation of physical activity and where residents live within ¼-mile of a park or trail, noting areas where residents do not have parks facilities resources provided within that proximity, particularly in southern King County. Ms. Berry noted that the Task Force has a unique opportunity to make recommendations to provide better access to parks and recreation facilities to those that are currently under-served. Task force members raised a number of issues and questions, including: what type of metrics are applied to the ESJ initiative; how is physical activity defined; noting the potential conflict between the need for the Parks system to generate revenue to support the rural and regional facilities versus the urban area investments encouraged by the ESJ initiative; and how social justice needs were addressed in last year's parks user surveys.

Kevin Brown reviewed various topics introduced in previous meetings, including the Parks system funding sources matrix and the last decade of the division's history. Mr. Brown described how the previous task force's recommended 7-cent levy was lowered to 5 cents before being introduced to Council, by lowering assumptions of how quickly costs would grow and removing funding to replace anticipated REET revenue losses. At the time, the division was very concerned that the lowered cost assumptions were not realistic, and they were unfortunately correct. Mr. Brown reviewed the total projected revenues necessary to maintain the existing system at current maintenance levels (8.4-cent levy rate for a 6-year projection); the common themes extrapolated from the division's 2011 customer satisfaction initiative; and the funding options for Parks operating and capital programs after the current levies expire in 2013.

Mr. Brown reviewed the 2008-2013 Open Space and Trails Levy and the associated funding for the 39 cities in King County and the Woodland Park Zoo ("Zoo"). As a group, the cities receive 20% of the levy proceeds, and the Zoo receives another 20%. The Parks Levy Citizen Oversight Board reviews how all levy funds are spent and has, to date, concluded that levy funds have been spent consistent with the provisions of the levy ordinances. He noted that at today's meeting a representative from the Zoo and two city parks directors will make short presentations about the their use of levy funds.

David Schaefer of the Zoo reported that levy funds have become an integral component of the Zoo's operating funds, and currently comprise 11 percent of operating revenue. Mr. Schaefer described impacts of the recession on the Zoo's operations, including reductions for travel, staff layoffs, the closing of two exhibits, senior staff furloughs, etc. He described how levy dollars have been spent in 2008-2011, including funding the new penguin exhibit and environmental education (which includes bringing school children to the Zoo from schools around the county). Mr. Schaefer noted these environmental education programs are the most important use of levy funds by the Zoo.

Dick Deal of the City of Shoreline spoke to the value of trails projects which have been partially funded by levy dollars allocated to the city. He noted that trail usage is increasing throughout the region, that completing missing links is important and that trails are also important transit connections. He identified a need for increased trail maintenance and he suggested that a regionwide strategy is necessary to better communicate to residents the impact of levy dollars on the trails system, and expressed that the trail system would benefit from standard signage and mapping. He described the need for increased flexibility in how the cities can use levy funding.

Daryl Faber of the City of Auburn also expressed his view that cities need increased flexibility in how they can apply any future funds dispersed to the cities, given the heavy concentration of active recreation facilities and programming within city parks systems—which are types of programs that the County has largely stopped operating and transferred to cities.

Task Force co-chair Jeff Watling, the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director for the City of Kent, noted that while the levy funding has been crucial to support land acquisition projects, he echoed that there is a need for increased flexibility in the use of levy funds to support expensive local parks facilities. He noted that the County parks system and cities parks systems should support each other. Task Force member Terry Higashiyama, Community Services Administrator for the City of Renton, noted that future funding to the cities could help to support city parks that are regional in nature, such as Renton's Gene Coulon Park. She noted the importance of funding missing links in the trail system.

Task Force members asked a number of questions about the information presented, including: whether levy dollars have supplanted previous funding; how Conservation Futures Tax revenues along with Open Space & Trails levy dollars have helped to create an expanded and better-connected system of open space; the difference between major maintenance and operating funding; why REET and levy funding are not comparable; and the state of the county's General Fund.

No public comment was given. Ms. Reed noted that the next meeting would take place on August 7<sup>th</sup> and that an upcoming meeting would include findings of survey data. She also provided a handout that frames the mission of the Task Force into a series of questions to be answered in upcoming meetings and discussions, including: what is the funding mechanism; what can be afforded and funded; should the task force include recommendations for both operating and capital considerations; and should funding for non-county recipients be considered.

Ms. Reed adjourned the meeting at 6:05pm.