## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 8 | **Name:** | Jake Tracy |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2020-0068 | **Date:** | February 12, 2020 |

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Motion 2020-0068 would provide direction to the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee for Council priorities on the use of Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) funds for acquisition of property rights in Agricultural Production Districts (APDs).

**SUMMARY**

Proposed Motion 2020-0062 would use the Council’s authority under K.C.C. 26.12.010 to express the Council’s interest in prioritizing CFT funding for Agricultural Production Districts. The proposed motion notes that the farmable land in the APDs is an irreplaceable natural resource, and that the County has already committed through the Comprehensive Plan to developing a long-term strategy for financing protection of farmland in the APDs and working with other jurisdictions, agencies, and agricultural interest groups to enhance commercial farming activities and encourage resource-based businesses in the APDs. For these reasons, the motion would direct the CFT Advisory Committee to prioritize projects that include the purchase of property rights in APDs for agricultural activities or conservation.

Actual CFT project applications in response to the stated priority would be submitted through the regular CFT review process. If project applications are received, the CFT Advisory Committee will review the applications as part of its review process during spring 2020. The CFT Advisory Committee will transmit its recommendations for funding to the Council and Executive during the summer. The Executive will propose specific funding recommendations to the Council as part of the 2021-2022 biennial budget.

**BACKGROUND**

Conservation futures tax (CFT) levy proceeds are authorized by state law[[1]](#footnote-1) to acquire property rights to conserve open space lands. CFT levy proceeds are collected throughout King County as a dedicated portion of the property tax. Open space lands are defined in K.C.C. 26.12.003 and RCW 84.34.020 to include open space, agricultural lands, and timber lands. CFT funds are allowed to be used to protect, preserve, maintain, improve, restore, limit the future use of, or other otherwise conserve open space lands.

K.C.C. chapter 26.12 defines the process and criteria for the allocation of CFT levy funds, done through the county’s budget process. Project applications are submitted to King County, either by the local jurisdiction in which the project is located, or through community groups or nonprofits. These project applications are reviewed by the CFT Advisory Committee, which makes a recommendation to the Executive on funding allocations based on the selection criteria.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Executive includes recommendations for funding allocation in the proposed budget, which the Council reviews, amends, and adopts. Unless a project is determined by the CFT committee to be located in an opportunity area, project applicants are required to provide funding from another source in an equal or greater amount to the CFT funding they receive.

King County Code allows the Council to establish priorities for the CFT Advisory Committee to consider during their project selection and funding recommendation process.[[3]](#footnote-3) A motion setting such priorities must be passed by the Council by March 1st of any given year for consideration for funding in the following year.

Farm and Agricultural Lands fall under King County's definition of open space and thus are eligible for acquisition using CFT funding. APDs are agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance that the King County Comprehensive Plan states must be conserved for productive use. However, although the APD lands – roughly 41,000 acres – have been conserved, the Comprehensive Plan states that only 25,000 acres are being actively farmed.

**ANALYSIS**

Proposed Motion 2020-0068 would set an evaluation priority for one or more projects that include the purchase of property rights for lots in APDs. The proposed motion states that the farmable land in the APDs is an irreplaceable natural resource, and cites the Comprehensive Plan, which calls on the County to develop a long-term strategy for financing protection of farmland in the APDs, to work with other jurisdictions, agencies, and agricultural interest groups to enhance commercial farming activities, and encourage resource-based businesses in the APDs. For these reasons, the motion would direct the CFT Advisory Committee to prioritize projects that include the purchase of property rights in APDs for agricultural activities or conservation.

If an applicant submits a CFT application for a project located within an APD, it will be subject to the review process and criteria established in code. This proposed motion, if passed before March 1, 2020, would alert the committee that such projects are a priority for consideration in the 2020 application review cycle for projects that would be proposed to the Council for funding as part of the 2021-2022 biennial budget.

**INVITED**

* Bob Burns, Deputy Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks
* Ingrid Lundin, Project Program Manager, Department of Natural Resources and Parks

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Motion 2020-0068

1. Conservation futures are established in RCW 84.34.200 through .240. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Motion 15513 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. K.C.C. 26.12.010.B [↑](#footnote-ref-3)