



Legislation Text

File #: 2002-0157, **Version:** 3

Clerk 05/06/2002

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, the metropolitan parks task force has been created and tasked to recommend to the county council and the executive, by June 2002, ways to keep King County parks and recreation facilities open to the public and eliminate the reliance of these parks and facilities on county current expense revenues, while considering the long and short-term effects of recommended actions and working with affected stakeholders, and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. The exploration of alternatives should at a minimum:

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

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

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

and similar means;

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

4. Develop criteria for prioritizing the allocation of available funding to types of county parks and

recreation facilities, taking into account:

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

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

6. Include coordinated outreach to all affected user groups, stakeholders and employees as well as

other governments, including the state and federal governments, cities and school districts; and

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

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

1. A status report on each of the actions outlined in this motion;
2. Recommendations developed by the executive as a result of the evaluations of the alternatives to

keep county parks and recreational facilities open to the public;

3. Identification of potential legislative actions required by the county to implement any proposed recommendations or actions;

4. The report from the metropolitan parks task force;

5. Recommendations from the executive as to which actions proposed by the metropolitan parks task force should be supported by the council, the justification for the executive recommendations, and the steps necessary to implement those actions.

none