King County Land Conservation Advisory Group

Phase 1 Report

January 2017

Executive Summary

Executive Constantine has proposed a countywide initiative to “finish the job of protecting our great places forever.” The Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative (“Initiative”) sets forth the goal of conserving and preserving remaining high conservation value lands throughout King County within the next 30 years. Five categories of land are targeted: natural areas, farmland, forests, river valley and nearshore lands, and trail corridor connections. The Initiative calls for preserving such lands in cities as well as rural and urban unincorporated areas of the County.

The Advisory Group was convened by the Executive in September 2016 and tasked with reviewing and proposing refinements to the Initiative. The Advisory Group’s Phase 1 report endorses the Initiative, recommends some adjustments to the proposed scope, and requests that the County undertake a phase of interim work and then reconvene the Advisory Group in the fall of 2017 in order that it can issue a final set of recommendations. The Advisory Group’s main Phase 1 recommendations include:

- Adding a sixth category of lands to the Initiative: urban green space. This should be defined through work with cities and historically underserved communities.
- Working with cities to complete a list of urban priority lands before a 2017 target date, and also ensuring ongoing funding is available to cities to preserve conservation lands that cities may identify later.
- Incorporating equity and social justice considerations into the Initiative, including addressing disparities that exist amongst some communities regarding access and proximity to open space and green space, and working with historically underserved communities to identify the types of urban green spaces that would be most valued in their communities.
- Refining cost assumptions with respect to the 66,000 acres of identified King County priority land, and the new acreage identified inside cities.
- Ensuring that acceleration of funding is available so that quick action can be taken to preserve lands under threat of development.
- Developing a strategy that will ensure the renewal of the current County Parks Levy, which is up for renewal in 2019, creating timing considerations for this Initiative.
- Leaving four potential public funding sources on the table for now, pending further work to refine the scope and cost of the Initiative.
- Doing additional work to test the assumptions about the role of private funding in supporting the Initiative.
- Proceeding with a sense of urgency, as development pressures continue to grow.
The Advisory Group believes that by preserving the remaining natural areas and open spaces in our rural and urban areas, ensuring accessible green spaces in every community, strengthening our region’s commitment to preserve working farms and forests, and completing our trail networks we can ensure King County remains one of the best places in which to live and work for generations to come.
The residents of King County have a long record of supporting bold initiatives to advance the quality of life in our region—from the Forward Thrust bond program of the 1960s, to the Farmlands Preservation Program of the 1980s, the Open Space Bonds effort of the 1990s, and the series of regional parks levies beginning in 2002 that helped grow the County Parks system into the State’s second largest park system. More recently, County voters approved the Best Starts for Kids initiative and a third phase of growth in our regional transit system. As a region, we have repeatedly approved measures to ensure our growing population can enjoy the spectacular natural setting that has drawn so many of us here over the decades.

Building on this heritage, Executive Constantine has now offered up another bold initiative, one that will, in his words, “finish the job of protecting our great places forever.” Having deliberated for the last four months upon this vision and the work plan to accomplish it, we issue this report endorsing the Executive’s Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative, recommending some additions to it, and requesting that the County undertake a phase of interim work in order that we may issue a final set of recommendations with respect to the Initiative in the fall of 2017.

I. THE LAND CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION INITIATIVE

The Executive transmitted the “Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan” to the County Council in March 2016, in response to Council Motion 14458 asking the Executive to develop and transmit a work plan for implementing a program to protect and conserve high value land and water resources throughout the County. That Motion, unanimously adopted in November 2015, states in part: “It is the policy of the county to ensure that King County remains one of the greenest metropolitan areas in the world by protecting and conserving land and water resources that will enhance our quality of life, strengthen our region’s economy, enhance biodiversity, provide recreational opportunities and promote sustainable forestry and farming and locally grown food.” The Council’s Transportation Economy and Environment Committee received a briefing on the Executive’s work plan in spring of 2016.

The Work Plan sets forth the goal of conserving and preserving remaining high conservation value lands throughout King County within the next 30 years, in both urban and rural areas. High conservation value lands are defined as lands with important natural or scenic resources, such as forests, streams, rivers, wetlands, soils, nearshore resources, beaches, and other types of fish and wildlife habitat; importance for restoration or flood hazard reduction projects; passive recreation or regional trail opportunities; or timberland or agricultural lands supporting
commercial production. Lands to be conserved or preserved are presented in five categories: natural lands; farmland; forests; river valley and nearshore lands; and trail corridor connections. See Figure 1. ¹

In the last several years, the County has undertaken an intensive effort to identify, parcel-by-parcel, lands in the unincorporated area (and a few parcels inside cities) to “protect our great places forever,” resulting in a list of over 5,500 parcels totaling approximately 66,000 acres. The County has developed a range of estimates for what it would cost to acquire, or otherwise protect and maintain, these “County priority lands.” The range of estimates is based on varying assumptions about: (1) how much land is acquired in fee versus easement; (2) how much land now in the Current Use Taxation Program ² must be acquired (in fee or easement) to ensure its continued protection, and (3) what level of maintenance funding is needed for County-acquired parcels. For the County priority lands, the cost for this 30-year effort is estimated by the County

Figure 1. Overview of the Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative

Source: King County. [graphic will be updated to add passive rec to natural lands.]

¹ Throughout this report, we incorporate work products from the County that help illustrate the Initiative.
² The Current Use Taxation program is authorized by the Washington State Open Space Taxation Act (1970; RCW 84.34). Landowners receive a property tax reduction in exchange for voluntary preservation and stewardship of open space, farmland, or forestland on their property. Once enrolled, the property is assessed at a ‘current use’ rather than the ‘highest and best use’ value
at $1.5 to $1.8 billion. This cost estimate *excludes* the cost of lands that Cities target for preservation.

The County has catalogued existing funding available to support the Initiative. A tally of projected funding available from these existing sources over the next 30 years (after deducting existing commitments to which such funds are applied), results in an estimated “*funding gap*” of $223 million to $533 million (again, excluding the cost of city-identified lands and excluding existing funding available to acquire city lands). See **Figure 2**. The County has further identified a range of potential funding options to fill this gap, including both public and private sources. See **Table 1**.

A summary of the Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative (“Initiative”) as presented to us is reproduced at **Exhibit B**. **Exhibit C** shows maps the location of these lands at a high level.

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**A. Summary of the Advisory Group Process and Mission**

The Advisory Group is composed of [26] County residents convened by Executive Dow Constantine in September 2016, after close consultation with County Councilmembers. A list of our members is presented at **Exhibit A**, and includes professionals from local businesses, real estate companies, environmental non-government organizations, investment firms, as well as local philanthropists, local farmers, rural foresters, two former county councilmembers and five representatives from cities.

Our mission, in summary, was to review the Executive’s proposal to protect remaining unprotected high conservation value lands in King County within a generation and make recommendations for a preferred approach or approaches to implement the proposal. More specifically, we were asked to offer our recommendations on:

- Any refinements proposed to the Executive’s proposal
- The expected benefits of, and challenges associated with, implementation of the proposal, in particular considering the health and quality of life for County residents and equity and social justice considerations
- A preferred timeline for implementation, including consideration of options to accelerate the pace of land acquisition
- The amount of private funding that can reasonably be anticipated
- Strategies for engaging private, nonprofit and NGO agencies in King County with similar land conservation goals and programs to integrate and leverage efforts where appropriate
- Preferred public funding option(s)
- Implementation strategies
Figure 2. Current Public Funding and the “Funding Gap”

- Presented in order from most to least certainty, moving clockwise
- Actual funding gap and total cost to be determined
- Existing funding available to King County over 30 years is approximately $1.266 billion (2016 dollars)
- Pie chart based on $1.65 billion total cost for county priorities, leaving a funding gap of $383.5 million
- Total cost estimates range from $1.5 billion (a gap of $233 million) to $1.8 billion (a gap of $533 million)

Source: King County
• How high conservation value lands within cities should be addressed
• Implications for the County’s parks system levy, which is up for renewal in 2019

We met nine times between September 2016 and January 2017. The Executive appointed former County Councilmember Larry Phillips and Tukwila City Councilmember De’Sean Quinn to serve as our Co-Chairs. We were supported by County staff and an independent facilitator. All our meetings were open to the public, and our meeting materials were posted online. Over the course of our work, the County also conducted three public meetings on the Initiative, in addition to holding many additional meetings with cities and other stakeholders.

We began our work by hearing from Executive Constantine about why this Initiative is important to him. We then heard from County staff about the process they went through to identify the County priority lands, their assumptions regarding their cost of these lands, and funding that is currently available for this purpose. The Director of the County Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget identified for us a range of public funding options that could fill the funding gap.

We heard from a variety of subject matter experts, including medical professionals studying the health benefits of green space, leaders from local philanthropic organizations and nonprofit agencies working to engage private markets in preservation of land.

The County and Forterra partnered on a poll seeking information on how people perceive the values and benefits of land conservation; the poll results were shared with us, together with results from polling commissioned by Forterra on Puget Sound area resident attitudes about growth and the environment. (A summary of the County poll results can be found at http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/land-conservation/meeting-12-14-16/presentation-polling-summary.pdf.)

At our last four meetings, we discussed the components of the mission statement and provided our thoughts and direction to the facilitator and staff team, who prepared this report on our behalf and at our direction.

B. Our Support for the Initiative

i. The Vision

We endorse the vision presented by the Executive. It describes a level of aspiration appropriate and necessary to keep King County sustainable and inclusive in the 21st century and beyond. It represents a generational effort to help preserve the foundation of why we live here and why we hope our children will want to live here.

Identifying and preserving open spaces – from pockets of green space in urban areas, to our working farms and forests, to the last best wild and natural areas of our County – advances the health and quality of life of each and every resident of King County. Many of us were drawn
here by the mountains, forests and waters that magnificently frame our communities – and we stay here because of them. We understand that our beautiful natural environment is not only something we enjoy personally: it also directly benefits our economy, drawing new people and employers to the region.

We share the Executive’s vision of a region where we, and the generations beyond us, live in sustainable neighborhoods in vibrant communities, with myriad local natural areas and green spaces to enjoy. The vision reinforces our region’s long commitment to preserving working farms and forests. It promotes a thriving economy and the competitiveness of local businesses by making this a place people want to live, and that businesses will want to call home. It furthers our commitment to addressing the impacts of climate change locally. We believe it can also be the launching platform for broader, regional preservation and conservation work with our neighboring Puget Sound Counties.

As our population grows, the need to preserve that which drew us here becomes ever more important. New tools need to be developed to enable preservation. The time to act is now, before these last precious wild areas and green spaces are lost to us forever.

**ii. Benefits of the Initiative**

The range of potential benefits from the Initiative is extremely far-reaching—from the obvious environmental preservation considerations, to advancing the health and wellness of residents, to strengthening our economy. Figure 3 presents a table developed by County staff at our direction that provides a high-level mapping of these benefits. Benefits will vary depending on the location and type of land being preserved. In some areas, we have an opportunity to focus on advancing the health of underserved communities. In other places, we see an opportunity to focus on climate change goals. In still others, we can save wetland areas and protect communities from flooding.

We call attention to the growing body of evidence around the health benefits of having access to green space. While in some ways intuitive, it is affirming to see the early data on these health benefits, and we find this one of many compelling reasons to pursue this Initiative. The issue of health benefits also reinforces the need to incorporate cities in this initiative, given existing disparities in green space access.

**iii. Inclusion of Lands Inside Cities**

Eighty three percent (83%) of the population of King County lives inside cities.\(^3\) Lands inside cities comprise approximately one-fifth of the total acreage in the County.\(^4\) Protecting high value conservation lands within cities is essential to achieving the vision and benefits of the

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\(^3\) Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2016 official population counts.

\(^4\) Percentage of approximate area based on political boundaries and excluding Puget Sound and Lake Washington. Data source: King County GIS.
Figure 3. Potential Benefits of the Land Conservation Initiative  [note: graphic will be edited to refer to Urban Green Space]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits the Environment</th>
<th>Benefits People</th>
<th>Benefits the Economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Function</td>
<td>Water Quality</td>
<td>Human Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish &amp; Wildlife Habitat</td>
<td>Water Supply</td>
<td>Public Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air Quality</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connect Corridors</td>
<td>Flood Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate Resilience</td>
<td>Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flood Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resource Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Natural Lands: High benefit in all categories.
- Rivers: High benefit in all categories.
- Forests: High benefit in all categories.
- Farmland: High benefit in all categories.
- Trails: High benefit in all categories.
- Urban Open Space: Draft placeholder, more discussion and definition needed.
Initiative and the support and active engagement of local city government is similarly essential. Cities are necessary partners in the success of this Initiative.

We hope and expect that cities will identify all of the important urban incorporated lands of high conservation value for preservation or conservation through this Initiative. We recognize that the types of land and the conservation opportunities inside cities may differ from those in the rural area and that cities have additional needs and priorities that come with higher density and urban spaces, as made clear by the city representatives of the Advisory Group. In recognition of this, we recommend adding an “urban green space” category to the Initiative, and working with the cities in coming months to more clearly define this additional dimension to the Initiative. The goal is to reach an alignment with these partner agencies so that they can broadly support the Initiative.

iv. Equity and Social Justice

We strongly endorse the incorporation of equity and social justice principles into this Initiative. We must act to ensure the results of the Initiative are as holistic as our vision. This will require full engagement of cities, as well as working with underserved communities. The County must reach out to historically underserved groups, communities of color and low income residents, as well as organizations that work with these communities, to identify the best approaches to improve access to green space in their local communities—to learn from them what they value and want to see happen where they live.

County staff presented data to us showing disparities in access and proximity to open spaces and trails in multiple communities and neighborhoods throughout the County, particularly in urban areas. We encourage the County and Cities to engage on ways to reduce and eliminate those disparities through this Initiative, by ensuring we are identifying green spaces to protect in these communities and neighborhoods.

v. Other Challenges

As outlined above and further in this report, there is important work to be done in the next year in order for us to develop a set of final recommendations on how we think the County should proceed. Work with cities is particularly critical. For this reason, we ask to be reconvened for a “Phase 2 effort” in the third quarter of 2017. (We expand further on the scope of the Phase 2 work plan later in this report.)

While most of the Advisory Group members are today very supportive of the County moving forward once this interim work is completed, a few of us prefer to reserve judgment pending assessment of the work and information gathered over the next several months—particularly the work to engage the cities and understand both city priorities and the overall cost of the Initiative once city priorities are included. We realize that this Initiative does not exist in a vacuum. Local governments and the people they serve face many competing challenges. One
challenge in particular that we call out for Phase 2 interim work relates to housing affordability and the related issue of buildable lands. Based on the information provided to us, preservation of the County priority lands located in rural areas will have a minimal impact on the inventory of buildable lands in King County. But the city lands have yet to be identified. We will want to review the results of a full examination of housing affordability and buildable lands impacts from the final scope proposed in Phase 2.

vi. Urgency

There is urgency to this work. Our population is growing and we want our cities and neighborhoods to remain vibrant and livable. Every day, we are at risk of losing our remaining green spaces to development. So, while we are asking for an interim phase of work, it is very important that we maintain momentum.

II. RECOMMENDED REFINEMENTS TO THE WORK PLAN

The County has presented a thoughtful and well researched approach to preserving high conservation value lands in unincorporated areas, and the County is pursuing work with cities to complete the picture. As stated, we endorse the proposed scope of the Initiative; and, in this section of the report, offer some recommended refinements to the Initiative work plan presented by the County.

A. The County Proposal for Unincorporated Areas

The County has identified five categories of lands as having high conservation value. Exhibit B outlines the scope of the Initiative with respect to unincorporated area acquisitions—the “County priority lands.” A handful of these County priority lands are located in urban areas and cities. The cost of acquiring County priority lands hinges upon three major assumptions:

- How much land can be acquired in fee versus easement?
- How much land can be preserved through the Current Use Taxation Program?
- What level of maintenance funding is appropriate for parcels acquired by the County?

Figures 4, 5 and 6 outline the range of assumptions presented to us on these 3 issues. As noted above, the total cost of acquiring these County Priority Lands ranges from $1.5 to $1.8 billion, depending on these assumptions. City lands will add to the total cost – but cities also have some resources to bring to bear in support of the Initiative.
Figure 4. Acquisition in Fee versus Easement

Costs to protect land will vary based on how much is acquired in fee (title held by County—higher cost) versus parcels being protected through restrictive easements being placed on the land by agreement with the owner (lower cost). Cost estimates presented ranged from protecting 30% in fee, down to 14% in fee, resulting in a range of $170 million in land acquisition costs between those two endpoints.

![More Expensive vs. Less Expensive](source: King County)

Figure 5. Lands Remaining in Current Use Taxation (CUT)

Of the 66,000 acres of targeted King County priorities, 62% (40,500 acres) is enrolled in CUT. The remaining 38% (25,500 acres) is not enrolled in CUT. If a parcel stays in CUT forever, it is assumed to be adequately protected. So the question is how much land do we think will stay in the program? The following table lists various percentages of CUT-enrolled land that could be left in CUT (thus not acquired) and indicates the corresponding amount of acreage we would need to acquire to preserve all 66,000 acres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of CUT-enrolled parcels retained in CUT – instead of acquired</th>
<th>...results in total acres to be acquired (in Fee or Easement)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0% remains in CUT</td>
<td>66,000 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33% remains in CUT</td>
<td>52,700 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% remains in CUT</td>
<td>46,000 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66% remains in CUT</td>
<td>39,400 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*including CUT and non-CUT parcels.

Source: King County.
i. Proposed Scope

We support the approach of identifying County Priority lands based on the five categories identified in the Initiative. We believe the County has done a good job defining the five land categories and the criteria for selecting high priority conservation lands within each category. More work needs to be done in the next several months to refine the costing assumptions.

One scope adjustment we recommend with respect to County priority lands relates to historic barns. The Initiative proposes the preservation of 174 historically significant barns, with $11M - $22M for that purpose. The Advisory Group supports the preservation of historically significant barns. They are an iconic part of the rich agricultural heritage of our region—and also support the day-to-day work of farmers and ranchers. We asked staff to provide us information on what sources of funding currently are in place to preserve historic barns. Two programs were identified: (1) the County’s Barn Again Historic Barn Preservation Program, relaunched in 2016, and (2) the 4Culture Landmarks Capital Grant Program. These programs are important, but do not provide sufficient resources to ensure preservation of historically significant barns. Indeed, as a region we have done well in preserving agricultural land, but we have not done as well in protecting the viability of farming as a livelihood in King County. That said, we do not recommend including historic barn preservation funding in the Initiative. We do not see a

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**Figure 6. Range of Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Costs and Levels**

The County presented four potential levels of O & M funding for care of parcels of land that are acquired and held by the County for preservation/conservation. Numbers show 30-year O & M costs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>What is funded in this Option</th>
<th>30-year cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Current Parks Levy level of maintenance funding for new property acquisitions (2 entry level field staff added annually).</td>
<td>$140 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>+ Direct costs (vehicles, materials)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: King County Parks Division analysis and estimate. Assumes 50% of CUT-enrolled parcels are not acquired and approximately 76% of acquired parcels are preserved through easement.
strong nexus between barn preservation and land conservation. We believe it is important to stay focused on land acquisition and preservation for the Initiative to succeed. But, mindful of the importance of these structures, we strongly urge the County and state to expand resources available for historic barn preservation.

Overall, it is critical that the County develop clear messages to communicate the benefits of conserving these priority lands.

ii. Costs

Overall, the County’s approach to developing a cost estimate for preservation of County priority lands seems sound to us. However, the range of the cost estimate is fairly wide, and we hope it can be narrowed over the next several months. For the subset of parcels where there is still a question of whether fee or easement is the best approach, we encourage the County to undertake additional parcel-by-parcel work to better assess whether preservation can be accomplished by less expensive easements, rather than fee acquisition.

Similarly, we agree it is important to further analyze whether properties now enrolled in the Current Use Taxation (CUT) program will remain so enrolled. Lands in this program are more likely to be conserved – through continued private stewardship – without any additional County expenditure. Historically, over 95% of parcels enrolled in CUT have remained in CUT. But as development pressure grows, we agree it is realistic to expect retention levels to drop. We are not in a position to second-guess the County’s range of assumptions on CUT retention. We encourage the County to look into this question further in the coming months—to create a refined proposal about when and where parcels should be prioritized for acquisition or easement protection in the face of this uncertainty. It may be helpful for the County to further explore whether adjustments to the CUT program (by new legislation at the state level) could increase the likelihood of properties joining and remaining in the program.

In terms of the range of maintenance funding levels identified by the County for lands acquired through this Initiative, we strongly agree maintenance funding must be included in the Initiative. Acquired lands will not retain their conservation value without maintenance. The public will—and, we believe, should—demand assurance of adequate maintenance funding as part of this Initiative. We cannot say what the correct level of funding is for maintenance. However, we agree that the County should examine whether additional funding options are available.

A perhaps obvious but important point around costs: we are exploring a 30-year land acquisition and preservation program. Cost estimates made now will not translate to reality with precision over time. Some identified parcels may never become available; others could be added to the list over time. Revenue assumptions should incorporate this variability.
iii. Existing Revenues

The array of existing funding available to support the Initiative is impressive, but insufficient. (See Figure 2). There may be some competing demands for some of these funds, which we have not explored in depth. And we are not sanguine about the future for federal environmental grant funding. This Initiative may be even more important if federal funding for conservation is reduced. The likelihood of such a decrease should be figured into the future funding picture.

Overall, however, we are starting from a very positive position in terms of available public funding.

iv. Additional Steps Needed

In addition to the Phase 2 work identified below, we emphasize the challenge of communicating the goals and benefits of this Initiative in the most effective way possible to the public. The labels applied to the lands to be protected are important, and the County-proposed labels may resonate as well as other possible terms. Holistically describing the benefits of the Initiative is also critical to building support for it. And this means reaching out beyond the traditional constituencies of outdoor enthusiasts and environmental advocates. It means also ensuring we communicate potential benefits to all residents, historically underserved communities, as well as the business community, in ways that resonate with them. Work should continue over the next several months to develop a thoughtful and effective public outreach strategy.

B. Conservation Lands Inside Cities

As stated previously, protecting high value conservation lands within cities is essential to achieving the vision and benefits of the Initiative, and the support and active engagement of cities is similarly essential. On a practical level, the County will need to demonstrate benefits in urban areas to secure voter support for any regional funding source to implement the Initiative.

The County began outreach to cities on the Initiative several months ago, and work has begun in earnest. Just as the County has spent the last many months developing the data on unincorporated lands to conserve, we similarly expect it will take considerable time and effort for cities to develop their own list of conservation priority lands.

In terms of environmental benefits, the five categories of land identified by the County are relevant to city acquisitions, and we strongly encourage cities to identify such lands within their respective borders.

We endorse adding a sixth category of “urban green space” to the scope of the Initiative to address urban green space opportunities that exist within cities that are different than the five categories the County developed. The definition of this category should be developed through
work with cities and urban community groups in the coming months. We anticipate that the “urban green space” category will be broader and more flexible than the other five categories. For example, instead of farmland, cities may be seeking to expand areas where “P-Patches” or community gardens can be established. Outreach around equity and social justice (discussed in the next section of this report) may suggest other ideas for inclusion in the “urban green space” category.

In the course of our deliberations, members of the Advisory Group representing cities also made clear that for some cities, acquiring new land may be a lower priority than redeveloping or restoring land already in public ownership. The extent to which these different priorities can be accommodated within this Initiative—or a companion effort, perhaps the County Parks Levy renewal—needs to be explored.

In sum, City lands must be identified. The level of development threat is likely high for in-city lands in general, so there is real urgency to this work. After identifying priority urban parcels, cost-effective preservation strategies for each parcel must be identified, and the extent of existing City resources that can be applied in support of the effort must also be considered.

Fortunately, most cities have already responded to the County’s request for direct, one-on-one engagement on the Initiative. However, this work will not be completed for several months at best—indeed, engaging all 39 cities in the level of detailed analysis already completed by King County for unincorporated lands may take years, and we cannot wait that long. So there is a balance to be struck here between perfect knowledge and action.

A mid-2017 target date should be established by the County for completing work with cities so that the Initiative can be finally scoped and we can proceed towards funding and implementation. Given the amount of work yet to be done in cities, it seems appropriate to us to plan for an initial round of specific in-city acquisitions and also ensure an ongoing funding stream is available for in-city acquisitions over time as information is developed. Work will also be needed to clarify the process and priorities for allocating any future funding stream.

C. Equity and Social Justice Considerations

The County’s work plan for the Initiative notes the importance of incorporating equity and social justice considerations. We agree. There are serious inequities in our County between communities, including inequities related to access and proximity to open space and green space.

Several years ago, the County launched an equity and social justice initiative, and the County has a policy goal of incorporating equity and social justice into all its programs. The County defines “equity” as *full and equal access to opportunities, power and resources so all people may achieve their full potential*. “Social justice” is defined as having aspects including *legal,*
political, economic and environmental considerations—requiring the fair distribution of and access to public goods, institutional resources and life opportunities for all people.5

The County presented to us some intriguing work overlaying GIS data on income, health and other metrics of disadvantaged and underserved communities compared to open space access. The preliminary data identifies areas in King County where there are higher levels of diversity, environmentally related health concerns, lower incomes, and more limited access to open space. Staff stressed that this data is a work in progress and plan to refine the mapping as work proceeds. Even at this draft stage, however, the data illustrates to us that the Initiative provides an important opportunity to address equity and social justice.

We see a clear nexus between the potential benefits of this Initiative and improved equity and social justice outcomes in our County. Incorporating equity and social justice considerations into the Initiative would also make this effort more appealing to our broader community and potentially, private funders: all communities will be asked to support this Initiative in terms of contributing towards the public funding—and they should all see some benefit from it.

This does not mean shifting the primary focus of the Initiative away from preserving high value conservation lands. Rather, it means applying an additional lens to the prioritization process, particularly, though not exclusively, in urban areas. The nexus between conservation and equity varies by the type and location of land. A small pocket of urban green space may not present the same level of habitat-related conservation value as a rural parcel, but could strongly advance equity goals in a disadvantaged community. Conversely, a rural parcel providing significant habitat benefits may rate extremely high in terms of conservation value but provide little direct opportunity to advance equity goals. In our view, the Initiative should include preservation of both types of parcels.

Specific goals should be identified within the Initiative for addressing known inequities in access and proximity to open space and green space. These goals should be established in close coordination with cities and with organizations working to advance equity and social justice in underserved and disadvantaged communities. Desired outcomes may differ across different communities.

In the next several months, the County should engage directly with underserved and disadvantaged communities, with community groups working on equity issues, and with cities, to identify parameters of urban green space that can advance equity and social justice. Specifically the work should try to identify the specific actions and priorities within the scope of a land conservation initiative that can improve equity and social justice outcomes. This work should also consider ways to effectively communicate the value of the Initiative to underserved and disadvantaged communities.

**D. Implications for the County’s Parks Levy**

5 Definitions in King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.
In 2001, facing a general fund crisis that threatened to close the entire County Parks system, the County launched an effort to refocus the system on regional parks, open space and trails, shifting away from active and local urban park properties while retaining local parks in rural areas. The Parks Division was directed to incorporate entrepreneurial activities and build revenues from these activities to help sustain park operations. In 2002, for the first time, the County sought voter approval to fund parks operations with a short term levy. The voters agreed. That levy has been renewed twice in the years since, with growing margins of voter support.

Today, the County Parks system retains its focus on regional parks, open space and trails, and is the second largest park system in our state—with 200 parks, 175 miles of regional trails, over 200 miles of back-country trails, and 28,000 acres of open space. It more than lives up to its motto of being “your big backyard.” Entrepreneurial revenues continue to contribute substantially to the Parks budget. The Parks Levy provides over 80% of the operating budget for the County Parks system, as well as important funding for all city parks systems and the Woodland Park Zoo. (See Figure 7.) This critical levy expires in 2019. Thus, the timing and scope of the land conservation Initiative could have important repercussions for the renewal of the Levy.

Figure 7. Structure of Current King County Parks Levy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of Levy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King County Parks O&amp; M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County Parks Capital</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Parks and Trails</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Park Zoo</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: King County.

It is vitally important that the King County Parks Levy be renewed. The land conservation Initiative must be pursued in a manner that does not undercut the ability to renew the County’s Parks Levy. The constituencies for the Parks Levy and this Initiative overlap, but are not
identical: a well-designed and transparent strategy is needed to ensure approval of both efforts. Additional work by the County, and others, should explore whether linking both measures on the ballot – or separating them by a year or more – is more likely to be successful.

One thing to consider is whether Parks Levy revenues—which are extremely flexible as to how they can be used – can help address goals of the Initiative that cannot be served by other funding sources. For example, if restoration projects, or significantly expanded maintenance and operations funding, become priorities as the Initiative is further developed – and the funding source chosen for the Initiative could not fund those efforts – we should explore whether it makes sense to allow cities (or the County) to switch out allocations between Levy and Initiative funding sources. Similarly, it may make sense to increase operation and maintenance funding allocations within the Parks levy.

E. Private Funding Sources

Just as entrepreneurial revenues have been important to funding the County Parks system, the County is proposing employing non-traditional sources to support the land conservation Initiative. Some of this involves expansions of existing County programs—transfer of development rights and “in-lieu fee mitigation.” In addition, the County has reached out to firms, foundations and individuals in the private sector to explore other ways in which private sector funding could help fund the Initiative. The private funding approaches being explored include philanthropy, capital investment (although likely at a lower than market rate of return in exchange for an environmentally beneficial outcome) and private lending to help accelerate the pace of acquisition. Including private funding would reduce the overall need for public financing of the Initiative. Figure 8 summarizes some of the types of private funding being examined.

The County funding source “wheel” (Figure 2) shows that these private funding sources are estimated to contribute $100 million towards the land conservation Initiative – $50 million from philanthropy and an equal amount from “future ecosystem service markets.”

Is this realistic? After hearing from a panel of impressive individuals leading the way on these strategies in the Northwest, we cannot say for certain. Some of those on the panel observed that the County’s target for private funding seems realistic. However, this is largely uncharted

Figure 8: Private Funding Mechanisms

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6 The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program enables purchase of unused development rights from rural areas and subsequent sale of the development rights to urban developers who can build higher density projects. The In Lieu Fee (ILF) mitigation program enables developers whose projects create an environmental impact to pay a fee to King County in lieu of completing their own offset project; King County then uses the money to restore habitat (and a portion of fees can be used to acquire new restoration sites or protect intact habitat).
Ecosystem markets are in their infancy, though there are some specific successes to point to in our region. Private funding mechanisms could be a catalyst for innovation, and could be an important means of accelerating the availability of monies for acquisition (eventually repaid with public dollars). It seems less likely to us that private funding sources will generate substantial dollars to “fill the gap.” The apparent lead time to develop new sources of private funding (i.e. years, not months) also conflicts with the urgency we feel to act to preserve lands that may be lost forever to development.

Members of the Advisory Group have noted that nationally, the scale of private philanthropic contributions to environmental causes is quite small compared to the contributions of public funding. Private funding is a plus, but public funding is the key to success or failure of the Initiative.

With all this in mind, we nevertheless support the County’s work to incorporate private funding mechanisms into the Initiative. It is important to be able to tell the public we are pursuing this opportunity.

One area where success is more clearly within our grasp is the transfer of development rights (TDR) program. We support the County’s efforts to expand this program through additional city partnerships. There are only four cities which currently have TDR agreements with the County: these agreements can not only reduce the cost of land preservation, they also directly mitigate
concerns about the loss of buildable lands as areas are preserved—while keeping the land in private ownership.

We also encourage the County to work over the next several months with experts from private funding markets to develop a proposed plan for engaging private capital in support of the Initiative and to develop a better sense of the long-term capacity here. It may be useful to convene another panel of experts in this inquiry. The County should also explore the potential for a land conservation pilot project using private funding.

F. Public Funding

In addition to the idea of private funding contributions, the County has presented four options for public funding to “fill the gap” between existing County funding sources and the cost of the Initiative. We reviewed the capacities and implications of these various sources over several meetings. All four options would require countywide voter support, and the proceeds of all four would be remitted to the County for allocation regionally. Three of the options are property tax based. The four options are:

- Restoring the existing Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) to its maximum levy rate of 6.25 cents per $1,000 of assessed value
- Establishing an additional Real Estate Excise Tax—“REET 3”
- Seeking a property tax lid lift
- Seeking approval to issue general obligation bonds

The four options are summarized in Table 1.

As between the four options, the Advisory Group most strongly supports the idea of using the Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) to fund the land conservation Initiative. That said, at this time, we would leave all four funding sources on the table for further consideration.

i. Conservation Futures Tax (CFT)

In King County, CFT was initially enacted by the King County Council in 1982 at 6.25 cents per $1000 of assessed value. CFT has been a quiet success for decades, and has been extensively—and successfully—used by both the County and cities. The allocation process in place is well understood and has stood the test of time. Because allocation is built around a grant process, it can address emergent needs over time. For the land conservation Initiative, we would be asking voters to simply restore the levy to its initially authorized rate. Restoring CFT to the original 6.25 cent rate would generate substantial funding, particularly if a second lift was used to again restore the tax rate mid-way through the 30-year Initiative. One downside of this source is that it may not be able to be applied in support of some of the broader interests of cities, and that it is not used for maintenance funding by the county policy (though limited use
for maintenance is allowed by state statute). This points out the importance of considering ways to coordinate the Parks Levy renewal with the funding of the Initiative.

ii. REET 3

REET 3 has some supporters within the Advisory Group, but also raises some concerns. It has tremendous fund-raising capacity and is arguably the most progressive tax option presented. However, it may be a bigger political hurdle to secure approval than the other options. Limitations on the use of REET 3 dollars raise similar concerns as for CFT: some types of city projects may not be funded with REET 3.

iii. Property Tax Lid Lift

Property Tax Lid Lifts are routinely sought by local governments, given the limitations on growth of property tax revenues. On balance, we are less enthusiastic about this funding source than others. It is familiar to people, and the monies generated can be used more flexibly than any other source. However, we have some concern about voter fatigue with this source.

The existing County Parks Levy is a property tax levy lid lift. We think the County should explore whether adjustments to the next Parks Levy would be appropriate to help address city priorities relative to this Initiative, as well as other Initiative items that could not be funded by CFT or REET.

iv. General Obligation Bonds

General Obligation Bonds require 60% voter approval and validation, and the proceeds cannot be used for maintenance. Those are important limitations which make us not strongly favor this option. Again, however, we would leave it on the table for now.

v. Next Steps

In the next year, polling to further test the level of voter support for these various options should be pursued. We understand there are limitations on what polling the County can fund, so it may be advisable to reach out to nongovernmental groups for assistance here. Refining how cities would like to engage in this Initiative may also impact the choice of funding, given statutory limitations on how these various revenues may be applied.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Implementation Mechanics</th>
<th>Revenue Generated</th>
<th>Potential Cost for $416,000 AV home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Futures Tax (CFT)</td>
<td>50% voter approval; No minimum voter turnout. Originally authorized at 6.25¢, has eroded to about 4.45¢ today.</td>
<td>Lift to 6.25¢ creates $340M new funding over 30 yrs.</td>
<td>Increase of $7.50 per year (from $18.50 per year to $26 per year) on a $416K home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>With 2nd lid lift to restore to 6.25¢ 15 years out, add $290M more to total $630M.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REET 3</td>
<td>50% voter approval; no minimum voter turnout. Can be authorized at rate up to 1%. Tax on property buyer.</td>
<td>A 0.10% tax (1/10th of maximum) would generate $1.88 over 30 years.</td>
<td>At 0.10%, buyer pays $416 on a $416K transaction; $10,000 on $10M transaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A 0.021% tax generates $386M over 30 years.</td>
<td>At 0.021%, buyer pays $87 on $416K transaction; $2,100 on $10M transaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Property Tax Lid Lift         | 50% voter approval; no minimum voter turnout. This is the County Parks Levy mechanism (levy expires 2019; authorized in 2014 at rate of 18.77¢ per $1,000 of assessed value.) Structure can vary as to years imposed, rate imposed. A King County property tax levy lid lift could reduce the taxing capacity of junior taxing districts such as parks districts. | Options here could include:  
- A shorter term, higher tax rate levy.  
  - More money available for acceleration.  
  - Higher rate costs property owners more per year, for a shorter duration  
  - Levies of up to 6 years can include inflation adjustor (exempting receipts from 1%/year growth limit)  
- A longer-term, lower tax rate levy.  
  - Cannot bond against a levy longer than 9 years – limits money available to accelerate purchases  
  - Lower rate costs property owners less in any single year. | In 2016, a Countywide 1¢ property tax levy generates $4.3M, and costs $4.16 per year for a median homeowner (home value of $416,000).  
The following scenarios raise $385 million in 6 or 9 years:  
A 12.5¢, 6-year levy costing $52 a year on a $416K home.  
An 8¢, 9-year levy costing $33 a year on a $416K home. |
| General Obligation Bonds      | 60% voter approval Validation requirement                                                | Assuming 20-year bonds, $385M could be raised at annual avg. homeowner cost of about $22 (2016) | A 15-year bond at 2.8% costs $27 a year on a $416K home.  
A 20-year bond at 3.0% costs $22 a year on a $416K home. |

Source: King County.
III. BUILDING THE OVERALL PACKAGE

One of the points that arose early in our dialogue was that accomplishing a regional environmental vision is complex. We seek to protect a priceless environmental heritage that is overlain by dozens of jurisdictions that are home to nearly two million people. We want to do this in a way that will continue to grow jobs and opportunity for residents, maintain livable and affordable neighborhoods and diverse communities, while promoting equity and social justice. We believe we must embrace this complexity in order to succeed.

This means we must be cognizant of the many competing considerations inherent in the Initiative. We summarize below the key components of the overall package we believe can be successful.

A. The Proposed Scope and Urban Green Space

We support conserving the five categories of land identified by the County. The County priority lands inventory has been thoughtfully and comprehensively developed. However, it is important that the preservation of high conservation value lands in both unincorporated and incorporated areas be accomplished through this Initiative. Urban area high conservation value lands must be identified. And, we are convinced that it is appropriate to add a more flexible category of “urban green space” to the initiative to address the variety of city open space priorities. The scope of this urban green space category should be consistent with the open and green space preservation goals of the overall Initiative, but should ultimately be refined and determined through working with cities over the next several months.

B. Overall Funding Requirements and City Priorities

As noted, the Initiative must include identification and preservation of high value conservation lands within cities. However, these lands have yet to be identified, and work is also only beginning towards defining “urban green space” priorities. Urban lands tend to be more expensive than rural lands. So the price tag for the Initiative cannot be reasonably developed without more work with cities.

That said, given the urgency of acting to preserve lands, we cannot wait years for cities to accomplish a detailed inventory of high priority conservation lands. The challenge in the next six months will be for the cities to develop a list of known high priority lands to protect, and to work with the County to identify a principled basis by which to size an additional revenue stream over time for as-yet unidentified in-city purchases and “urban green space” priorities.
C. Acceleration Strategies

Another implication of the urgency here is that there must be an acceleration strategy for funding. It is critically important to front-load some funding to protect as many lands as possible before they are developed and lost forever. The most likely tactics here would be bonding of certain public funding sources or possibly the use of private market strategies (advance funding for purchase, to be repaid over time by public funds).

At the same time, however, all identified parcels will not necessarily be available in the next few years—and not all parcels will be identified, particularly within cities. Therefore, there must also be a revenue stream to acquire or otherwise preserve land as it is identified or becomes available over time.

D. Public and Private Funding

A variety of regional public funding sources are already in place to support a significant portion of the Initiative. Just how large that portion is depends upon the size of the cities’ priority lands component—and what city funds are applied to support those acquisitions. In any event, however, there is a sizeable funding gap to achieve the vision.

We believe that the region must approve both new public funding of some sort, as well as support efforts to secure private funding to fill the gap. Given national data on environmental philanthropy, and the relatively nascent state of privately funded environmental markets, we agree that new public funding is much more important for “filling the gap” than private funding. Private funding should be further explored, but seems more likely to us at this point to assist with acceleration strategies.

Of the public funding options identified by the County, we are most interested in restoring the existing Conservation Futures Tax Levy as a funding source. However, a final decision should be made only after additional work is done to identify city lands in coordination with cities and communities, including the scope of the urban green space category, and also after a strategy to address the County Parks Levy is developed.

E. Interplay with Parks Levy

Continued operation of the County Parks System is dependent on periodic renewal of a regional property tax levy. This levy, which also allocates millions of dollars each year to city park systems, expires in 2019. We must be mindful not to focus on winning the battle at risk of losing the war: implementing the Initiative cannot undercut the ability to preserve County parks system funding. The timing of the two measures – the Initiative funding source potentially on the ballot in 2018, with the Parks Levy following the next year— needs to be carefully considered and coordinated. We think it is possible that a complementary strategy
can be developed between the two efforts. The County should explore whether city funding issues related to the Initiative can be integrated to advantage with the Parks Levy renewal. City representatives on the Advisory Group note the importance of adequate maintenance and operations funding for local systems, as well as urban green spaces – these might not be fully funded by some of the public funding options we considered for the Initiative. This creates an opportunity for the Parks Levy to be scoped in support of the Initiative.

**F. Equity Considerations**

It is important to incorporate equity and social justice considerations into the Initiative. More work with historically underserved and disadvantaged communities needs to be done in the next several months to determine how to fully incorporate a social equity perspective to the selection of lands to be preserved, and also how the “urban green space” category should be defined.

**G. Metrics**

Metrics for the success of this Initiative should be developed. The County and cities need to be able to tell the public what they will achieve with any new funding. A review of proposed metrics could be a part of the Phase 2 work of the Advisory Group.

**IV. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

The Executive has laid out a bold vision in the Initiative, and we endorse that vision. By “finishing the job” of preserving the last best places in King County, we will further invest in our growth management vision of ensuring vibrant communities and a sustainable economy while our population continues to grow—and ensure a healthy ecosystem and access to beautiful green spaces for all residents for generations to come.

This report offers the County Executive and County Council our recommendations and refinements with respect to the Initiative and supporting work plan. We believe that it is necessary to take time to pursue several paths of inquiry before finalizing the action plan for the Initiative. We therefore respectfully ask to be reconvened in early fall of 2017. As outlined in this report, issues that we believe must to be addressed in a “Phase 2” effort include:

- **City engagement** to identify city land conservation priorities, expand upon the definition of the urban green space category we propose, explore funding options.
- **Community engagement**, particularly around equity and social justice issues, to ensure that benefits of the initiative can be broadly realized and we can further take the opportunity to address open space deficiencies in underserved communities.
• **Equity mapping analysis** to support equity and social justice goals—identify how and where we can address limited green space in underserved communities through the Initiative.

• **Explore private funding opportunities** and test expectations for how private funding can support the Initiative.

• **Planning for next Parks Levy cycle** to develop a preferred strategy that can ensure the County parks system stays open and explore ways in which the levy renewal may be integrated with the Initiative.

• **Update cost modeling incorporating city priorities** so that we can most accurately size the funding gap, including consideration of revised scope and the need for some degree of funding acceleration.

• **Model potential funding packages** considering the full projected cost over time.

• **Develop targets and metrics of success** to ensure accountability to the voters and confirm the goals to be accomplished.

The tasks identified above involve a substantial amount of work. Given the urgency of the mission, we urge the support of the County and cities to pursue these tasks collaboratively over the next several months. We ask to be reconvened in the third quarter of 2017 to review the items identified in the Phase 2 work plan, with the goal of providing the Executive our final recommendations before the end of 2017.

In closing, we thank the Executive for convening us, and for the outstanding work of the County staff in support of our efforts. We are inspired by the vision that Executive Constantine has set forth and by the Council’s policy support for this effort. We look forward to hearing their feedback on this Report, and to later reconvening in 2017 to finish our part in this effort to “finish the job.” By preserving the remaining wild areas and green spaces in our rural and urban areas, ensuring urban green spaces in every community, and expanding upon our region’s commitment to preserving working farms and forests, we can ensure King County remains one of the best places in to live and work for generations to come.
Exhibit A:

King County Land Conservation Advisory Group Members

Larry Phillips – Co-Chair, former King County Councilmember
De'Sean Quinn – Co-Chair, Tukwila Councilmember and Forterra Board Member
Jesús Aguirre/Christopher Williams, Seattle Parks and Recreation Department
Lyianna Allala, Seattle Parks District Oversight Committee, Environmental Leadership Program
Marc Berejka, REI
Michael Brown, Futurewise Board of Directors
Tom Dean, Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust
Tamara "TJ" DiCaprio, Microsoft
Patti Dill, Laird Norton Wealth Management
Gene Duvernoy/Leda Chahim, Forterra
Jon Hoekstra, Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust
Jeremy James, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
Greg Johnson, Wright Runstad & Company
Martha Kongsgaard, Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council
Leann Krainick, King County Agriculture Commission
Paul Kundtz, Trust for Public Land
Terry Lavender, Conservation Futures Citizens Oversight Committee
Hank Margeson, Redmond City Council
James McNeal, Bothell City Council
Louise Miller, former State Representative and King County Councilmember
Michael Orbino, John L. Scott Real Estate
Alanna Peterson, Washington Trails Association, Pacifica Law Group LLP
Steve Shestag, The Boeing Company
Vandana Slatter, Bellevue City Council
Mike Stevens/Mo McBroom, The Nature Conservancy
Nate Veranth, King County Rural Forest Commission
Steve Whitney, Bullitt Foundation
King County Executive Dow Constantine is considering a new land conservation effort to protect the remaining high conservation value lands in King County within a generation. Executive Constantine submitted a Land Conservation & Preservation Work Plan to King County Council in March 2016. An advisory group has been convened to review the work plan. King County is meeting with cities to integrate city priorities, in order to complete the vision for conservation across the entire county.

King County’s landscape is spectacular – from Puget Sound, through a thriving metropolis and quiet rural communities, abundant farms and working forests, to the Cascade Mountains. Our landscape gives King County a competitive economic advantage in the global marketplace. People want to live here and businesses want to be here, in part because of the natural beauty and accessible open space. As one of the fastest growing large counties in the U.S., King County’s population of 2 million people is expected to increase by 25 percent by 2040.

Residents in our region have made significant investments in open space and trails, but there is more work to do to finish the job of conservation and keep our environment, communities, and economy healthy. For King County to thrive we need to keep our natural lands and river corridors intact, maintain viable working resource lands, and preserve great places for people to explore, relax and stay connected to the natural world. We must act quickly to protect our most-important remaining conservation lands before prices escalate and we lose opportunities to development.

Land Conservation & Preservation Work Plan

The Land Conservation & Preservation Work Plan includes an initial analysis of conservation opportunities, available revenues, and new funding possibilities. The work plan focused on five main conservation categories:

- **Natural Areas** (land acquired in fee or easement that preserves natural ecosystems for fish & wildlife habitat, provides nature-based/passive recreation, completes corridors of public land ownership, buffers natural and developed landscapes)
- **Forests** (land often acquired in easement that supports working forests, holds the line against sprawl, supports wildlife habitat, protects water quality, helps respond to a changing climate)
- **Farmland** (land acquired in easement which preserves local food production, farm economies and affordability, in Agricultural Production District or rural areas)
- **River Corridors** (land acquired along rivers in rural and urban areas to help protect communities from floods and repetitive losses, which also support natural watershed functions)
• **Regional Trails** (completing existing and planned corridors for shared-use, non-motorized trails, providing mobility and recreation opportunities, spanning urban and rural King County)

**Next Steps**

Moving forward, near-term actions identified in the plan include:

• Refine the analysis of lands the County seeks to protect.
• Identify existing and new revenue streams to support conservation acquisitions.
• Look for opportunities to forge public and private partnerships.
• Collaborate with cities in King County to identify their priorities for conserving land.
• Provide opportunities for public engagement and input.
• Convene an Advisory Group to provide input on the County’s overall land conservation goal; input and recommendations on financial strategies; and approaches and timing considerations for achieving the goal. The Advisory Group will issue a report to the Executive in early 2017.

Initial analysis focused on conservation priorities that King County would lead, and revenues available to King County. Approximately 66,000 acres of land has been identified by King County for conservation, primarily in the rural area of King County.

The work plan recognizes that it is vital for the county and cities to work together to identify city priorities, in order to identify regionally important conservation lands across King County. The county is actively meeting with cities to determine how to integrate city conservation priorities into the picture of conservation across King County. Urban land is important to help meet not only regional conservation goals, but also to help support health and equity among all residents of the county.

**Filling the Funding Gap**

The total cost to conserve the current scope of lands (66,000 acres) is on the order of $1.5-$1.8 billion. Approximately $1.27 billion in existing revenues is estimated to be available to King County to fund these acquisitions over the next 30 years. The estimated funding gap identified at this point in time is on the order of $300-500 million. As city lands are added, costs to protect these lands will rise, but available revenues will also rise as revenues available to cities are taken into account.

Potential funding sources were identified in the work plan that could generate additional funds for land conservation. Most of these would require a countywide vote to authorize:

• a county bond
• property tax levy lid lift
• increase in the conservation futures tax to the fully authorized amount
• REET (Real Estate Excise Tax) 3

Other options the Executive has proposed are expanding philanthropy and new ecosystem markets to secure private funding for land conservation.

Exhibit C  High Level Map showing location of County Priority Lands (note: map may be updated for final Report)