



King County

Ron Sims
King County Executive

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

May 14, 2008

Dear Friend,

As you know, King County's natural beauty and the accessibility of its open spaces are a significant part of its appeal for residents and visitors. These lands are facing increasing development pressure as the county's population and prosperity grows.

The King County Charter Review Commission has responded to this situation by proposing the Open Space Amendment (OSA). The OSA would amend the county's constitution to provide **additional protection for over 100,000 acres of irreplaceable natural land** owned by the county.

About the OSA – This amendment would create a list of the county's finest conservation properties as an appendix to the Charter. The OSA would permanently **protect these properties from sale, transfer, or conversion** to a different use than when they were acquired. To provide a powerful firewall against shortsighted land use decisions, **a majority vote of the people** would be required to remove the properties from Charter protection.

The lands protected by the OSA would remain natural, open spaces unless an exception - such as a utility project - must be made for the public good. There would be no change in how residents currently use these spaces.

Next steps – The County Council is reviewing the Commission's proposed charter amendments, including the OSA, and will decide by September which of the amendments will go to a public vote. Now we need your help. Your support will help demonstrate to the Council how important this strong protection is to the many county residents who care about open space!

To express your support for the OSA, please email charter.review@kingcounty.gov.

Please also consider attending a Council-sponsored town hall on the Charter amendments on Monday, June 16 at 6:30pm, at the Federal Way Community Center.

For more information, please contact Commissioner Terry Lavender at tlavender@att.net, or Charter staff Corrie Watterson Bryant at corrie.watterson@kingcounty.gov or (206) 296-4950.

Sincerely,

Gov. Mike Lowry and Lois North, Charter Review Commission co-chairs
Terry Lavender and John Jensen, Commission Rural/Local Subcommittee co-chairs

About the Open Space Amendment

No new land would be required to be purchased under this amendment, and no direct costs are associated with the OSA. King County already owns the OSA-protected land, or the development rights to the land.

The specific properties protected by the Amendment were chosen for their high value in safeguarding the county's drinking water, habitat, recreation opportunities, and rural economy:

Clean drinking water – protects the water quality of rivers, lakes, streams, and aquifers that county residents rely upon for their drinking water.

High-quality habitat – provides some of the best habitat in the county for native vegetation and wildlife, including salmon, which are threatened by urbanization.

Recreation – provides open spaces for recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing.

Rural economy – commercial timber production maintains a vibrant rural economy, as well as large open spaces important for recreation, wildlife habitat, and water quality. Working forestlands make up more than 97,000 acres of the total 108,000 acres protected by the OSA.

See <http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/charter/issues/openspace> for a list and maps of the properties proposed for Charter protection. More properties could be added to this list in the future by a majority vote of the people.

A few of the over 100 open space properties that the OSA would protect include Black Diamond Natural Area, Cougar Mountain Regional Park, Fall City Park West, Green River Natural Area, Maury Island Marine Park, Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Area, Moss Lake Natural Area, Snoqualmie Forest, Upper Raging River Forest, and Tiger Mountain/Squawk Mountain Corridor.

About the King County Charter Review Commission

As the constitution for King County, the Charter provides the foundation for county government. The Washington State Constitution authorizes counties to create their own "home rule" charters. Charter counties have broad authority to address local governance issues.

The King County Charter calls for the Executive to appoint a citizen commission to review the Charter every 10 years. In January 2007, Executive Ron Sims appointed 21 members to the county's fifth Charter Review Commission under the leadership of co-chairs former Washington Governor Mike Lowry and former King County Councilmember Lois North. After over a year of public outreach, research, and deliberation, the Commission has released twelve proposed amendments to the Charter.

The County Council will now review the amendments and decide which of the amendments will go to the ballot for a public vote. Amendments will appear on the ballot as soon as November 2008. The amendments can be reviewed on the Commission's website at:
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/charter>.

Open Space Amendment Charter Language – New Section 897

The clerk of the council shall maintain the list of inventoried high conservation value properties set forth as Appendix A to this charter. The inventory may include only properties in which the county owns a fee simple interest or a lesser interest. No inventoried county property interest shall ever be conveyed, relinquished, or converted to a different use than was authorized at the time of acquisition, as evidenced by deed, easement, covenant, contract or funding source requirements, except that this section shall not prevent: the conveyance of an inventoried property interest to another government, the conveyance of an inventoried property interest under the lawful threat or exercise of eminent domain; the grant of an easement, license, franchise or use agreement for utilities or other activities compatible with use restrictions in place at the time of acquisition; or the use of an inventoried property interest for habitat restoration, flood control, low-impact public amenities or regionally significant public facilities developed for purposes related to the conservation values of the property, road or utility projects, or emergency projects necessary to protect public health, welfare or safety. This section shall not affect any contractual obligations entered into as part of the county's acquisition of an inventoried property interest.

For more information about the Charter Review Commission or the Open Space Amendment, see our website at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/charter/issues/openspace> or contact Charter Review Project Manager Corrie Watterson Bryant at corrie.watterson@kingcounty.gov or (206) 296-4950.