



King County

John Wilson
King County Assessor

News Release

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Wilson Launches Taxpayer Transparency Tool for November Election. Website Details Cost of Proposed Ballot Measures By Household

King County Assessor John Wilson today launched his November 2018 **Taxpayer Transparency Tool**, a website which provides each King County taxpayer an individualized accounting of where their property tax dollars go, and the estimated cost of any proposed property tax measure to be voted on.

The new tool can be found at <http://localscape.spatalest.com/#kingcountyassessor/Tax>. There is a link to the tool on left side menu of the Assessor's web page <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/assessor.aspx>

"Taxpayers have a right to know where their money is going, and what each proposed property tax levy will cost them," said Wilson. "Property taxes keep going up. We need to make sure the public understands why."

"The Assessor's new transparency tool will make it easier than ever for the people of King County to know how their property taxes are being invested and what portion is supporting local, regional, or state-wide infrastructure and services." King County Executive Dow Constantine.

The tool was tested on a ballot measure in April during the special election and was widely available for the ballot measures appearing in the August primary. All county residents will be able to see how the various property tax measures on the ballot this November, including Seattle's proposed renewal of the Families and Education Levy, will affect their tax bill. In addition to Seattle, property tax measures are also on the ballot and in the Tax Transparency Tool in the following areas:

- Mercer Island
- Bothell
- Fire District 45 (Duvall area)
- Si View Metropolitan Park District (North Bend area)

The Transparency Tool only shows the impact of property tax measures. Other ballot measures, including sales tax measures or benefit charges, are not included.

Wilson said there were several factors that led him to create this new tool:

- The property tax system in Washington State is complicated. This new tool allows voters to make informed decisions about ballot measures, and helps illustrate how our tax system works.
- News stories or other information about ballot measures typically use a median-value or average property as the example for the cost of the proposal. "The problem is most people don't live in a median-value property, so those estimates just don't seem as relevant," Wilson said.
- The Assessor's Office receives a number of inquiries via phone and email in the lead up to voting on property tax measures by residents wanting to know how much these measures will cost them. This tool will be an efficient and effective way to answer these questions, as residents can find the answer on-line whenever it is convenient for them – not just during normal business hours.

King County taxpayers have seen significant increases in their taxes this year. There are two primary reasons for this increase:

1. In recent years, voters have approved ballot measures that will fund vital services through property tax levies.
2. Last year state lawmakers voted to dramatically raise the state share of the property tax in order generate more school funding to satisfy the Supreme Court order in the McCleary case. In 2019, local school levies will be reduced, offsetting part of that increase. But in 2018, taxpayers will pay both their current school levy, **and** the new, increased state property tax. That led to a big spike in the property tax bill in 2018.

“We are working on policy proposals to relieve some of the property tax burden on homeowners, especially those on fixed incomes. In the meantime, the least we can do is give taxpayers more information about our complicated property tax system,” said Wilson.

The Tax Transparency Tool was developed for the King County Assessor by Spatialest Inc, a unique enterprise software company focusing on Location, Value and Technology. The company also created “Localscape” for the King County Assessor in 2014, a map-based visualization tool that aggregates data to present information.

(<http://localscape.spatialest.com/#kingcountyassessor/>).

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