



King County

John Wilson
King County Assessor

News Release

July 18 , 2018

Wilson Launches Taxpayer Transparency Tool. New Website Details Cost of Proposed Ballot Measures By Household

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King County Assessor John Wilson today launched his new **Taxpayer Transparency Tool**, a website which provides each King County resident an individualized accounting of where their property tax dollars go, and the estimated cost of any proposed property tax levy 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>

The tool was tested on a ballot measure in April during the special election and will be widely available for the ballot measures appearing in the August primary, including the proposed renewal levy for the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). All county residents will be able to see how this AFIS renewal levy will affect their tax bill, while residents in the South King County Fire and Rescue District (Federal Way area) can also see how the proposed levy lid lift will impact them.

"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."

"A healthy democracy requires a well-informed public," said King County Executive Dow Constantine. "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."

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-valued or average property as the example for the cost of the proposal. "The problem is most people don't live in a median-valued property, so those estimates just don't seem 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 relive some of the property tax burden on homeowners, especially those on fixed income. 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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