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Property taxes jump 12.9% in Kent for 2022

5th highest hike in King County; voter approved school measures lead to much of increase.

By STEVE HUNTER
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Property taxes in Kent jumped 12.96% this year compared to 2021, the fifth highest increase among King County cities.

Tukwila has the highest property tax increase over last year at 15.14 percent followed by Covington at 14.55%, Sammamish at 13.69% and Black Diamond at 13.11%, according to King County Assessor John Wilson. Renton's increase is just behind Kent at 12.55%.

"Residential property values have continued to rise during the COVID-19 pandemic, partly driven by a lack of housing

inventory," said Wilson in a Feb. 22 news release. "Still, it is important to remember that voter approved levies, and not the value of your property, is the primary cause of increased property taxes.

"Local governments may only increase property tax collections by 1% per year without a vote of the people. Voter approved levies are not subject to that restriction."

The median value of a Kent home is \$467,000 in 2022 for

a property tax bill of \$5,292 compared to a median value of \$395,000 in 2021 and a tax bill of \$4,685. The levy rate is \$11.33 per \$1,000 assessed value this year compared to \$11.86 in 2021. The median value means half of the homes are higher than that price and half are lower.

Most of the property taxes in Kent go to schools with about 32% to local school measures and 26% to the state school levy.

About 11% goes to the city, 10% to the county and 8% to fire. The remaining 13% includes hospital, library, Medic One/emergency medical services, county flood district, Port of Seattle and Sound Transit.

School property tax measures that Kent voters approved — and the ones that impact 2021 and 2022 taxes — include the 2020

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Unity for Ukraine rally in Kent calls for Putin to end war

By STEVE HUNTER
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"Putin stop!"

That was the chant the Rev. Roman Melnik asked several dozen people gathered outside Kent City Hall to say in support of the people of Ukraine during a candlelight vigil Tuesday evening.

Melnik, pastor of Bread of Life Church in Kent, said that he understands the main message for pastors is to point people toward Jesus Christ. But he said it's also a pastor's responsibility to point out the sins of politicians when they do something wrong.

"We want to call out one politician who is doing something very, very terrible," Melnik said about Russian President Vladimir Putin, who sent troops Feb. 24 into neighboring Ukraine in an effort to overtake the country. "He is the aggressor who is killing innocent people. We are not trying to be political, but we are pointing out a sinful action when the president of Russia is attacking innocent people. We are calling on him to stop and recall his army to return home."

The crowd, which included a few people carrying Ukrainian flags and others dressed in the blue and yellow colors of the flag, echoed his cry.

Kent Mayor Dana Ralph worked with Ukrainian community leaders to organize the March 1 Unity for Ukraine vigil in support of the country in its war against Russia. She said more than 4,000 Ukrainian Americans live in Kent.

"It's important to recognize that we understand the tragedy and terrifying acts of war happening as we speak and that we stand as a city in support and unity with our friends and neighbors," Ralph said at the Kent City Council meeting that followed the vigil. "The city of Kent stands with the Ukrainian community and I encourage all residents of the city of Kent to join me in solidarity with the Ukrainian community



STEVE HUNTER, KENT REPORTER

A man carries an Ukrainian flag at a rally Tuesday, March 1 outside Kent City Hall.

here in Kent and abroad."

Melnik was born in the Ukraine and moved to the Kent area with his family when he was 10 years old. He lives in Auburn and has been a pastor at Bread of Life Church for about 20 years. The

church, 23435 104th Ave. SE, began in Kent 25 years ago.

Melnik told the crowd the whole world is telling Putin to stop, but that unfortunately he is not listening.

"But there are people listening

and you are listening to the cry of the Ukrainian people and you are here to support them," Melnik said. "And we are so thankful for that, to support them morally and in your prayers and financially. I ask you to pray with me to stop

the war in Ukraine and protect the people as the war goes on."

Melnik said during an interview after the vigil that he has a sister who still lives in Ukraine

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Kent assistant police chief remains on paid administrative leave

By STEVE HUNTER
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Kent Police Assistant Chief Derek Kammerzell remains on paid administrative leave two months after Mayor Dana Ralph requested his resignation from the police union after public outcry over Kammerzell posting a Nazi insignia on his office door.

Negotiations among city officials, Kammerzell and the Kent Police Officers Association (union) have entered their third month.

"The city is working to negotiate a resolution of this matter and at present, I do not have a time



Derek Kammerzell

frame of when the process will conclude," City Attorney Pat Fitzpatrick said in a Feb. 24 email to the Kent Reporter. "The city will

advise you when we have something to report."

Fitzpatrick declined to answer numerous questions from the Kent Reporter about the negotiation process and why it's taking so long to reach a resolution. Fitzpatrick said in January article in the Kent Reporter that it would be a "lengthy process," but declined to specify what that meant.

Meanwhile, the city's Civil Service Commission, as part of its Feb. 23 agenda packet, received a memo from Police Chief Rafael Padilla about a temporary promotion to fill Kammerzell's role as an assistant chief.

"Cmdr. Philip Johnson will

be assigned provisional assistant chief for investigations, for a period of no more than four months beginning Jan. 16, 2022, while Assistant Chief Kammerzell is on administrative leave," Padilla wrote in the brief memo.

Mayor Ralph on Jan. 4 asked the Kent Police Officers Association for Kammerzell's resignation. Padilla suspended Kammerzell for two weeks in July 2021 after he posted a Nazi insignia on his office door in September 2020, as reported by a co-worker, which led to an investigation by an outside law firm hired by the city.

The incident and suspension

didn't become public until December 2021 when No Secret Police, a citizens watchdog group, received Padilla's disciplinary report against Kammerzell from a Public Records Act request and sent the documents to media outlets.

After public outcry that Kammerzell, a 27-year veteran of the force, still worked for the police department, Ralph asked for his resignation, and Padilla said Kammerzell would never work for the department again. City and police officials did not release any information

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Taxes

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educational program and operations levy, the 2018 technology and capital levy, and the 2016 bond measure, which included funding for a new Covington Elementary School and the new River Ridge Elementary School, according to the Kent School District.

In Kent's neighboring cities, property tax bills for 2022 increased 11% in Federal Way, 10.76% in SeaTac, 8.96% in Des Moines, 8.36% in Maple Valley and 7.81% in Auburn. King County Treasury



A bond measure approved by Kent School District voters in 2016 paid for the construction of the new River Ridge Elementary that opened in 2021. That measure boosted property taxes that Kent residents are paying over a 10-year period.

COURTESY PHOTO, KENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

has begun sending out tax bills. King County collects property taxes on behalf of the state, the county, cities and taxing districts (such as school and fire districts) and distributes the revenue to these local governments.

By state law, values are set as of Jan. 1 each year. Taxes collected this year are based on the value of the property on Jan. 1, 2021.

Kent had just a 3.15% hike in 2021 compared to 2020, according to the King County Assessor.

While property tax increases jumped in Kent and other cities, most hikes were modest in King County for the 2022 tax year — about 3% — despite the fact that property values

rose by about 9%. Wilson said this is because voter approved levies, and not rising property values, are the main drivers of property tax increases.

Overall, countywide property tax collections for the 2022 tax year are \$6.79 billion, an increase of \$190 million over last year's total of \$6.6 billion. Total county property values, however, increased from \$659.5 billion to \$722.5 billion.

Property taxes vary depending upon location, the assessed value of the property, and the number of jurisdictions levying taxes (such as state, city, county, school district, port, fire district, etc.).

For seniors and the

disabled, Wilson said it is important to be aware of Washington state's property tax relief programs. King County taxpayers who are 61 years or older, or disabled, own their home, and have an annual income of \$58,423 or less after certain medical or long-term care expenses, may be eligible for tax relief.

Taxpayers should go to the website kingcounty.gov/depts/assessor/TaxRelief.aspx for more information and to apply online.

Property owners can find tax levy rates and more property related information by visiting the eReal Property Search on the King County Assessor's website or by calling 206-296-7300.

Rally

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and he's been in touch with her.

"Thank God they are OK," Melnik said. "She is on the western side close to Poland. They have shot some missiles there, but they are safe for now."

King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn, whose District 9 includes part of Kent, said during the vigil that people have stepped up to support Ukraine.

"It's rare in the United States when we stop our

petty partisan bickering and in-fighting and unite around one cause," Dunn said. "That cause is standing in solidarity with the people of Ukraine."

Dunn said the King County Council unanimously passed a resolution Tuesday to support the people of Ukraine and introduced legislation to send food and medical supplies to Poland to help Ukraine.

Melnik said Russia's invasion of Ukraine hit him deeply despite living most of his life in America.

"It made me think a whole lot about Ukraine," he said during an

interview. "I thought I was Americanized until this happened. I realized I am still very much attached to the country of Ukraine."

That's true of his congregation as well.

"Like many people, they are worried and praying," he said. "There is not an Ukrainian here who does not have somebody back home. We are all praying and hoping for the best."

Melnik looks forward to the war ending, if certain things happen.

"I think every day the Ukrainian army can resist and the people of Russia will become his (Putin's) enemies and step up to his

dictatorship," Melnik said. "I'm confident the majority of Russian citizens do not support his war. They just don't have a choice."

"I hope it's going to end soon and I think it will because Putin is getting more and more enemies around the world and in his country."

The pastor said support such as the candlelight vigil in Kent helps.

"It was amazing," he said. "It was nice to see so many Ukrainian people and non-Ukrainian people, it means a lot. I think people in the Ukraine knowing this is happening will be a big support for them."



A woman wears the colors of the Ukrainian flag at the Kent City Hall courtyard on Tuesday, March 1 as part of an Unity for Ukraine rally.

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Police

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when Padilla suspended Kammerzell in July 2021, despite his high ranking as one of three assistant chiefs.

After an investigation by an outside law firm into Kammerzell's actions, Padilla suspended Kammerzell two weeks for violating city policy prohibiting harassment and discrimination and for unbecoming conduct in violation of police policy,

according to city documents. He was suspended without pay, but given the option to use two weeks of vacation pay.

Wayne Graff, president of the Kent Police Officers Association, did not respond to a Kent Reporter email last week for an update about negotiations among the city, union and Kammerzell. Graff has not replied to numerous emails for comment since Ralph asked for Kammerzell's resignation. Graff set up an interview with Kammerzell and the Kent Reporter after news of the suspension first

broke.

In addition to media coverage locally, nationally and internationally in January about the Kammerzell incident, the Kent assistant chief became part of the motivation across the state for stronger actions against police officers.

State Sen. Jesse Salomon, D-Shoreline, introduced Senate Bill 5677 in Olympia that would restrict avenues used by police who have been disciplined by their superiors to overturn or reduce those disciplinary actions and gain reinstatement despite serious misconduct.

A Washington state Senate Democrats news release Jan. 17 about the proposed bill called the incident a glaring example of the existing gap in accountability that has been playing out for more than a year in Kent, where the city has been unable to resolve the case of an

assistant police chief accused of multiple acts of on-duty displays of pro-Nazi insignia.

Salomon said his bill would improve accountability in the Kammerzell case and in similar situations by mandating consistent practices for complaints, investigations, discipline, and disciplinary appeals for serious misconduct. As of Feb. 28, the bill failed to get out of the Senate's Law & Justice Committee as the Legislature approaches the end of its session March 10.

The Kammerzell incident also was referred to in a letter from a coalition of activists and civil rights groups, led by the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, to the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, according to a Feb. 21 Seattle Times article.

The group wants the commission to apply standards, approved

last year by the Legislature, to be retroactively applied to significant cases of misconduct that occurred before July 25, 2021, including Kammerzell. The measure greatly expanded the grounds for denial, revocation or suspension of an officer's certification, according to the Seattle Times.

Kammerzell is one of three assistant chiefs for the Kent Police, although his assistant chief profile has been removed from the city's website. The other assistant chiefs are Jarod Kasner and Eric Hemmen.

Philip Johnson, who was promoted by Padilla to fill Kammerzell's duties, has served with the Kent Police Department since 2000 and has held assignments in patrol, and as a detective in ProAct, Narcotics, Special Investigations, and Crimes Against Persons, according to the city's website. During that time, he also served as a general instructor at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

providing instruction to entry and lateral officers regarding search warrants.

Kammerzell continues to be paid during his administrative leave. A public records request Feb. 25 to the city of Kent by the Kent Reporter for Kammerzell's annual salary has not yet been released because of a state law adopted by the Legislature in 2020 that requires notification to public employees and their union that their pay is subject to a public disclosure request.

The City Clerk's Office advised the Kent Reporter that the salary will be released to the newspaper by mid-March.

The Legislature changed the rules in 2020 about what personal information can be released about public employees to the public as well as requiring notification to employees. State law still requires pay information to be released, but allows at least 10 days before a public agency can release the figure.

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