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Charter Amendment: Property Tax for Parks and Playgrounds

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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CHARTER AMENDMENT: PROPERTY TAX FOR PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

508 — Yes, I vote for the proposed amendment

✓ 509 — No, I vote against the proposed amendment.

To the Board of Governors of The City Club of Portland:

Your Committee was appointed to report on the proposed amendment of the City Charter to continue for a 10-year period an annual property tax levy of 4/10th of a mill, the funds to be used for the acquisition, improvement and equipment of park, playground and other recreational areas within and adjacent to the City. The levy would be in addition to and outside of the so-called 6% limitation prescribed in Section 11, Article XI, of the Constitution of the State of Oregon.

Previous Levy

In November, 1938, the voters of the City of Portland approved an amendment to the City Charter providing for the levying of a property tax of 4/10ths of a mill each year for 10 years beginning with the fiscal year 1939-40, for substantially similar purposes. In the 10-year period that ended in 1949 this levy, together with operating revenues such as interest on investments and rents of buildings on purchased properties, produced approximately \$1,490,000.00. As of September 15, 1949, disbursements had been made from this fund as follows:

Land Purchases	\$ 925,212.98
Equipment and Improvements	284,740.59
Architects' Fees	20,017.50
Administrative Costs	39,466.00
Total	\$1,269,437.07

The land purchases included 37 areas in various parts of the city, 22 of which, so far as sites are concerned, are completed to the extent necessary, while 15 are incomplete in the sense that the purchase of additional adjoining property is considered necessary or advisable to round out the holding and make it fully usable for park and playground purposes.

Proposed Levy

The proceeds of the proposed levy may be used by the City for the improvement and equipment of any of its recreational areas, and for the acquiring of properties adjacent to but outside the city limits, as well as within the City. Under the previous levy the funds could be used only for the purchase of property within the city limits, and for improving and equipping of the areas so acquired.

It is estimated that the continued levy for the next 10 years would produce approximately \$2,020,000.00. While definite plans have not been made for the allocation of these funds, it is expected that they would be used about as follows: 25% for additional land acquisition; 25% for site development, such as clearing, grading and seeding; and 50% for buildings and equipment, such as wading and swimming pools, rest rooms, playground apparatus, lighted courts and fields, and community buildings.

Scope of Committee's Work

In its study of the proposed Charter amendment your Committee interviewed Mr. Ormond R. Bean, Commissioner of Finance for the City of Portland; Mr. Paul A. Rehms, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. H. B. Buckley, Superintendent of the Bureau of Parks and Public Recreation; Mr. Ivan C. Anderson, Chairman of the Parks Committee of the City Planning Commission; and Mrs. Robert Marshall, Jr., Chairman of the Citizens Committee for Park Development, the latter representing various Parent-Teacher Association groups and other community organizations.

It has sought the opinions of those individuals and organizations who it was thought might oppose the measure, as well as those who obviously would be expected to endorse it.

It has reviewed the land acquisition program carried out by the City authorities during the past 10 years. Most of the land acquired during this period has been inspected by members of your Committee for the purpose of obtaining personal knowledge of the character of the property, and its location with respect to residential areas; but more particularly for first-hand information on improvements and equipment, or lack of these facilities.

Summary of Data Obtained

In 1939 it apparently was thought that the 10-year levy then proposed would be

sufficient to purchase the desired land areas and properly equip them for recreational use. Your Committee has been advised that this has not been possible, because of the substantial increase in property values in the past 10 years, together with the higher cost of development and equipment, and that as a consequence the City finds itself with some land areas only partially purchased, and many where the only development possible with the limited funds has been the clearing and grading of the sites. The latter has been confirmed by the personal inspections carried out by the members of your Committee.

Then, too, there has been the tremendous growth in the City's population during the preceding 10 years, which has increased the need for parks and playgrounds and the proper equipment of these areas. This growth in population is illustrated by the fact that in every year since 1947 there has been an increase of between 1350 and 3700 in the total public school enrollment in the City. The school authorities estimate that in September, 1950, there will be an increase of 1950 pupils in the kindergarten and elementary schools alone.

While it has been the feeling of your Committee that a critical review of the City's park and playground acquisition program over the past 10 years was not within its province, still it seems pertinent to report that its studies and observations lead it to the opinion that the areas have been well chosen with respect to present and future needs.

Consideration has been given to the questions of whether the recreational facilities supplied by the City are in any way duplicating or overlapping similar facilities supplied by the schools, and whether or not there is full coordination of the work of these two public bodies. It was the unanimous opinion of all individuals interviewed that within the past few years there has been a marked improvement in this field, to the extent that presently there is the fullest possible cooperation. Wherever it is possible city playground areas are located next to school grounds, and the City and school authorities collaborate in planning for the equipment of their adjoining properties. Your Committee has also been informed that the school authorities allow the use of school recreational facilities by the public to the fullest extent possible, and that there is in fact extensive use of such facilities after school hours.

The cost of the proposed program to the average home owner will be nominal. If the assessed value of his property is \$2,000.00, which your Committee is informed is about the average of homes in Portland, the additional tax for the park levy would amount to only 80c each year.

It should be remembered that this levy is only for the acquisition, improvement and equipment of recreational areas. Maintenance charges are included in the general levy each year.

No opposition to the measure has been encountered.

Conclusions

1. That well equipped recreational areas and facilities are a necessity in Portland, as they are in all large cities, for the proper development of children and the well rounded living of adults.
2. That the park and playground program in Portland has been soundly though modestly conceived, and is being properly implemented.
3. That the acquisition of some additional land, both within and adjacent to the City, for recreational use is desirable, and that both these properties and those previously acquired should be improved and equipped to the end that they can be fully utilized by children and adults for recreational purposes.
4. That in order to raise funds for the carrying out of such a program it is necessary that the City Charter be amended as proposed so that the 4/10ths of a mill tax levy can be continued for an additional 10 years.

Recommendation

Your Committee therefore unanimously recommends that the City Club approve the adoption of the proposed measure.

MORTON H. CAINE
 DAVID C. FULTON
 ALLAN A. SMITH
 JOHN M. WHITELAW
 RICHARD A. WELCH, *Chairman*

Approved April 21, 1950, by Allan Hart, *Section Chairman*, Legislation and Elections, for transmittal to the Board of Governors.

Received April 24, 1950, by the Board of Governors and ordered published and submitted to the membership for discussion and action.