

City of Newark Open Space Referendum

Tuesday, Nov. 5th

Key Facts about the Newark Open Space Referendum:

On Tuesday, November 5th Newark voters will have the opportunity to decide whether to establish a dedicated source of funding to acquire, develop and maintain land for conservation and recreation, including provide safe, clean and accessible parks, neighborhood playgrounds, community gardens and playing fields for youth sports. If the referendum is approved, the Newark Municipal Council would be authorized to create an Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund through a levy of 1-cent per \$100 of assessed property, which is estimated to generate \$1.1 million annually for these purposes. Every county in New Jersey, including Essex, and over 200 municipalities in New Jersey have already established voter-approved open space trust funds. In Nov. 2012, East Orange voters overwhelmingly approved a measure to create an open space and recreation trust fund in their city.

If a 1-cent levy is approved and established, the cost to the owner of property assessed at \$200,000 would be \$20 annually, less than \$1.70 per month. City property taxes were recently reduced by 13%. Renters would not be subject to the levy. All funds would be dedicated and could only be used for the purposes specified in the ballot language (see below). Full public disclosure and review of all expenditures would be required.

The 2012 City of Newark Master Plan identified the need to make parks more secure, attractive and enjoyable for the public, to improve maintenance and programming at existing parks, and to expand access to quality open space and recreation in neighborhoods underserved by parks. Passage of the Newark Open Space Trust Fund would make more resources available to meet these goals and to leverage state, county and private matching funds. The official ballot language is below.

Municipal Question No. 1 **Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund**

Shall the City of Newark create a "Municipal Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund, to be funded through an annual levy of one cent per \$100.00 of assessed valuation of real property for the purposes of acquiring, developing and maintaining lands for recreation and conservation, including providing safe, clean and accessible parks; repairing and improving existing parks; creating neighborhood playgrounds and playfields for youth sports; and for the payment of any debt service incurred by the City for these purposes, with full public disclosure and review of all expenditures?

INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT

Approving this referendum will authorize the City of Newark to establish a Municipal Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund to acquire, develop and maintain lands for conservation and recreation purposes in order to provide safe, clean and accessible parks, neighborhood playgrounds and playfields for youth sports throughout the City. A yes vote will permit the City to establish a Municipal Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund and authorize an annual levy of one cent per \$100.00 of assessed real property value to fund the purposes above, including debt service on any bonds issued for these purposes. Funds raised by the measure, along with any interest or other income earned on monies deposited into the municipal trust account shall be credited to the fund, and could only be used for these purposes and would be eligible for a greater match through the State Green Acres Program and by other state, county and private sources. Full public disclosure and review of all expenditures would be required.

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Questions and Answers:

Q: Why is this measure needed?

A: As identified in the 2012 City Master Plan, there is a need to make parks in Newark more secure, attractive and enjoyable for the public, to improve maintenance of existing parks and green spaces, and to expand access to open space in neighborhoods underserved by parks. Maintenance needs are especially great, as there are less than 10 maintenance workers for all City parks at present. Only 53% of Newarkers live within a ten minute walk of a park or recreation center. The City Master Plan identified \$75 million in priority improvements needed to City parks. A dedicated source of funding is needed to ensure the necessary long-term investment in parks is made, especially to maintain them.

Q: What will it cost taxpayers and will who pay?

A: If a 1-cent property-tax levy is approved and established, commercial and residential property owners would pay an annual levy equivalent to .01% (or .0001) of assessed property value. For example, the owner of a property assessed at \$200,000 would pay \$20 annually on their property-tax bill, which is less than \$1.70 per month. Property-taxes were recently reduced by 13% from \$3.45 to \$2.98 per \$100 of assessed value, so this levy would just add one penny back for parks. People who rent their home will not directly pay this tax, though their landlords will pay it as part of their overall real estate tax bill. Business owners will only pay this tax if they own property as part of their annual real estate tax bill.

\$100,000 property: \$10 annually	\$150,000 property: \$15 annually	\$200,000 property: \$20 annually
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Q: How will the funds be spent and who will decide?

A: Funds – as dictated by state statute - can only be spent for the purposes identified in the ballot language: acquiring, developing or maintaining city-owned lands for conservation and recreation, including - but not limited to - providing safe, clean and accessible parks; repairing and improving existing parks; and creating neighborhood playgrounds and playfields for youth sports. Exactly how the funds are spent each year from among these eligible uses would be decided by the Newark Municipal Council and the City Administration, with public input. Full public disclosure of all spending would be required.

Q: What happens next if the measure is approved?

A: Municipal Council would be authorized to establish an Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund for the purposes identified. Municipal Council would need to take further action to establish and collect the levy, determine the priorities for funding with public input, and clarify how the funds will be administered