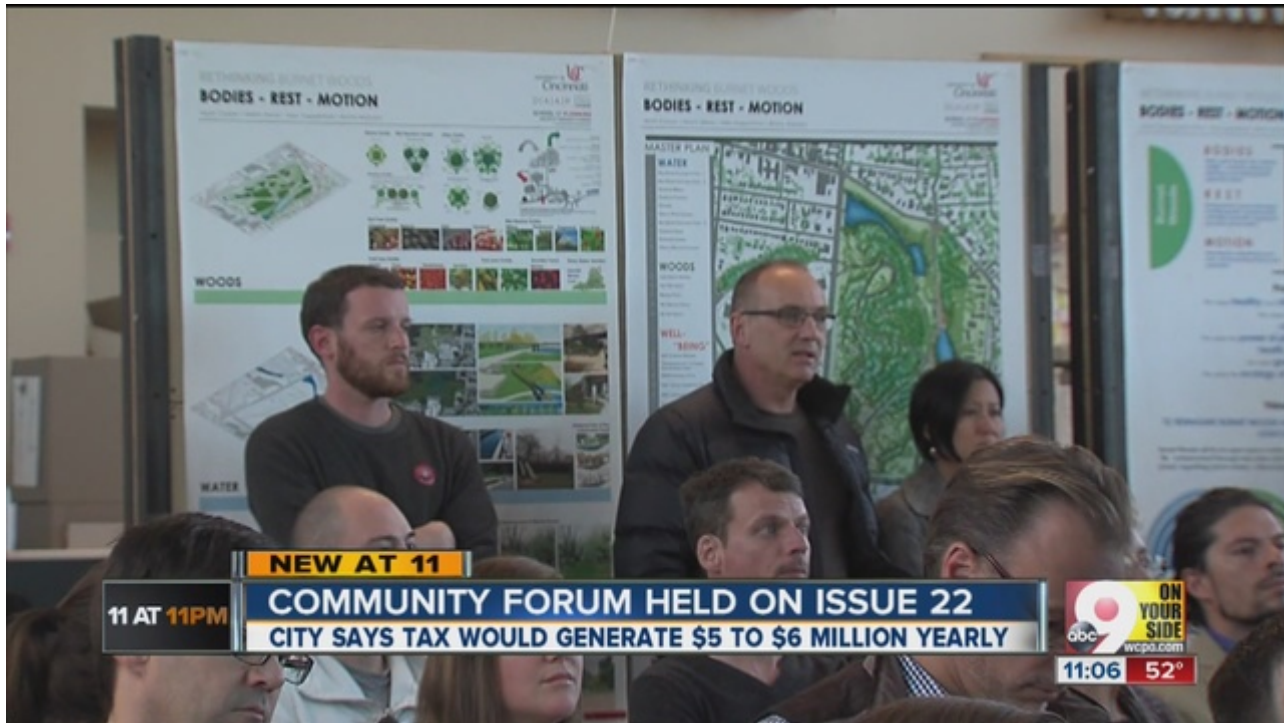


Cincinnati parks levy: Will it 'help neighborhoods' or be 'bad government'?



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CINCINNATI -- One side argued a permanent property tax would unfairly burden city residents for parks used by thousands of suburbanites while also giving Cincinnati's mayor too much power over the city's park system.

The other argued the issue would allow Cincinnati residents to give public input on the future of the city's parks, ensure they're funded for years to come and upgrade neighborhood parks that have been ignored for years.

Mayor John Cranley, the force behind the parks tax that voters will decide Nov. 3, and parks tax opponent Don Mooney debated the issue for the first time in public Tuesday. The tax would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home roughly \$35 a year and is expected to raise at least \$5 million annually for the city's park system.

Cranley represented residents and local leaders who have backed the Citizens for Parks group, while Mooney has led a growing opposition group called Save Our Parks against the tax

Mooney called the proposal "bad government" during the 90-minute debate, saying it will place an unfair burden

on Cincinnati taxpayers and would be hard to undo in the future.

“Let’s face it: we all know folks from the suburbs come to Washington Park, come to Smale (Riverfront) Park,” Mooney said. “Shouldn’t it be a broader tax base?”

Mooney suggested that funding for parks should be increased through the city’s income tax, the money Cincinnati collects from people who work in the city, instead of the property tax, which is collected based on property values.

He accused the proposal supporters of funding a “wish list” of projects through a new tax.

“It’s a collection of, in some places they call it pork barrel, favors for different communities and interest,” Mooney said.

But Cranley said the tax focuses attention on neighborhoods such as Avondale and Roselawn for the first time in years through park projects. Cincinnati residents, he said, often complain that city leaders have invested too much time and money in areas like Over-The-Rhine and Downtown.

“They (the opposition) want to promise things to the neighborhoods, but they don’t want to pay for them,” Cranley said. “I think it’s the neighborhoods’ turn.”

Cranley also rebuffed criticism that the tax would give him too much power, saying that each proposed park project would go through a public input process.

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