

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

What is the Parks Conservancy?

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is the nonprofit partner of the City of Pittsburgh that is working to improve and maintain Pittsburgh's parks.

Parks Listening Tour

What is the Parks Listening Tour?

The Parks Listening Tour is a community outreach initiative from the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh. The Parks Listening Tour (known in short as 'the PLT') consists of two phases of outreach.

Phase One of the PLT (PLT I) lasted from late 2018 through April 2019. The tour consisted of community meetings and events throughout Pittsburgh, where the Conservancy and City gathered feedback on what Pittsburgh residents love about their parks and what they would like to see improved about their parks. You can learn more about PLT I at <https://www.pittsburghparks.org/listening-tour>

The second phase of the PLT (PLT II), named "The Parks Plan," began in July 2019 and is currently still active.

During the Parks Listening Tour II: The Parks Plan, the Parks Conservancy and City are revisiting different locations across the City of Pittsburgh to share a comprehensive equitable parks investment strategy, driven by data and community input collected during the first phase of the tour. This presentation includes facts, figures, and investment maps for equitable investment across the entire parks system.

You can learn more at <https://www.pittsburghparks.org/parksplan>

What is the purpose of the Parks Listening Tour?

The purpose of the Parks Listening Tour is two-fold: 1) to gather community input from residents across a large number of Pittsburgh neighborhoods to better understand what those residents would like to see in their local parks and 2) use that community information and input, along with data, to outline an equitable parks investment strategy that will benefit all city residents to help offset years of underfunding of the parks system.

Who participated in the first phase of the Parks Listening Tour?

More than 10,000 residents from across the City of Pittsburgh participated in the first phase of the Parks Listening Tour. The Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh invited local communities to public meetings, engaged in intercept activities, and held standalone Parks Listening Tour meetings across the City.

Want to attend an upcoming Parks Listening Tour II: The Parks Plan meeting? Visit <https://www.pittsburghparks.org/parksplan> for more information and to register. Childcare, pizza, and refreshments are provided for free at all meetings, though registration is required.

How did you decide where to hold Phase One Parks Listening Tour meetings?

The goal of the Parks Listening Tour was to receive input from City of Pittsburgh residents in as many neighborhoods as possible so that residents from all areas of the City would have an opportunity to voice their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. We worked with neighborhood

associations, schools, businesses and other interested Pittsburgh groups to schedule and meetings in as many neighborhood as possible across the City.

What's the difference between the first and second phases of the Parks Listening Tour?

During the first phase of the Parks Listening Tour, the Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh collected input from city residents throughout more than 70 neighborhoods. Along with this community input, the Parks Conservancy and the City also collected data pertaining to the condition, need, and use of Pittsburgh's 165 parks.

In the second phase of the Parks Listening Tour, known as "The Parks Plan," the Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh are sharing a comprehensive presentation of this community input, the collected data, and how these two factors create an equitable investment strategy. Phase Two of the Listening Tour details the plan for improved park safety, increased fair funding and access, and upgraded maintenance and facilities for all existing city parks.

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Pittsburgh Parks for All FAQ

What is the question that has been added to the November 2019 ballot?

The ballot question regarding Pittsburgh's parks will ask voters if they support the creation of a dedicated Pittsburgh Parks Fund to improve Pittsburgh city parks for children and adults, and future generations. Voting "yes" in November will provide additional resources for all Pittsburgh parks in every neighborhood to ensure all Pittsburghers have access to a high-quality park. The proposed ballot language is:

Shall the Pittsburgh Home Rule Charter be amended to establish a dedicated Parks Trust Fund beginning in 2020 to: improve, maintain, create and operate public parks; improve park safety; equitably fund parks in underserved neighborhoods throughout Pittsburgh; be funded with an additional 0.5 mill levy (\$50 on each \$100,000 of assessed real estate value); secure matching funds and services from a charitable city parks conservancy; and assure citizen participation and full public disclosure of spending?

What if my house is assessed at less than \$100,000?

The tax is based on the assessed value of your home. Note that assessed values are often much lower than the value at which you bought your home. If your house is assessed at \$50,000, you would pay only half of the proposed tax, meaning you would pay around \$25 per year (equivalent to \$2.08 per month). Only property owners (homeowners and commercial properties) would pay this tax, as it does not apply to renters. Additionally, property owners may be exempt or pay reduced taxes through military veteran status or the Taxpayer Relief Act.

Why were paid circulators hired to collect petition signatures?

Petition signatures were collected by both volunteer and paid circulators.

The Parks Conservancy was legally required to collect 12,467 signatures of City voters in a seven-week timeframe. To put the large number of signatures in perspective, to run for Mayor of Pittsburgh an individual needs to collect less than 500 signatures. It's difficult to collect so many signatures in a condensed timeframe.

Some individuals from the Parks Conservancy staff voluntarily collected signatures. A large number of park-supporting volunteers joined Parks Conservancy staff collecting signatures. In order to give the Conservancy the best chance to collect enough signatures to be placed on the

November ballot, we hired a group of paid circulators. These individuals were trained and informed upon the details of the referendum.

Why has information regarding the referendum been withheld?

The Parks Conservancy prides itself on being transparent. As there are many moving parts to the referendum initiative, the Conservancy has been careful to only communicate facts. When select details regarding this referendum are confirmed across all involved parties, those details are shared with the public. This is in an effort to provide clear, concise, and factual information.

Why does the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy want to tax City residents?

Parks are our passion and we are proud of the work that we and the City of Pittsburgh have been able to accomplish with limited resources. However, our parks are in need of further work and improvements. With this tax, and any matching funds we can secure, we will be able to make improvements across all 165 of Pittsburgh's parks.

Ultimately, this decision is up to the residents of the City of Pittsburgh. The parks are for City residents; the City and Conservancy are simply the stewards of that land. The residents must choose if they want the tax for the benefit of the parks and future generations like our children and grandchildren.

Why is the Parks Conservancy trying to raise this money through a tax? Why not through another means?

For close to 50 years, while the City of Pittsburgh has struggled with its finances, parks have been underfunded. The park system falls further and further behind every year. We have a minimum \$400 million capital project backlog today, which will grow if we don't address it now. Additionally, we annually fall short on maintenance needs by \$13 million. The City cannot allocate \$33 million dollars per year, as the City does not have this amount of available funding for parks. The Conservancy has raised funding in the past from private and corporate donors, foundations, and grants; raising an average of \$7.8 million annually for parks. The Conservancy will continue to raise funds for parks through private and corporate donors, foundations and grants, yet, those funds alone are not adequate to address the funding needed to maintain and operate our city parks for current and future Pittsburgh residents.

How much would the tax raise for the parks if it passes?

Should the referendum pass, the parks would receive approximately \$10 million additional dollars per year. The Parks Conservancy is currently working to earn matching dollars from the local philanthropic community. Should we secure these matching dollars, funding for our parks would double, resulting in double the amount of park improvements every year.

Is the philanthropic community supportive of the referendum?

Yes, the response to date has been very positive. We have received \$2.9 million from the foundation community thus far for this effort.

Can the tax dollars collected through the referendum be used for anything other than parks?

No. The charter amendment is written so that the money must be used for Pittsburgh parks. The tax dollars cannot legally be used for anything else.

Who will oversee the distribution of funds should the referendum pass?

Should the referendum pass, the funds received would go directly to the City and be allocated and overseen by a board consisting of Parks Conservancy representatives, elected City officials, and City of Pittsburgh residents.

Is this privatization of our parks?

No, all City parks and park assets remain in the public trust as City-owned public assets.

When would the tax begin should the referendum pass?

Dollars generated from the tax would begin on Jan. 1, 2020. Park investments would begin in 2020.

Don't the parks already receive tax dollars through the Regional Asset District (RAD) tax?

RAD dollars are specifically for regional assets such as libraries, museums, and parks. That revenue, however, cannot be used to maintain or restore any park that's less than 200 acres because only parks with 200 or more acres are considered regional parks. Five of the 165 Pittsburgh city parks are more than 200 acres. The RAD tax dollars cannot be used on neighborhood and community parks that are the focus of this referendum and which require the most help in Pittsburgh's park system.

Additionally, while other organizations that receive RAD money charge admission and other fees, the parks are free to all.

Will regional parks benefit from these tax dollars?

Should the referendum pass, these funds will be distributed across all 165 parks in Pittsburgh, including the five regional parks. Regional parks are part of our park system and despite them being in much better condition than our smaller community and neighborhood parks, mainly due to Regional Asset District (RAD) funding, they also require maintenance and improvements.

While regional parks will receive funding, you can access our Park Ranking list (<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/415693/Park%20Ranking%20Sheet%202019-07-31.pdf>) to better understand how capital funding will be allocated to different parks. Our parks that are highest in need will be prioritized over parks that are less in need.

Why are the parks most in need in areas with a high minority population?

This is not uncommon and tends to be the case across many cities. The philosophy and belief of the Parks Conservancy is that every resident in every city is entitled to a well-maintained, healthy park space. The areas that are most in need are the areas that will receive investments first. Currently, 66 DPW employees work in the five regional parks that receive Regional Asset District (RAD) funding. The other 160 parks, which do not receive RAD funding, are serviced by 39 DPW employees.

What are the key areas of investment for the additional funds?

There will be four key areas of investment for the Parks Conservancy and the City of Pittsburgh should the referendum pass:

- (1) Capital projects
- (2) Maintenance
- (3) Rehabilitation
- (4) Programming

Visit <http://bit.ly/parksonepager> for detailed information on the four areas of park investment that will be funded by monies generated by a successful referendum and any matching dollars the Conservancy can secure.

Where does the replanting of trees fall with the key areas of investment?

Tree-planting will fall within funding for maintenance. All parks will see improvement in maintenance beginning in 2020 should the referendum pass, though not all may see tree planting within that time.

Would tax dollars be allocated to Hays Woods?

Hays Woods is not currently a city park. Many conversations have taken place regarding potential usage, including keeping the 640 acres of Hays Woods as predominantly natural space, which would cost far less to maintain than a developed park space. The future of Hays Woods has yet to be determined, but if it becomes a park resources from the referendum would be allocated to Hays Woods.

How is the library funding in comparison to this referendum?

The library asked for a ¼ mill levy. The Parks referendum is asking for a ½ mill levy. What this means is that for every \$100,000 of assessed real estate property owners would pay approximately \$50 year. Please note that these amounts are based on the assessed value of your real estate. Assessed home values are often much lower than purchased values. Additionally, property owners may be exempt or pay reduced taxes through military veteran status or the Taxpayer Relief Act.

Even with the library property tax revenue, the Carnegie Library System remains the largest recipient of Regional Asset District funding at more than \$20 million annually.

Who is responsible for maintenance in our parks?

Currently, the Department of Public Works (DPW), which is managed by the City of Pittsburgh, handles much of the maintenance across Pittsburgh's parks. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy provides supplemental maintenance in 22 of the City's 165 parks.

The referendum states that park amenities would be improved. What constitutes a park amenity?

Park amenities include trails, sidewalks and paths; playgrounds; outdoor athletic facilities including basketball and tennis courts; benches; pavilions; restrooms; swimming pools; water fountains, and more.

Will we be able to plant more trees with these additional funds?

The City of Pittsburgh is losing 8,000 trees per year due to life cycle, development, diseases, and more. Our city tree canopy is under significant threat with these tree losses.. We need to plant more trees than what's currently being planted annually. Additional funding will allow us to allocate select funds to maintenance, which will include tree pruning, tree inoculation, and tree-planting.