

**OPPOSE HB 3515**

HB 3515 would allow voters in Portland to form a park and recreation district, but what it really does is change district governance laws and effectively creates a new and additional permanent property tax rate for the City of Portland, thereby violating the spirit and intent of Ballot Measures 47 and 50. It is purely a way for the city to create a “new” government to generate new revenue for a service they already provide and control.

For the last 25 years, local governments across the state have adhered to their permanent rate as required by voters. If you allow the City of Portland to create a new or additional permanent rate how would you justify saying no to any other city that would like the same authority? If you pass this bill there will be plenty of other cities lining up to do the same and this language would be easy to modify to accomplish just that. The result would threaten the integrity of many of our 53 well-established park and recreation districts across the state. So, you must consider the ramifications if you pass this proposal.

If cities, other than Portland, are successful at starting park districts governed by city councils, what would stop a city from convincing the legislature to allow a vote of the public to create other types of city-run districts like transportation, fire, and police? Districts would simply become a financing system for cities to skirt their permanent rates, instead of districts with independent governing boards accountable to voters to manage the district.

Current statutes, under ORS chapters 198 and 266, allow park and recreation special districts to be formed within city boundaries upon consent of the city council and a vote of the people. Many park and recreation districts are the providers of park and recreation services within city boundaries such as Beaverton, Newberg, and Springfield. Some of the largest are Bend Park and Recreation District, Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District and Willamalane Park and Recreation District. The services provided by these districts are nationally recognized for the quality of their programs and facilities. What makes them such effective organizations is they have independent elected boards who are solely focused on their mission. 100% of their funding is also dedicated exclusively to parks and recreation services. The same would not be true for a city-run district formed solely for increased funding. A city council overseeing the district would not be 100% dedicated to the mission of the district.

Over 6,000 elected special district board members represent their communities by volunteering to serve on approximately 1,000 special district boards. It is truly the most accessible and localized form of democracy. If the City of Portland wants to create a special district, it can support the formation of an independent district with an independently elected board under ORS 266. Why is it afraid to expand participation and governance by having a separately elected parks and recreation board of volunteers who would be responsible for directing the future of expanded parks and recreation services for the city?

Furthermore, the bill doesn’t require the City of Portland to under-levy if they are successful in convincing the voters to approve the district and a new permanent rate. Because the city is already collecting property taxes to provide parks and recreation, the city could realize an additional windfall of revenue to spend as they see fit on other services. The result could even be eliminating current city

spending on parks and recreation services and only relying on the new special district funds, thereby adding no additional parks and recreation benefits for the voters who approve the new district.

Creating a city-run special district will confuse voters. Voters who are served by special districts express a high degree of confidence in the governance and fiscal management of their districts. Allowing cities, who already have broad revenue raising authorities, to create special districts, as HB 3515 does, will confuse, and undermine the confidence that voters have with special districts, the process to create them, and the authority by which they are governed.