



Board of Directors

Felicita Monteblanco
President

Barbie Minor
Secretary

Alfredo Moreno
Secretary Pro-Tem

Heidi Edwards
Director

Tya Ping
Director

General Manager

Doug Menke

March 30, 2023

Rep. Dacia Grayber, Chair
House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 3515, Relating to park and recreation districts

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Lewis & Tran, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District (THPRD) board, I'm writing to express the district's concerns with HB 3515, which would allow the City of Portland to refer a ballot measure to electors to form a park and recreation district that is governed by the City of Portland, rather than having a distinct and independent board of directors for that district.

The THPRD Board of Directors is generally in support of increasing funding streams for park and recreation services, but we have significant concerns with the potential erosion of special district rights and powers.

THPRD is the largest special park district in Oregon, spanning 50 square miles and serving about 270,000 residents in and around Beaverton, Oregon. The district was established over 65 years ago through the efforts of a local physical education teacher, Elsie Stuhr, who believed Beaverton-area community members needed more opportunities for recreational activities. The voters' decision to create this special purpose park district allows the community to shape its park and recreation system through a direct relationship to the elected officials who guide THPRD – elected officials who are specifically tasked with delivering on its mission: to provide natural areas, high-quality park and recreational facilities, programs, services and natural areas that meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve.

The THPRD Board of Directors devotes the entirety of its efforts and its funding to that mission and vision – providing the very best park and recreation services. As a result of our commitment and singular focus on providing these services, we have recently been recognized, both nationally and locally, for our work:

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) United States Project of the Year for the Vision Action Plan
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values Award for Diversity, Culture and Inclusion for the Vision Action Plan
- Washington County Harold M. Haynes Award for the Visioning Task Force
- Golden Hammer Winner for its Cedar Grove affordable housing partnership

Oregon already has several areas of statute that address the formation and governance of parks and recreation special districts (ORS 198 and 266) that can and already do support parks and recreation in the Portland area. These statutes provide for special districts to be formed within city boundaries, however, they call for a very clear governance model – independent elected boards focused solely on the park and recreation district’s mission.

THPRD’s Board of Directors is concerned by the proposal to amend state statute to allow a park district to be run by a city council, particularly if an area within a city is already served by a park district. Would a city-run park district be able to take over or absorb another park district, fundamentally altering the relationship a community has with its park and recreation leaders? We urge the proponents of the bill to consider that any city wishing to create a special purpose park district should do so under the existing statutes and establish an independent governing body, accountable to its community for delivering park and recreation services.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please contact Aisha Panas, Deputy General Manager, at a.panas@thprd.org or by phone at 503-816-5804, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Felicita Montebianco
President, THPRD Board of Directors