



Portage Park District

Frequently Asked Questions About the November Park Levy

1. What is the Park District levy issue?

The Portage Park District is requesting a 1-mill, 10-year levy, comprised of a ½ mill replacement and ½ mill additional property tax, to continue park operations and growth of your county park system.

2. Why is this levy needed?

The existing ½ mill levy that was passed by voters in 2014 (its first and only levy), expires at the end of 2023. It provides 95% of the operating budget that the Park District can count on, which is also used to match state and federal grants received for land acquisition and development. The new levy will provide funding to maintain safe, clean parks and continue to grow your countywide system of parks and trails.

3. How has the Park District used the levy funds so far?

Since the levy was passed, the Park District has opened 4 new parks, improved existing parks, resurfaced multipurpose trails and permanently protected an additional 1,335 acres. It has grown from 2 employees to 11 full-time and 3 part-time staff working with dozens of active volunteers. An existing building was renovated into a park operations center with workshop and equipment storage for Maintenance, Natural Areas and Ranger staff. Public Education and Outreach staff have grown the volunteer corps and provided hundreds of free programs for all ages and abilities. Portage Park District now manages over 2,750 acres and 17 miles of hike and bike trail on 22 sites.

4. How much money will this levy raise?

The 1-mill levy will generate \$4.54 million per year which will support park maintenance, improvements, staffing and creation of new parks and trails. Park levy dollars stay here to make Portage County an even more desirable place to live, while matching millions in grants, mostly for land acquisition, from outside the county.

5. What other income do you receive?

With help from partners, grants and generous donors, the **Park District has received over \$7.3 million in grants and donations and over \$1.4 million in land and other revenues. *That's a 60% return on your local tax levy investment.*** Cash donations are mostly received by the all-volunteer **Portage Park District Foundation** who raise funds for special projects and amenities such as the pergola at Morgan Park, the kayak launch at Trail Lake and the new picnic shelter at Dix Park.

6. How much will this levy cost me?

The levy will cost the owner of a \$100,000 property, \$35 per year or \$2.92 per month. The levy is only paid by owners of real estate and is based on 35% of the auditor's appraised value, which is usually lower than open market value. To find out your property's County Auditor-appraised value, and what the increase would cost, go to www.portagecountyauditor.org, look up your property and use the tax estimator.

7. Who is in charge of the Park District?

The Portage County Probate Judge appoints a 5-member non-partisan board of commissioners for 3-year terms, who serve as the governing board without pay. The Board approves policies, regulations, budgets, contracts, and land acquisitions. The Board hires the Executive Director, who is responsible for planning and implementation, hiring staff, preparing and managing budgets and overall direction and management.

8. What does it cost to develop new parks and trails?

Every project is unique, so it's hard to compare. Some sites have constraints due to access, grant restrictions, wetlands, topography, soils, etc. Prices also depend on availability of contractors and costs of materials and labor, which fluctuate depending on market conditions. We publicly bid our capital improvement projects, and bids received can have a wide range.

- As an example of park development, Trail Lake Park cost over \$1.3 million in engineering and construction contracts to develop-- over and above park staff time and land acquisition cost.
- As an example of trail costs, the proposed 1.37-mile limestone-paved extension of the Headwaters Trail in Mantua is estimated to cost over \$760,000, over \$550,000/mile. If we receive the \$500,000 grant requested, the Park District still needs to contribute \$260,000.

9. Why is the Park District asking for more?

- **We want to keep a good thing growing!** We are still a relatively young and small park district with great potential, and now is the time to pursue opportunities while they're available, as development continues in Portage County.
- Portage Park District now manages over 2,750 acres and 17 miles of hike and bike trail on 22 sites. It costs more now to keep them clean and safe with staff and equipment.
- Without additional funds, we're stuck in maintenance mode with just existing parks and trails. Development of new parks will have to wait, even on land we already own.
- We want to grow partnerships and programs to serve more people in more places.
- Grant funds are for specific projects and are very competitive. Grants still require some local match; we can't count on grants for our park system development or operations.
- The \$2.92 per month per \$100,000 property is still a small request with a great return, with lasting benefits for all in our own community, for generations to come.

10. Why do we need parks?

With its transportation corridors, proximity to economic centers, plentiful water and open space, Portage County is very attractive to development, which continues to increase. Portage Parks balances development with conservation while creating parks and trails for all, yielding **environmental, social, health and economic benefits.**

- Conserved land improves overall quality of life for communities, even if you don't use them.
- Parks are common ground for healthy, accessible recreation available to all, without fees.
- Conserved land increases our resilience to extreme weather through forests and wetlands that moderate heat, filter drinking water, and reduce the potential for flooding.
- Parks and trails increase property values and improve community quality of life.
- Conserved land protects and improves air quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity.
- Conserved land helps protect Portage County's rural character and heritage, leaving a natural legacy for future generations.