

Submitter: Ross R

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General
Government, and Veterans

Measure: HB3515

Please oppose HB 3515- a new tax levied on Portland residents and business at a time when the city is in such a fragile period. Over \$400 million in lost income in recent years due to high taxation/population loss. A lot of folks/businesses are fleeing due to the city's poor delivery of services- parks included. Unfortunately, the failures are easy to spot.

Portland has some of the nation's highest property taxes, the 2nd highest top marginal income tax rate in the US, some of the nation's highest water/sewer rates, high gas taxes and so on. It's been very apparent even BEFORE COVID that the city has done a terrible job of providing even the most basic (and I mean basic!) core functions of government: streets and parks among them. A city that can't even do simple tasks like cleaning graffiti off signs, pulling weeds/trash out of public right of way, and street sweeping. Setting all this aside for a moment, the HEMGGV committee needs to ask the following question at it's core:

****Can the City of Portland be trusted to run a clean, safe, efficiently run parks system under a new permanent taxing district based on it's history in other areas the last decade?***

Other questions to ask:

1) How has the city in less than a decade gone from having a nationally renowned parks system to one in it's current state?

2) Has the city steered away from core priorities like gardening and recreation classes to instead focus on more managerial/admin roles?

3) Has the city overextended itself with collective bargaining agreements that leave little remaining for parks? It's a fair question to ask.

4) Why isn't the city waiting to analyze the park system when a new form of government starts in Jan 2025? It's management/spending can be put under a microscope when a professional city administrator takes over. Why the rush now?

5) Washington Park is the "crown jewel" of Portland Parks and has a dedicated revenue stream from parking fees for park improvements. So why are the Rose Gardens looking more worn than ever, signs are graffiti tagged, and the tennis court area needs a major overhaul? Where is the money going?

6) Same with the Eastbank Esplanade and Tom McCall Waterfront Park: these are prominent to our central city but marred with graffiti, worn benches, vandalized lamp posts, encampments, trash and more. Why isn't Portland Parks using ARPA funds and Portland Clean Energy Fund monies to help? Other cities keep their parks in clean condition without taxing districts, so what's hindering Portland? Once again, these issues have long persisted before Covid and labor shortages.

7) Speaking of PCEF- it has \$300 million+ in tax collections. Energy efficient lighting, parks/open space, and recreation programs are aligned with the city's climate goals- shouldn't some of these funds be earmarked to help out the park system until it gets it's house in order?

8) Portland property tax owners pay taxes to 20+ separate entities. Does anyone honestly think adding yet ANOTHER taxing layer will help improve parks? It basically ensures that renters will get another rent increase, and more businesses/residents will leave like I did.

It's these kinds of questions and scrutiny the committee should be focusing on. As a Portlander of ten years who recently moved out of the city due to paying high taxes and not seeing much return on investment, the committee needs to show some "tough love" to the city. Make sure they look for efficiencies first and exhaust ALL OTHER options before asking for a permanent taxing district. The city "magically" found money recently to replace lighting they yanked out in their parks after negative press coverage, so we know the city when scrutinized can cough up the money.

Thank you for your time- vote NO on HB 3515 and help save the city from itself- it's especially tone deaf for them to even consider this right now!