



# Park Equity Communities of Practice

## *Maintenance Policies and Funding Track*

Overview of Session 2 – Traditional Funding Models

*December 13, 2023*

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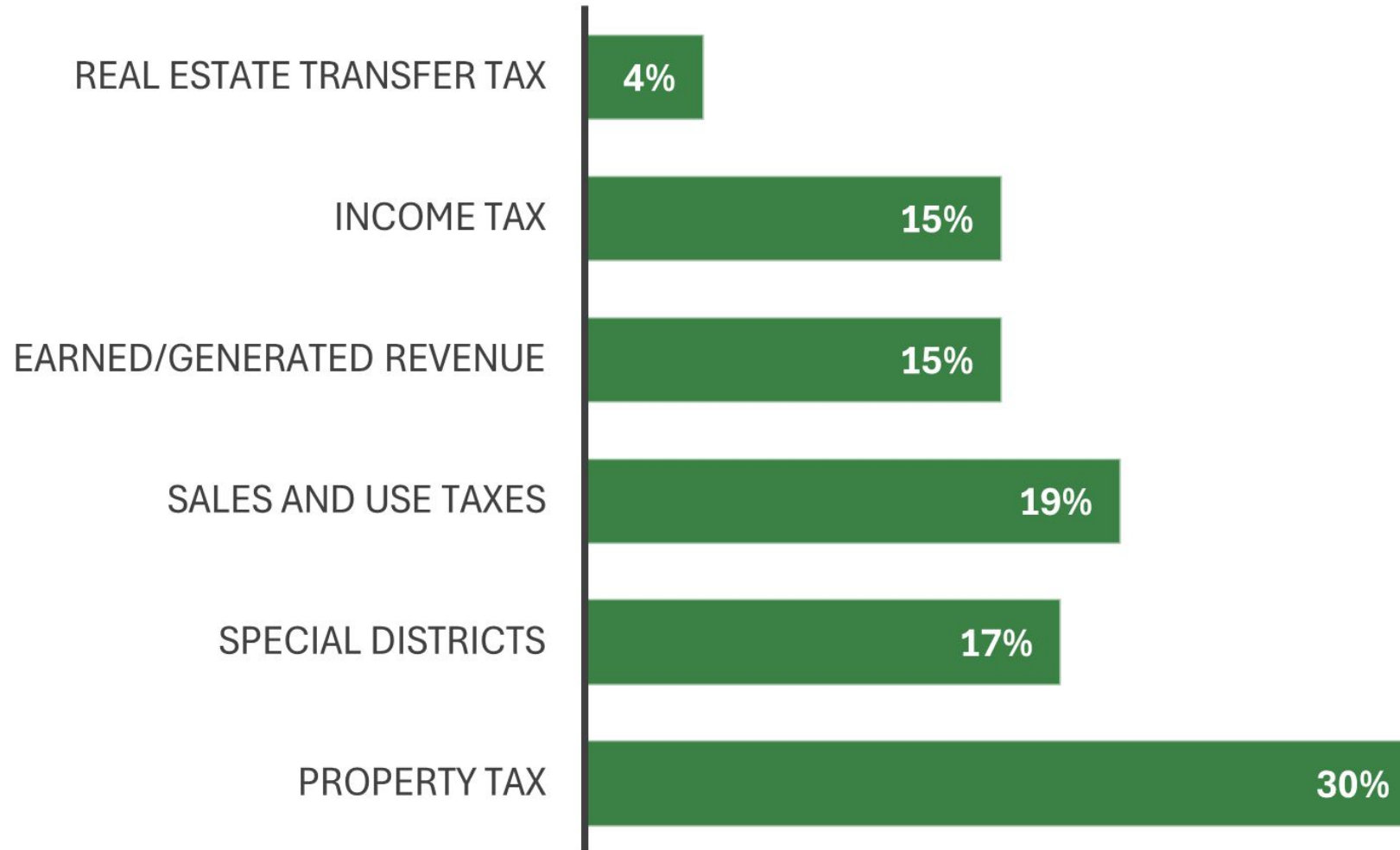
# Session Overview: Traditional Funding Models

The **Maintenance Policies and Funding** track of the **Park Equity Communities of Practice** elevates maintenance as an essential driver of building an equitable park system.

During the December 2023 session, participants heard from TPL's Conservation Finance team about the potential of bonds and ballot measures to finance park maintenance and equity across the United States. Participants were divided regionally into breakout rooms in which they discussed local case studies, as well as the unique challenges and opportunities of public financing for park maintenance in their regions. The following themes emerged:

- Across geographic and political boundaries, voters approve of increased taxes to support parks and conservation.
- Nonprofit park support organizations have a role to play in providing additional resources and capacity to municipal park systems. While this support is often necessary, it is important that supplemental funds are on top of, not in place of, dedicated city funding.
- Coalition-building is critical to galvanizing widespread support for parks, given local leaders' diverse array of competing priorities.
- Consider not just who, but when to engage stakeholders in public financing campaigns. Engage potential naysayers early in the process, leverage nonprofit partners and advisory councils to build a broad network of support, and follow up with community members as allocated funds are spent

# Poll Results: Does your city use one or more of the following sources to fund parks operations and maintenance?



# Funding and Planning O&M: Eastern US

Participants from Cleveland, OH, Washington, D.C., Scranton, PA, Buffalo and New York, NY, and Lynn, MA identified the following common insights and challenges for cities across the eastern United States:

- Many cities have or are exploring the potential for conservancies, nonprofit partners, or other support groups to provide additional daily maintenance in partnership with the local city agency.
- Few cities have dedicated funding streams for parks maintenance – resources mostly come from a general fund and are allocated via council, which always has competing priorities.
- Cities with tax-funded maintenance programs have seen success in allocating dedicated resources while continuing to preserve capital dollars.

*Massachusetts' Community Preservation Act leverages property taxes to support community priorities, including open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing.*

# Funding and Planning O&M: South & Southeast

Participants from Atlanta, GA, Austin, TX, Memphis, TN, and Lexington, KY identified the following common insights and challenges for cities across the south and southeastern United States:

- Competition between city agencies for funding remains a challenge. Developing a dedicated funding stream, such as real estate transfer taxes or property taxes, is critical.
- The timing of the fiscal year is often occurs during parks' busiest season, meaning fewer dedicated resources and less staff capacity is available to address long-term needs.
- Increasing pay and hours for maintenance staff is vital for employee retention and longevity, which is ultimately better for the long-term care of the park system.
- In order to keep up with maintenance demands, many park agencies need more staff members. Many funding considerations must be made in tandem with hiring decisions, but agencies often don't have the tools to accurately project these costs, leading to casemaking challenges.
- Land swaps and creative partnerships with public/private-sector landowners can be leveraged to meet agency needs without allocating additional resources.

# Funding and Planning O&M: Midwest & Southwest

Participants from Tulsa, OK, Aurora and Denver, CO, Mandan, ND, and Des Moines, IA identified the following common insights and challenges for cities across the midwest and southwestern United States:

- Competing priorities remain a challenge as parks are seen as a “lower-tier” issue.
- Positioning parks as part of improving quality of life is a powerful messaging tool for voters with a diverse array of priorities.
- Voters need increased education on the importance of general funding for parks maintenance, not just capital dollars or funding for specific projects. More data is needed to support casemaking.
- In order to keep up with maintenance demands, many park agencies need more staff members. Many funding considerations must be made in tandem with hiring decisions, but agencies often don’t have the tools to accurately project these costs, leading to casemaking challenges.

*In Tulsa, OK, a wide range of priorities related to parks have successfully gained public support thanks to their framing as “the 4 W’s: Water, Wildfire, Wildlife, and Way of Life.”*

# Funding and Planning O&M: Western US

Participants from Oakland and San Diego, CA identified the following common insights and challenges for cities across the western United States:

- Prioritizing maintenance needs is a major funding and equity challenge given the scale of investment necessary across the park system. Most park systems have too much demand, but not enough money. This process likely requires significant community involvement.
- Building long-term maintenance costs into capital budgets may present a critical opportunity to leverage capital investments to support maintenance needs.
- In some cases, regional parks are funded differently than neighborhood parks, which poses a challenge regarding the equitable distribution of resources to best meet community needs.
- Park master plans present an opportunity to build operations and maintenance standards into agency policy and/or practices. These plans should be actionable and regularly updated to ensure effectiveness.



# Common Challenges

- There is little consistency with regard to maintenance standards and practices across the US. Many major park systems across the country lack dedicated maintenance plans, funding, or standards, and scalable solutions are critically needed.
- Park agencies currently struggle with casemaking for maintenance funding due to a lack of standardized metrics regarding the costs of maintaining different park types, as well as the return on investment for elevated maintenance standards versus bare minimum standards.
- Capital projects are often funded differently than deferred or daily maintenance, which can lead to system-wide inequities in park quality and can exacerbate capacity challenges. The same challenge can exist between different kinds of parks, for example, between regional and neighborhood parks.
- Staffing challenges exist nationwide. Due to lack of available funds to increase staff hours and pay, parks agencies struggle to retain employees whose accumulated knowledge is essential for high-quality stewardship.

# Resources

## [10-Minute Walk Communities of Practice](#)

Find session recordings, presentations, and resources for each track.

## [Trust for Public Land: Conservation Finance](#)

We help state and local governments design, pass, and implement legislation and ballot measures that create new public funds for parks, land conservation, and protecting communities from climate change.

## [How We Win: A Look at How TPL Secures Public Funding for Parks and Open Space](#)

Since its inception in 1996, TPL's Conservation Finance program has helped win voter approval for nearly 650 state and local ballot measures, generating \$93 billion in new funding for parks, land conservation, and climate across the U.S.

## [Fundamentals of Funding for Local Parks and Greenspace](#)

City leaders and parks practitioners are being asked to do more for parks with less. But, they may not always know where to go for funding. Trust for Public Land's 10-Minute Walk® Program has compiled this report to share common funding mechanisms available for city parks. This report is not intended to be encyclopedic, but rather to outline a wide range of frequently-used funding tools.