



The Honorable City Council
City of Wildwood, Missouri
16860 Main Street
Wildwood, Missouri 63040

Re: Parks Sales Tax for April 2019 Ballot

Council Members:

Introduction >>> As the City approaches its twenty-fifth anniversary, a great deal has changed in terms of the number of park facilities and the amount of recreation programming within this community. In the early years of the City, Wildwood had no park properties of its own, and offered only a Summer Concert Series for its residents. With each year, and under the direction of the City Council, the number of park facilities has increased and over one hundred (100) recreation events, tailored to the residents of Wildwood have been developed and implemented. As the facilities and programs have increased, so has the budget for maintaining these items and conducting the range of programs. With 2019 rapidly approaching, the need to address the funding of park facilities and recreation activities was determined by the Action Plan Update Committee to be a priority, as part of its review and update of the *Action Plan for Parks and Recreation - 2007*.

This funding issue has been identified by the City Council since 2007, when the original Action Plan on Parks and Recreation - 2007 was endorsed and ratified by its members. This identification of funding considerations led to a decision on how best to fund this desired growth and also meet the goals of the Action Plan in this same regard, given growth in facilities and programs and this volunteer's group desire to ensure a more permanent and dedicated source for funding in the future. The current group of volunteers believed the best approach was to move forward with an election on a local parks sales tax (such was placed on the ballot in November 2008 and failed).

The Committee, in endorsing this park sales tax initiative, sought to provide to City Council the key components of it and the steps that must be taken to be prepared for the April 2019 election date. These components are certainly not the complete list, but are several areas of consideration at this stage in the process.

Justification for the Request >>> The development of a sustainable and substantial revenue source for parks and recreation purposes is a goal of many communities, including the City of Wildwood. With this type of revenue source, parks and recreation facilities, programs, and general operation and maintenance costs associated with them, are not competing with other public services for revenues. Therefore, to move forward with current and future plans for the development of facilities and increases in programming, as is being recommended in the 2018 update of this plan, this type of revenue source is essential. If successful with such a tax, the City can develop program facilities and programs commensurate with its resources.

This goal of finding a sustainable and substantial revenue source for parks and recreation was also discussed over the course of several months by the Parks Action Plan Update Committee. This Committee was charged

by the City Council to review the 2007 plan and provide any pertinent updates to it, thereby reflecting the ten (10) year period of time that had passed. The Committee did utilize an on-line survey instrument and, in that, respondents noted that a sales tax for parks and recreation purposes received the highest level of support within the community. Additionally, other communities in this same area of western St. Louis County had successfully implemented this sales tax and, in most likelihood, Wildwood residents who shop in Chesterfield, Ballwin, and Ellisville are already funding portions of our neighbors' respective park systems. Accordingly, the Committee endorsed the sales tax, as the major funding initiative the City should pursue immediately.

The Citizens Committee, in discussing this sales tax option, noted several key characteristics that should be incorporated into a proposal, when submitted to residents. These characteristics included the following: the tax would contain no sunset provision for its removal; the revenues would be directed to parks only, not stormwater projects (capital improvements tax is currently in place for such); the amount of the tax would be one-quarter of one (1) percent; and the revenues would be used to achieve the goals of the Updated Action Plan for 2018. The members of the Committee agreed such characteristics were essential to the submittal of this sales tax to the voters of Wildwood for it to be received successfully at an upcoming election, which was recommended by them to be on the April 2019 Municipal Election ballot, when turnout is highest.

Sales Tax Language >>> State Statute authorizes cities to place a sales tax proposal for local parks and stormwater projects before their voters. Additionally, this same legislation contains the specific phrase that must be included as part of the official ballot, which is:

“Shall the municipality (county) of impose a sales tax of (insert amount) for the purposes of providing funding for (insert storm water control, or local parks, or storm water and local parks) for the municipality (county)?”

Therefore, the City can submit such a request to voters and will follow all requirements of that statute.

The City can include additional information as part of the ballot language, but this phrase minimally has to be retained as part of it. Many municipalities, having successfully received voter approval of a sales tax for local parks, provide additional language and appear to want to ensure a minimum level of information for voters is available on the ballot. This approach would appear to be best for the City as well, given its size and on-going concerns about reaching residents with important information. An example of the language the ballot could include would be as follows:

Shall the City of Wildwood, Missouri impose a sales tax of one-quarter of one (1) percent (¼ of 1%) for the purpose of providing funding for local parks within the City of Wildwood, Missouri?

The approval of this sales tax would authorize the levy of one-quarter of one (1) percent (¼ of 1%), in addition to other sales tax in the City of Wildwood, Missouri provided for by law, on all retail sales conducted within the City, which are subject to taxation. One hundred (100) percent of the tax that is collected within the City of Wildwood will remain here and no funds will be shared with other municipalities located within St. Louis County, Missouri. If the sales tax is approved, the City may apply these revenues to the following projects: (1.) further development of a community-size park, with active, accessible recreation facilities; (2.) development of additional neighborhood parks; (3.) development of additional trail corridors; (4.)

development of additional recreation programs; and (5.) other park development or improvements within the City. This sales tax authorization would have no sunset provision, unless otherwise repealed by the voters of Wildwood.

Process >>> The Missouri Park and Recreation Association (MPRA) has developed a handbook called “Missouri’s ½ Cent Parks/Stormwater Sales Tax” and within this document an article was provided addressing how to successfully pass a sales tax initiative in your community. The author of this article was Dave Ostland, who at that time (1997), was the Executive Director of the Missouri Park and Recreation Association (MPRA). In this article, the author describes the minimum steps needed to achieve a successful outcome for a sales tax proposal for parks and recreation. These steps include the following:

Step	Steps in Process
1.	Determine the percentage of sales tax that will be paid by non-residents.
2.	Carefully weigh the pros and cons of including a sunset provision.
3.	Be forthright with your voters.
4.	Form a citizen committee.
5.	Address the opposition’s concerns.
6.	Use the media.
7.	Communicate to your voters how little they will pay per year.
8.	Use all of the effective arguments that exist.
9.	Avoid being on the ballot with other tax issues.
10.	Get an early start on the promotion of the initiative.

According to the author, if communities can successfully complete these steps, where applicable, a positive outcome becomes more of a reality.

All of these steps should be considered and, where determined appropriate, implemented. Again, of these steps, the Committee noted the critical need for a group of citizens to lead this process is the most important. This group would be ambassadors of the proposal and advocate the benefits of the tax to fellow residents. This role is critical, since the City is limited in what it can do, given it can only provide information; but not promote it.

Next Steps >>> The volunteer committee requested this information be provided to the City Council, as soon as possible, with the intent to present the greater level of details to the Planning and Parks Committee at its meeting on November 21, 2018. Thereafter, the Committee endorsed having legislation prepared to place this question on the ballot for the April 2019 Municipal Election. To accomplish this ambitious schedule, final action on this ballot legislation would have to take place either in December 2018 or the first City Council meeting in January 2019. Ballot issues have to be submitted to the St. Louis County Board of Election Commissioners no later than January 15, 2019 to be placed on the April 2019 election.

Other >>> If any of the City Council members should have any questions and comments regarding this information, please feel free to contact the Department of Planning and Parks at (636) 458-0440. No presentation is planned on this matter at tonight’s Work Session, but such will follow after the Planning and Parks Committee is provided more details and time to prepare its recommendation on this item. Thank you for the opportunity to present this information to the City Council on this important tax issue.

Respectfully submitted,
CITY OF WILDWOOD

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