



VOTING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE IN OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Making Room for Parks in Oklahoma City

Oklahoma City has created a formula for success in its Metropolitan Area Projects series. In December 2009, the city approved its third temporary sales tax increase to fund civic improvements and other projects. Revenue from MAPs3 is allowing the city to move forward with ambitious plans for a new central park and improved connections to the Oklahoma River.

Voters also enthusiastically support ballots for parks and recreation infrastructure. In a December 2009 special election, 54 percent of voters approved a one-cent sales tax increase to fund an ambitious parks and open-space agenda in Oklahoma City. The \$777 million MAPs3 ballot, the city's third in a series of successful MAPs votes that passed over the last two decades, included plans for a grand central park of 70 acres, 57 miles of new bicycling and walking trails, recre-

ational upgrades for the Oklahoma River, and intensive renovation of the state fairgrounds.

The ballot, which brings local sales tax to 8.375 percent, authorizes collections for a seven-year period starting in April 2010 and sunseting in December 2017. An appointed Citizen Advisory Board assists the city with implementation.

Why have the MAPs initiatives been so consistently successful? According to Russell Claus, Oklahoma City's planning director, consistently strong leadership at the city level—across several mayoral administrations—and effective partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and others in the private sector have been important. Each initiative has been targeted and limited in scope and duration. And a strong track record in delivering the promised bundle of projects has helped build public trust and goodwill, as well as momentum for the next proposal.

This artist's rendering shows conceptual plans for Oklahoma City's Central Park, funded by MAPs3 revenues. (Rendering courtesy of the city of Oklahoma City)

Oklahoma City's MAPs3 Revenue and Expenditures, 2010–2018

| | U.S. dollars (millions) | Percent of total |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------|
| PROJECTED REVENUE | | |
| Sales tax revenue | 777 | 100 |
| EXPENDITURES | | |
| Project | | |
| A new, approximately 70-acre central park linking the core of downtown with the Oklahoma River, including a restaurant, lake, amphitheater, dog park, skating rink, and other amenities | 130 | 16.7 |
| Fifty-seven miles of new public bicycling and walking trails throughout the city | 40 | 5.0 |
| Improvements to the Oklahoma River, including a public whitewater kayaking facility and upgrades intended to achieve the finest rowing racecourse in the world | 60 | 7.7 |
| Improvements to the State Fair Park public buildings, meeting halls, and exhibit spaces | 60 | 7.7 |
| State-of-the-art health and wellness aquatic centers throughout the city designed for senior citizens | 50 | 6.4 |
| A new rail-based streetcar system of five to six miles downtown, a downtown transit hub to link streetcar, commuter rail, and bus systems, and possibly increased funding for the building of commuter-rail lines | 130 | 16.7 |
| A new downtown convention center on the south edge of downtown near the proposed park | 280 | 36.3 |
| Sidewalks to be placed on major streets and near facilities used by the public throughout the city | 10 | 1.3 |
| Contingency funds to cover unforeseen costs | 17 | 2.2 |
| Total | 777 | 100.0 |

Source: Oklahoma City.

MAPS3: POISED FOR SUCCESS

The success of the earlier two MAPs programs helped lay the groundwork for the city's third sales tax ballot effort. At nearly eight years and \$777 million, MAPs3 is the most ambitious and longest-lived program to date.

Early in the MAPs3 exploration process, the city conducted a four-month online call for ideas from Oklahoma City residents. Over 85 percent of respondents thought MAPs3 was a good direction to go. The calls also generated more than 2,700 suggestions for future projects, with public transit improvements leading the list. Of the 14 ideas that were most popular in the

survey, 12 were included in MAPs3 or addressed through other city programs.

Strong support from Mayor Mick Cornett helped bolster voter enthusiasm for MAPs3. At regular press conferences over a two-and-a-half month period, the mayor made a case for each of the eight projects (see chart) that made the MAPs3 ballot. Leadership elsewhere in city government, including long-term city council members and experienced agency staff, was also valuable.

At the December 2009 vote, MAPs3 carried the day, winning 54 percent of ballots.

A MAP FOR MOVING FORWARD

In its MAPs programs, Oklahoma City has developed a valuable system for funding important civic open-space, parks, and transit projects, an approach that continues to garner significant public support. Bundling seemingly diverse projects encourages links among them, in addition to creating appeal for a broad range of voters.

The limited lifespan, ten to 12 years, of each MAPs program has proven to be a smart idea. The time frame offers adequate opportunity to complete the promised projects while reassuring voters that their elected leaders remain accountable. Strong oversight has also helped. "We have tried to make it as transparent as possible," noted Claus. Success in the present builds momentum for future endeavors.



Oklahoma City has an ambitious infrastructure agenda, funded by MAPs and other sources.