

Metro Parks



1069 West Main St
Westerville OH 43081

Tel: 614.891.0700

Fax: 614.895.6208

www.metroparks.net

Park Commissioners

JB Hadden

Aryeh Alex

George McCue

Executive Director

Tim Moloney

Your Metro Parks:

Battelle Darby Creek

Blacklick Woods and
Golf Courses

Blendon Woods

Chestnut Ridge

Clear Creek

Glacier Ridge

Heritage Park
and Trail

Highbanks

Homestead

Inniswood Metro
Gardens

Pickerington Ponds

Prairie Oaks

Quarry Trails

Rocky Fork

Scioto Audubon

Scioto Grove

Sharon Woods

Slate Run Farm
and Park

Three Creeks

Walnut Woods

January 16, 2024

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the Ohio House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer opponent testimony on portions of House Bill 344.

My name is Tim Moloney and I serve as Executive Director of Columbus and Franklin County Metroparks. Metro Parks features 20 outstanding natural area parks with more than 230 miles of trails and over 28,500 acres of land in seven central Ohio counties. I am here today on behalf of our park district and districts around the state.

We are troubled by the provision included in House Bill 344 which would eliminate replacement levies in Ohio. These levies are utilized particularly in rapidly growing areas to align property tax collections with current property values. Rapidly growing areas create additional need for services from local governments, including parks and recreation agencies. A prohibition on collecting the property tax increases generated by that growth makes serving those needs much more difficult.

Here in Central Ohio we are seeing unprecedented population growth as well as attendance increases at our parks. Since our last levy our park visitation has gone from under 10 million to a high of over 14 million annually, while our levy proceeds stay relatively fixed over time. This combined with the tax abatements and Tax Increment Financing taking place, our District alone recognizes over 6.2 million dollars of reallocation of voted on dollars by our constituent's.

This movement to eliminate replacement levies comes less than two years after the legislature enacted Senate Bill 140. Proponents of this legislation are making many of the same arguments that were offered in favor of that bill, namely that the bill would "reduce confusion" among voters considering levy questions. Yet less than two years after passing Senate Bill 140, and way before anyone has had an opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of that legislation, we were faced with another bill which would make it more difficult to provide the services that our residents, and your constituents, are demanding.

Finally, we believe that this portion of House Bill 344 could have an impact which is the opposite of what proponents are seeking. Forcing local governments to seek an increase in the milage rate to expand budgets could actually raise property taxes for property owners in economically depressed areas. While property owners in these areas would generally not be greatly impacted by replacement levies, an increase in the milage rate would cost these homeowners more in property taxes.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, Metroparks districts around Ohio provide clean, safe spaces for families to recreate, grow and experience life together. Our visitor numbers continue to reach annual records, and the public expects more. House Bill 344 eliminates a tool for capturing the growth in property value necessary to provide these expanded services and may actually create an additional property tax burden for those who can least afford it. We oppose this provision.

I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions you may have.