

19th House District

Parts of NE Franklin County
Including Columbus, Gahanna,
New Albany, Westerville, Minerva Park,
and area townships

**134th General Assembly Committees**

Energy and Natural Resources
Health
Higher Education and Career Readiness
Primary & Secondary Education
Technology and Innovation, Ranking Member

**Representative Mary Lightbody
19th House District**

Testimony to the Ways and Means Committee
House Bill 662
November 30, 2022
Mary Lightbody, Ph.D.

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 662, which would authorize municipal corporations and joint recreation districts to propose a bond levy and operating levy as a single ballot question for parks and recreational purposes.

The need for this legislation was brought to my attention by the New Albany-Plain Local Joint Park District. This November, citizens of New Albany and Plain Township, including myself, considered and passed two issues on their ballots which will allow the Park District to build and operate a new fieldhouse and recreational area in the Bevelhymer Park area. Under current law, the Park District had to place two separate levies on the ballot which were dependent on one another. One was a bond levy and the other an operating levy. The New Albany Fieldhouse website states the problem as follows,

“In order to build and maintain the facility, both levies must pass. If only the bond levy passes, we can build the facility but will have no money to operate it. If only the operating levy passes, there will be no money to purchase the land and construct the building in which the services will be operating.”¹

The City of Granville in Licking County has faced similar obstacles. In 2012, they placed a Tax Levy and a Bond Issue on the ballot. Though neither passed, the results for the Tax Levy (For – 47.16%, Against – 52.84%) were much closer than the results for the Bond Issue (For – 35.93%, Against – 64.07%)². If only the tax levy had passed, the city likely would have had to decline those funds. In 2020, Granville planned to try again to build and operate a multipurpose Community Center that would house indoor recreational facilities, the Licking County Senior Center, a pool, and many other community features. They ended up offering a smaller ballot issue in 2020 because of concerns caused by COVID-19. House Bill 662 would enable the City of Granville to propose a single ballot issue for the funding to build and operate a facility in an upcoming election.

¹ <https://nafieldhouse.org/finance/>

² <https://www.boe.ohio.gov/licking/c/elecres/20121106.mht>

Ohio Revised Code currently permits combined bond levy/tax levy ballot issues for school districts (R.C. 5705.218), classroom facilities (R.C. 3318.06) and County Criminal Justice Facilities (R.C. 5705.233).

Recreational facilities enhance the health of residents in our communities. Community Centers that offer variety of opportunities are especially popular for kids and families, helping us tie generations of our community together. In addition, they create overall more stable communities, reduce crime, provide social connections for residents who take advantage of the recreational opportunities they offer.

Additionally, community parks and recreational areas have been shown to have many economic benefits, the most prominent being an increase in property values, both commercial and residential. This is especially true in densely urban and low-income areas. These facilities also help to attract and retain businesses, tourists, and residents.

Parks, greenspaces, wooded areas, and recreational spaces are central to our communities. They are highly sought by communities and benefit our wellbeing and environment. They also provide many social and economic benefits to our communities. House Bill 662 would simplify the process for cities and park districts to seek the support of their voters to make this worthwhile investment in their communities. This legislation will provide Ohio communities with the opportunity to ask residents for the funds needed to build and operate recreational facilities without having to pass separate, codependent levies which often confuse voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I hope that you will offer additional hearings and support this legislation. I welcome your questions.