

MEMORANDUM PROPOSAL

TO: Steve Phillips, City of Gainesville, Director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Will Abberger and Pegeen Hanrahan, P.E., The Trust for Public Land
DATE: March 3, 2015
RE: Conservation Finance Research Proposal

Adequate funding is a challenge for all parks and conservation-related activities. The Trust for Public Land's (TPL) Conservation Finance program helps communities and agencies identify and raise funds for conservation from state and local sources. TPL provides professional, technical assistance services to local governments that need to research and evaluate conservation finance options. Since 1996 TPL has helped over 400 state and local jurisdictions generate more than \$47 billion to protect special places nationwide for parks, trails, open space, historic landmarks, forests, watersheds, wilderness, farms, and ranches. Eighty-one percent of all TPL-supported measures have been approved at the ballot.

Given the substantial investment of time and resources required to develop a funding strategy, preliminary research is essential to determine the feasibility of such an effort and to understand public opinion surrounding land conservation. Feasibility research provides the knowledge base that informs the options for developing funding mechanism, levels of funding, purposes and messages.

The Trust for Public Land uses feasibility research to work with the community to design ballot measures with the very best chance for success. TPL will make specific recommendations as to the amount and duration of financing, expenditure priorities, election timing, public accountability, and ballot language for a ballot measure, if found to be a desired route forward.

Scope of Work/Services

Feasibility Research

TPL will evaluate the feasibility of implementing a property tax in the City of Gainesville to fund parks and recreation needs identified in the city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Vision 2020 Plan. TPL will examine the legal framework, the revenue-raising capacity, the fiscal impact to government budgets and/or taxpayers, and how tax options are implemented (either levied by the City Commission and or by a public referendum by referral to the ballot). TPL also proposes to provide examples of where and how these mechanisms have been used by other jurisdictions.

The Trust for Public Land also proposes to research election results in order to examine the extent to which the city electorate has supported or opposed spending public funds for parks and open space, or other priorities, in the past, as well as voter turnout trends. Because Alachua County may consider options for reauthorizing Alachua County Forever or Wild Spaces/Public Places, dynamics associated with the county's potential funding mechanisms will also be addressed.

This research provides a fact-based reference document to be used as a shared information source for the City of Gainesville Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs to evaluate available financing mechanisms from an objective vantage point. We will meet with staff, citizens and/or elected officials as designated by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs to understand program priorities and seek appropriate feedback for the research.



TPL Conservation Finance Proposal to the City of Gainesville

Program Recommendations

TPL will provide recommendations for a conservation finance strategy to the Department to address the need to create reliable funding for implementation of the PRCA Vision 2020 Plan. If the Department decides to recommend moving forward with a ballot measure, TPL will advise on the crafting of the ballot language, including legal parameters, examples of successful ballot questions, and consultation with legal counsel as necessary.

The following services will be provided by the Trust for Public Land at no cost to the City of Gainesville:

Public Opinion Survey

After completing the Feasibility Study, TPL will contract with a qualified public opinion survey firm to conduct a professionally administered, statistically valid public opinion survey, through telephone interviews of randomly selected voters in the city. The public opinion survey will be funded privately.

The poll will be designed to test the following:

1. Specific ballot language and the level of voter support for a parks funding measure;
2. Alternative funding sources and amounts;
3. Purposes for the use of funds the voters find most compelling;
4. Timing, i.e., when is the best time to bring a measure to voters; and
5. Various accountability measures that may be incorporated into the measure.

TPL staff will make a presentation of key research findings and poll results to Department staff, the City Commissioners, and interested partners as desired.

This proposal does not include the costs associated with the voter education effort that would be necessary if a measure is referred to the ballot. Our recommended approach is to fund and manage such efforts entirely in the private sector without using public resources.

Total cost for research, program recommendations, and presentation: \$6,100

Our research staff currently has time available in March and April to conduct the research. The work will take approximately six weeks from contract approval to complete the feasibility research and an additional month to provide recommendations and measure design, if appropriate.

Thank you for your consideration, please contact either of us at 352-665-5939 (Pegeen Hanrahan) or 850-222-7911 Ext 23 (Will Abberger) if you have any questions in this regard.