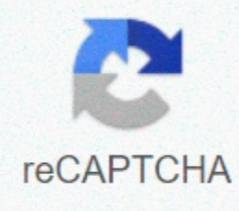




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Willamette weekly voter guide 2020

Multnomah County Library bond For years, the Multnomah County Library was among the jewels of local public services. Circulation is the fourth highest of any library system in the country, and patrons have regularly turned away from children's story hour and other popular amenities because the library buildings are mostly small and outdated, lacking meeting rooms and quiet spaces. Based on square footage, the system is the 102st in the country. The current system is also incorreparable and undermines those who most need library services. About 40 percent of the county's population lives east of Portland Avenue, but only about 20 percent of the library's capacity is there. The measure would allow the county to issue \$387 million in general obligation bonds to build a new flagship library in Gresham, renovate seven other library branches, add gigabit internet to all libraries, and add mechanical sorting equipment for books and other library materials. The added value for a home owner valued at a median cost in the county (\$201,000) would be about \$123 a year. The county asks for a lot of money, but like our schools and roads, libraries are an important infrastructure that requires regular investment to keep up with population growth and changing demands. After the debacle of The Vapado Prison, in which the county spent heavily on capital improvements but did not make securing operating costs, library staff and the planning committee took into account the annual costs of staffing and maintaining the new and renovated space the measure would buy. They made the case that operating expenses would add 5% or less to the current operating budget, the library's office figures says, well within the system's ability to absorb. We call for a vote yes. The state of Portland's beloved parks system is such an obvious cautionary tale, it feels like one of Aesop's fables. Let's say the one about the grasshoot that didn't get ready for winter. For a decade, city officials ignored chronic financial problems and expanded the parks system to the east, giving Portlanders more rope seats in the sun. Simply put, Portland Parks & Recreation's costs, mostly staff, regularly exceeded their revenues, which are a mixture of general fund dollars and user fees. Then winter hit --- and hard. Before his untimely death in January, City Commissioner Nick Fish intended to address the bureau's chronic parks flaws. But then COVID-19 arrived, closing the programs that generate these user meetings. Fish forced City Hall to make painful, unpopular cuts to beloved community centres and then disaster meant the meetings that for 27% of parks revenues evaporated because all programs are closed. The last seven months of violent separation have highlighted more than any politician's words that could ever have public space for city dwellers to exercise, reproduce or simply chill during a pandemic. Portland's parks, which cover more than 11,000 acres and include more than 470 facilities, are essential to a city that is increasingly taking on the trappings of the real city. Portland Parks & Rec is responsible for 1.2 million trees and a growing green spaces system that reflects a long overdue expansion of parks in East Portland. Yes, there is undoubtedly the effectiveness the bureau can realize, and yes, there are big ideas to rethink the city's third-largest general fund bureau (after police and fire). But the reality is this: Portlanders need our parks today more than ever. Despite when the COVID-19 vaccine will allow for the reinstatEEEE of programs that generate fee revenue, the bureau faces draconian cuts if that measure fails. We talk about emptying garbage cans and cleaning the dressing rooms once a week, not every day. We're talking about closing pools and facilities that help keep us healthy and calm. If the measure passes, it would add 80 cents per \$1,000 of estimated value per year to property taxes, adding \$161 a year in taxes to a house with a median estimated value in Multnomah County of \$201,000. That's less than a cup of 7-Eleven coffee a day - a small price to pay for sanity. Vote yes. Tax on funding preschool without study First and foremost: Preschool is a feminist event for all. It was one of the last arguments offered by WW County Commissioner Jessica Vega Peterson, the lead chosen champion of the idea. It was also the most compelling. Studies show that exemptions for COVID-19 and job losses disproportionately affect women. In part, this is because many blue-collar mothers have to choose between income and child care. Or, more bleakly, they should choose among rent, food and childcare. So the county offers to pay preschoolers for all 3- and 4-year-olds. That's what several places, including New York City, are already doing. This measure became an unusual path to the ballot paper. For most of the year, the Portland chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America competed with Wega Pederson and the county leaders; both had proposals for preschool without the training they hoped to send to voters this November. In the end, Vega Pederson forged an unprecedented decision: County commissioners passed, then rescinded the DSA measure and sent voters a compromise measure that combined the wishes of the DSA and the county. Did they pick up the tax? This makes the plan all the more populist. West tax 1.5% of taxable income over \$200,000 for shared files (\$125,000 for single files) with another 1.5% of income over for shared files (\$250,000 per file). The county says 92% of residents will not be taxed at all. This is, of course, the best kind of tax for most voters— one that someone else pays. Pollics includes concepts too numerous to be unpacked here: progressiveness and redistribution of wealth, for a start. But we don't buy the objections of tax foes that this burden will cause wealthy residents to flee to Clark County. It's worth noting that supporters expect the measure to raise a significant amount of \$133 million next year and more than \$200 million by 2026, when the program expects to add 7,000 children to the program. While preschool programs will be reimbursed from \$14,000 to \$20,000 a child, the measure has set aside a significant amount for setup, administration, quality control and reserve funds among other costs that backs will have to justify as they move forward. Multnomah County distributed money to existing preschool programs. The first recipients of tuition assistance will be families with the least means to secure a private place now. The county's record of contracting social services is spotty, please, but we're pleased to see it plan to phase out the program - the universal portion of universal preschool won't happen for several years as the county scales back its contracts. As advertising floods the airwaves to boost that measure in the coming weeks, mostly you'll hear about the kids. (Who can vote against children?) But caring for children is a struggle for entire families and, given gender roles in 2020, which means mostly fighting for mothers. This struggle has long compromised women's ability to advance in the workplace. And now we see how it cripples women's ability to hold down jobs. Vote yes for women (as well as for children). Portland Public Schools Communications This is one tax on the ballot this November that won't increase any tax bill. (Instead, it will simply recover \$2.50 for the \$1,000 estimated value homeowners already pay. And the \$1.2 billion it will raise over the next eight years is s very necessary. The big-ticket items complete an overhaul of Benson Polytechnic High School and redescend Jefferson High School, both of which are uncovered masonry buildings, the type of construction most at risk of collapse as a result of the earthquake. No one doubts that Portland's aging public school structures continue to need work as part of a cycle of building upgrades, many of which were built in the middle of the last century or earlier. And \$1.2 billion is only a down payment: PPS asks for only a fraction of what it takes to make classrooms safe. The event includes \$17 million to upgrade buildings to be sound when more than \$1 billion is needed; \$34 million. Million. more than \$100 million needed to upgrade schools to basic availability for disabled people; and \$66 million for more than \$300 million the district needs roofs. To be sure, the district has failed to do the politically challenging work of rounding the boundaries for the Jefferson building, which currently serves fewer than 700 students. (Both Cleveland and Wilson High Schools currently serve more than twice as many students and have not been repaired.) The last bond issue in 2017 saw a significant overstepping of value. County and Council President Amy Kohnstam, who led the effort, was held accountable after an inaccurate assessment of how much projects actually cost. (The rest of the school board has since been new.) But students returning to these buildings after the pandemic deserve a better, safer space to learn from. The bond campaign says the district learned of mistakes made last time and will have several layers of value estimates in place this time around. The fundamental inquiry sounds: old buildings wear out and we as taxpayers should replace them. Vote yes. Sets up a police surveillance board You're a Portland police officer who just hit someone with a baton? If that's the case, you probably love the city's current police surveillance system, which has resulted in only four cops going to arbitration after losing their jobs for misconduct in the past decade. (All four have returned their jobs.) Almost everyone else in town is frustrated with the status quo. This even includes people who worked for an independent review of the city's police force, a unit of the city's audit office that doesn't really have the authority to discipline or fire officers. Instead, whenever he receives a complaint, the IPR judges an officer's conduct based on the Portland Police Bureau's existing policy - which allows for the use of force in many situations - and runs along its conclusion: The complaint is either upheld or it is not. If sustained, the findings were forwarded to the police chief, who decides what punishment—if any— should be leveled. Meanwhile, investigative documents, including the officer's name, will almost never recover from the public. It is an understatement to say that the city's current system is designed to protect the police, not the public. Measure 26-217 reads like, if you pardon a metaphor, a silver bullet. It seeks to disband the IPR and replace it with a new police oversight board staffed by various members of the community, none of whom can be employed by law enforcement or have immediate family members employed by law enforcement. It will be funded by 5% of the Police Bureau's current budget of \$230 million - a percentage enshrined in the city charter, meaning the charter must be changed to change the council's budget. The measure 26-217, which is referred to in voters by unanimous vote of the Portland City Council, will give a new one the real power of the council: the powers of subpoena documents, force officers to investigate, testify, and share investigative findings, including the names of officers found guilty---fashed by the public. Most importantly, he will have the power to discipline and even terminate officers. IPR can't do any of this. Portland City auditor Mary Hull Caballero, who oversees IPR, is skeptical. She said she had not been thoroughly vetted and the same barriers IPR was running from would also be hobbling the new supervisory board. Nor are we fully convinced that the new board can achieve its goals. It will undoubtedly face a legal challenge from the Portland Police Association, whose president, Daryl Turner, has argued that many aspects of the measure are illegal. And for it to be fully successful, the state's arbitration laws on police misconduct must be changed in the Legislature - a process guaranteed to be lengthy and confusing. But City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardy, a longtime police reformer who champions the measure, is confident that goals can be achieved within the 18-month timeframe set aside for implementation. According to Hardy, the policy outlined for the supervisory board, unlike the IPR, will be enshrined in the city charter, giving the board legal powers to enforce its policies. We want it to work out and hopefully it does. If he reaches a quarter of what he is thought to do, the measure could be a major step forward to increase transparency and accountability when investigating police officers accused of wrongdoing. It couldn't be worse than the current system, which does nothing. The Metropolitan Council passed the measure to voters in July after two years of preparation. He would introduce a new tax on companies employing more than 25 workers, charging those companies up to 0.75% of wages. Metro said at the time of the referral it expected the measure to raise about \$4 billion for transportation projects, including a new MAX line from Portland to Tigard, as well as improved buses and sidewalks in 17 high-traffic transportation corridors. The tricity agency also believes it could use nearly \$3 billion in matching funds, mostly federal dollars for light rail. The economy of the west was a little hard to crush, for several reasons. First, while Metro models its Wage Tax TriMet, which local governments pay along with private employers, the agency decided at the last minute to exempt other local governments, arguing that its legal authority to tax them is questionable. Despite requests from news media and opponents, Metro never provided a legal opinion to justify that claim. Second, while the measure allows Metro to levy tax of up to 0.75%, the agency has proposed lowering this up to 0.6% to support business interests. Prior to its loan, Metro tried to prioritize priorities costs in underserved areas such as 82nd Avenue in Portland, the Tualatin Valley Highway in Washington County, and along McLochlin Boulevard in Clakamash County. Projects in these areas will serve more people of color and low-income Oregonians who have not historically benefited from improved transportation. The measure will also pay for turning a large portion of TriMet Park into electric buses and enhancing bus service in major corridors, as well as building 28 miles of new sidewalks, installing 140 miles of bike lanes and transit passes to all high school students in the Metro region. This will all be a significant improvement. First, while Metro says exactly that climate change is an existential threat, its own figures show that this measure does virtually nothing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. And critics say improving the highway it includes would actually encourage people to drive more. No one knows if the prepanдем circuits of movement and traffic on which this measure was based will return after COVID-19 is in the rearview mirror. The measure was created on the assumption that workers would still head downtown every morning, but that's less than certain. So ok the measure offers huge costs for environmental benefit, which is at best minimal and at worst illusory. Second, economic literature is clear: payroll taxes are stifling job creation. This is the exact opposite of what Portland needs to bounce back from an economic catastrophe. Supporters have unveiled a grossly inflated number of jobs they claim the measure will create - 37,500- while failing to point out that jobs will come within 20 years rather than now. Third, Metro's vague tax policy raises the issue of fairness. For example, Providence Health & Health & Services, a nonprofit that employs 18,000 in the region, will pay tax, while Oregon Health & Health & Health Science University, a nonprofit public corporation that operates about the same number, apparently won't. Metro's failure to be cautious and transparent about who will pay this tax will only exacerbate existing resentment — not just from businesses against the government, but from anyone unhappy or unproven enough not to find a loophole. Last but not least, we are deeply concerned about the lack of sunset for this measure. Typically, monetary measures such as those on the November ballot for Portland Parks & Recreation - the Multnomah County Library and Portland Public Schools - have limited durations. That tax never expires, even after all the projects on Metro's list are complete. This is a vote for everything Metro wants to build on, forever. There is no vote. Authorization of water fund costs These are measures for the economy. Through physical infrastructure, to deliver water to more than 650,000 residents, the Water Bureau of Portland owns properties throughout Portland. Some of the parcels owned by the bureau include a surplus of green green that residents of the city already use both playgrounds and pocket parks. There are currently seven such spaces - hydroparks, the city calls them - sprinkled around the city, mostly in areas undervalued by Portland Parks & Recreation. The water bureau cannot spend ratepayer dollars to mow grass or do other maintenance in these spaces because the city statute prohibits spending water fund money on anything other than delivering water to customers. So the city's general fund pays (currently, \$11,500 a year). City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees water bureaus, says the general fund is already overstretched, and since Vodokanal owns the properties, he should be allowed to hold them. (Important note: This measure specifically excludes the city's Bull Run watershed from recreational use.) The city also intends to spend \$1.5 million over several years to bring water parks into line with Americans with Disabilities Act Kent Creford, a longtime critic of the Water Bureau, argues that passing that measure could allow the mission to creep in and abuse ratepayer dollars. This has happened before, and the bureau agreed in 2017 to repay \$10 million to ratepayers for previous errors. But Commissioner Fritz makes a convincing argument that expanding costs beyond current parks or withholding plus ADA costs would require a public process and a majority of City Council votes. Pretty good. Vote yes. So.