

NEWS RELEASE: May 24, 2011

Parks Sales Tax will not be on August ballot

The Greene County Commission has decided not to place a proposed ballot initiative for the county-wide Parks Sales Tax on the August ballot.

The unanimous vote took place this morning during a special commission meeting in the Greene County Historic Courthouse Hearing Room. Today is the deadline for the commission to submit an August ballot proposal to the County Clerk's office.

The Springfield-Greene County Park Board asked the commission to place the proposal on the ballot during the commission's April 18 meeting. The proposal called for renewal of a 1/8-cent Parks Sales Tax approved by voters in 2006 and a 1/8-cent increase.

The commission accepted public testimony on the proposal at two public hearings. The commission also took numerous phone calls, e-mails and other voter feedback into careful consideration before reaching a decision.

Greene County Commissioners Jim Viebrock, Presiding; Harold Bengsch, District 1; and Roseann Bentley, District 2; issue the following statement on today's decision:

"The Greene County Commission strongly supports the mission of the Springfield-Greene County Park Board. We take considerable pride in the Park Board's award-winning facilities and programs, its stellar staff and its dedicated troops of volunteers. We gratefully acknowledge the Park Board's contributions to our local economy and our community's quality of life.

"We have received numerous comments from our residents regarding this proposal, and we have conducted a voter survey. Our conclusion is that our residents are still struggling with the economic downturn, compounded by the unemployment rate and rising gas and food prices. Now is simply not the appropriate time to place this sales tax initiative before the voters of Greene County.

"Greene County government, like our residents, is making do with less. We are facing urgent funding shortfalls in our law enforcement and criminal justice system. These are needs with which we continue to struggle. We realize our decision will result in delays in many planned parks projects, and we respectfully ask the community for patience as we prioritize numerous taxpayer needs against limited taxpayer funds.

"Our decision also directly impacts Greene County's ability to provide stormwater services, currently funded with a portion of the sunseting 1/8-cent of the 2006 Parks Sales Tax. The City of Springfield's stormwater program is also affected. Our decision also impacts Greene County's other eight municipalities, which would have shared potential sales tax revenue for their own parks and stormwater programs.

"No one surpasses the Springfield-Greene County Park Department when it comes to planning, diligence and hard work. We remain hopeful for the continued recovery of our economy, in consultation with the Park Board and other stakeholders, we will seek a more appropriate time to consider this or another proposal at a later date.

"We thank our residents for their input on this issue, and we remain open to further discussion on funding for parks and stormwater."

For more information, call the Greene County Commission at 417-868-4112; or Jenny Fillmer Edwards, Greene County Public Information Officer, at 417-829-6019 or 417 224-5510.

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