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Big Winner in 2018 Election: Parks

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Cities are [increasingly \(https://www.tpl.org/creating-and-funding-parks#sm.0000qq2xyobv6e1arvo1k4flus5eq\)](https://www.tpl.org/creating-and-funding-parks#sm.0000qq2xyobv6e1arvo1k4flus5eq) recognizing the importance of parks as a public good, as well as the potential benefits to health, the local economy, and civic engagement. Voters in the 2018 election have made their voices clear through ballot measures that parks and green space are crucial to their communities. In at least seven cities and one special district, voters approved ballot measures that would raise billions of dollars for maintenance and operations of parks, and improve existing parks and create new green space.

Many of the ballot measures would fund parks and recreation projects through general obligation bonds, in which debt is sold to investors and the proceeds are used to improve projects that benefit the public good. For instance, in [Mesa \(https://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=29962\)](https://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=29962), the City will pay off the \$111 million parks and culture bond through secondary property tax revenue in the form of annual principal and interest payments. Meanwhile, [Proposition 407 \(https://kvoa.com/news/2018/10/09/prop-407-would-pump-millions-into-tucson-parks/\)](https://kvoa.com/news/2018/10/09/prop-407-would-pump-millions-into-tucson-parks/) in Tucson would pay for \$225 million in parks improvements by selling old bonds, which would not increase property taxes.

Most projects on the ballots originated in parks master plans, which are critical to engaging residents in [prioritizing projects \(https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/ccpe-Parks-Conservancy-Report.pdf\)](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/ccpe-Parks-Conservancy-Report.pdf) when funding is available. For instance, the Cape Coral parks master plan included an [assessment \(http://www.capecoral.net/special_project_plans/go_bond_projects.php#.W-3VFZNKiSM\)](http://www.capecoral.net/special_project_plans/go_bond_projects.php#.W-3VFZNKiSM) of community needs and a list of proposed phase I projects, with a projected 5-1 year build out “based on available funding.” Once the master plan was complete, the next step was to identify sources of funding for implementing the projects. In November of 2018, voters in Cape Coral approved a \$60 million bond, which will be used to pay for some of the projects outlined in Phase 1 of the [master plan \(https://www.capecoral.net/department/parks_and_recreationhome/Cape%20Coral%20Final%20Master%20Plan%20Report%202016.pdf\)](https://www.capecoral.net/department/parks_and_recreationhome/Cape%20Coral%20Final%20Master%20Plan%20Report%202016.pdf). Residents can track its progress through a [map \(http://capecoral.net/special_project_plans/parks_and_recreation_go_bond/index.php#.W-3V4JNKiSM\)](http://capecoral.net/special_project_plans/parks_and_recreation_go_bond/index.php#.W-3V4JNKiSM) on the city’s website that provides a visualization of the location and type of each project.

Local officials must approve bond measures before they make it onto the ballot, and in some cities like Denver, [City leaders encouraged \(https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/10/10/denver-parks-recreation-sales-tax-increase/\)](https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/10/10/denver-parks-recreation-sales-tax-increase/) voters to support these initiatives. In Denver, voters approved an increase that would [cost residents \(https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/11/06/denver-parks-funding-measure-2a-election/\)](https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/11/06/denver-parks-funding-measure-2a-election/) about \$3 more per month while generating about \$45 million for the city. Before the increase, Denver’s sales tax was one of the [lowest \(https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/11/06/denver-parks-funding-measure-2a-election/\)](https://denver.cbslocal.com/2018/11/06/denver-parks-funding-measure-2a-election/) in the region. Meanwhile, in Fresno, ballot measures were initiated by campaigns led by local advocates like [Fresno for Parks \(https://www.fresnoforparcs.com/\)](https://www.fresnoforparcs.com/), which collected 35,000 signatures and endorsements from over 100 organizations, residents and elected officials. But Measure P had some strong [opponents \(https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/editorials/article221304565.html\)](https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/editorials/article221304565.html) including the Mayor, Chamber of Commerce, and Police Association and Fire Department, and with a repeal of the gas tax on the ballot, it’s possible that residents were voting based on [fiscal impact \(https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/editorials/article221304565.html\)](https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/editorials/article221304565.html). Ultimately, Fresno voters did not approve the 3/8 cent sales tax increase. The story of Fresno and Denver demonstrate the importance of community context in any policy decision.

Below is a roundup of these and other 2018 ballot measures that would improve and support parks. For a comprehensive list that includes additional measures that would pay for parkland acquisition, conservation for open space and farmland, and state and county measures, [click here \(https://www.tpl.org/2018-conservation-ballot-measures#sm.0000qq2xyobv6e1arvo1k4flus5eq\)](https://www.tpl.org/2018-conservation-ballot-measures#sm.0000qq2xyobv6e1arvo1k4flus5eq).

Jurisdiction

State

Funding mechanism

Projected revenue

Purpose

Margin ([https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_\(November_2018\)\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_(November_2018)))

Austin

Texas

Bond measure ([Proposition C](https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_(November_2018)))

([https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_\(November_2018\)\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_(November_2018))))

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\$149 million

Parkland acquisition (\$45M); aquatics (\$40M); parkland improvements (\$25M); building renovations (\$21M); infrastructure (\$17.5M)

Yes: 80.86% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Austin, Texas, Proposition C, Parks and Recreation Bond Issue \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_(November_2018))))

No: 19.14% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Austin, Texas, Proposition C, Parks and Recreation Bond Issue \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Austin,_Texas,_Proposition_C,_Parks_and_Recreation_Bond_Issue_(November_2018))))

Brooklyn Park

Minnesota

General obligation bond

\$26 million

Natural resources (\$500k); trails, signs, and lights (\$2.4M); park reinvestments (\$13.1M); community activity center an senior center (\$4M); fields and courts (\$2.6M); teen center (\$2M); Historic Eidem Farm (\$1.4M)

Yes: 63%

Cape Coral

Florida

General obligation bond

\$60 million over 15 years

Implementation of city's parks master plan, including the upgrades and creation of new parks

yes

Denver

Colorado

0.25% sales tax increase

(2A (<https://yesfordenverparks.org/>))

\$45 million

Trails, open space, watershed protection

Yes: 61.32% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Denver, Colorado, Measure 2A, Parks and Open Space Sales Tax \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Denver,_Colorado,_Measure_2A,_Parks_and_Open_Space_Sales_Tax_(November_2018))))

No: 38.68% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Denver, Colorado, Measure 2A, Parks and Open Space Sales Tax \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Denver,_Colorado,_Measure_2A,_Parks_and_Open_Space_Sales_Tax_(November_2018))))

Doral

Florida

General obligation parks bond; additional \$131-\$139 per household per year in additional property taxes

\$150 million

Build Doral central park according to master plan; Doral cultural arts pavilion; new walk-to parks; improved existing parks; expanded + improved trail system

yes

Fresno

California

30 year $\frac{3}{8}$ cent annual sales tax increase (Measure P (<https://www.fresnoforparcs.com/>))

<https://govex.jhu.edu/wiki/big-winner-in-2018-election-parks/>

\$1.1 billion over 30 years

46% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno, California, Measure P, Sales Tax for Recreation and Arts \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno,_California,_Measure_P,_Sales_Tax_for_Recreation_and_Arts_(November_2018))) (\$17.25 million) on maintaining clean and safe parks;

21% (\$7.9 million) on new parks and recreational facilities;

8.5% (\$3.2 million) on youth and senior recreation, after-school programs, and job training;

11.25% (\$4.2 million) on improved walking and biking trails, the San Joaquin River Parkway, and beautification of streets; and

12% (\$4.5 million) on expanded access to arts and culture

Yes: 48.87% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno, California, Measure P, Sales Tax for Recreation and Arts \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno,_California,_Measure_P,_Sales_Tax_for_Recreation_and_Arts_(November_2018))).

No: 51.13% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno, California, Measure P, Sales Tax for Recreation and Arts \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Fresno,_California,_Measure_P,_Sales_Tax_for_Recreation_and_Arts_(November_2018))).

Note: a 2/3 vote was required to pass

Glenview Park District

Illinois

Special district bond for park improvements

\$17 million

Park district projects

Yes: 65% (<https://patch.com/illinois/glenview/glenview-park-district-referendum-approved>).

No: 35% (<https://patch.com/illinois/glenview/glenview-park-district-referendum-approved>).

Mesa

Arizona

General obligation bond, to be paid off using secondary property tax revenue ([Question 4 \(https://www.mesaaz.gov/city-hall/city-clerk/election-information/2018-ballot-questions/parks-and-cultural-bond-question-4\)](https://www.mesaaz.gov/city-hall/city-clerk/election-information/2018-ballot-questions/parks-and-cultural-bond-question-4))

\$111 million

Athletic fields (\$61.2M); park amenities (\$61.2M); paths (\$12.4M); cultural (\$28M)

Yes: 55.44% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Mesa, Arizona, Question 4, Cultural and Recreational Facility Bonds \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Mesa,_Arizona,_Question_4,_Cultural_and_Recreational_Facility_Bonds_(November_2018))).

No: 44.56% ([https://ballotpedia.org/Mesa, Arizona, Question 4, Cultural and Recreational Facility Bonds \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Mesa,_Arizona,_Question_4,_Cultural_and_Recreational_Facility_Bonds_(November_2018))).

Tucson

Arizona

General obligation bond ([Proposition 407 \(https://www.tucsonaz.gov/parksbond\)](https://www.tucsonaz.gov/parksbond))

\$225 million

Improve parks and connectivity

Yes: 54.30%

([https://ballotpedia.org/Tucson, Arizona, Proposition 407, Parks and Recreation Improvements Bonds \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Tucson,_Arizona,_Proposition_407,_Parks_and_Recreation_Improvements_Bonds_(November_2018))).

No: 45.70%

([https://ballotpedia.org/Tucson, Arizona, Proposition 407, Parks and Recreation Improvements Bonds \(November 2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Tucson,_Arizona,_Proposition_407,_Parks_and_Recreation_Improvements_Bonds_(November_2018))).

Source: [Landvote \(https://tpl.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=8\)](https://tpl.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=8)

- [Austin, TX \(https://govex.jhu.edu/city/austin-tx/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/city/austin-tx/).
- [Cape Coral, FL \(https://govex.jhu.edu/city/cape-coral-fl/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/city/cape-coral-fl/).
- [Denver, CO \(https://govex.jhu.edu/city/denver-co/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/city/denver-co/).
- [Mesa, AZ \(https://govex.jhu.edu/city/mesa-az/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/city/mesa-az/).
- [Parks and Recreation \(https://govex.jhu.edu/topic/parks-and-recreation/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/topic/parks-and-recreation/).
- [Blog \(https://govex.jhu.edu/resource-type/blog/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/resource-type/blog/).
- [Applied Research \(https://govex.jhu.edu/practice-area/applied-research/\)](https://govex.jhu.edu/practice-area/applied-research/).