Conservation Finance Success
Newark, New Jersey

With help from The Trust for Public Land, Newark raises $1.1 million annually for parks. Under Mayor Cory Booker, Newark added and upgraded a number of neighborhood playgrounds and parks, often in partnership with The Trust for Public Land. But in a city where some neighborhoods still lack parks, this work was hampered by the lack of a dedicated source of public park funding. Our Conservation Finance staff approached the city with the idea of establishing a dedicated trust fund to assist in acquiring, developing, and maintaining parks.

**Our approach**
At the request of the administration and with the help of funding from several foundations we researched the feasibility of a measure, polled the public, and concluded the best approach would be a property tax levy to create the trust fund. We made program recommendations and drafted ballot language that was approved by the Newark Municipal Council. Once the measure was referred to the ballot, we worked with local partners to form a campaign committee, and to develop and carry out the campaign. Educating communities about the measure was crucial in Newark, where corruption and mistrust predating the Booker years made voters wary of new revenue measures.

**The result**
In the end, 84 percent of voters approved a 1 percent property tax levy that will raise an estimated $1.1 million annually for Newark parks. Among other benefits, the measure will ensure that the new parks created recently will receive adequate funding to remain important community resources for years to come.
About the Conservation Finance service

The Trust for Public Land is the nation’s leader in helping state and local governments design, pass, and implement legislation and ballot measures that create new public funds for parks and land conservation. Our technical services include feasibility research, public opinion polling, measure design, and the design and evaluation of conservation programs.

To pass ballot measures, we work with our lobbying and campaign affiliate, The Conservation Campaign (TCC), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit corporation that mobilizes public support for measures that create public funds for land conservation.

Since 1996, we’ve helped pass more than 450 measures—an 81 percent success rate—creating $34 billion in voter approved funding for parks and open space.

Measure snapshot

Year: 2013
Name: Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund
Measure type: 1 cent per $100 valuation annual property tax levy
Goal: To acquire, develop, and maintain parks, neighborhood playgrounds, playing fields for youth sports, and other green spaces in New Jersey’s largest city
Services provided: Feasibility research, public opinion polling, program recommendations, ballot language, campaign organization and support
Winning margin: 84%
Funds generated: $1.1 million annually
One lesson learned: The importance of education and proactive outreach to overcome community misgivings in a city with a past history of corruption and mistrust of government
Conservation results: An ongoing funding stream to help complete park, playground, and open space projects across the city

PHOTOS: FRONT, AVERY WHAM; BACK, LUKE WALTER PHOTOGRAPHY.
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