

# Land Trust Rally 2005

*Notes Submitted by Dave Sands*

## Creating and Expanding Public Funding for Land Conservation

*Taught by Staff from the Trust for Public Land*

- In 2001, 142 measures passed (71%), predominately funded by tax increases; in 2002, 196 measures passed (73%); in 2003, 101 measures passed (75%); and in 2004, 162 measures passed (75%).
- It gets down to how much people are willing to pay in increased taxes and \$20 to \$30 per year seems to be the tipping point.
- A “Referendum” is when elected officials refer a question to the ballot, while an “Initiative” is placed on the ballot through a petition drive.
- Getting the measure on the ballot and getting the “right” measure on the ballot is more important than the campaign.
- Key variables in any measure are:
  - Funding source
  - Amount and duration
  - Purpose/use of funds
  - Timing (choice of election date)
  - Management/accountability
- Critical Steps for Success
  1. Feasibility Research
    - Priorities
    - Plans
    - Election History
  2. Public Opinion Survey
    - Issue identification
    - Pollster selection and poll design
  3. Program Recommendations
  4. Ballot Language
    - THE most important thing to get right.
  5. Campaign
    - Getting the voters to say yes, raising funds, etc.
- Well funded opposition is the biggest reason for failure.
- Ballot measures are a legal activity for a land trust to be active in.

- In building a coalition, look to eliminate opposition; build a coalition that reflects the community and attracts constituencies needed to get it passed.
  - Who will benefit?
  - Who do people follow?
  - Who can bring monetary resources to the effort?
  - Form an Executive Committee to get things done, and a "Letterhead Committee" to enhance credibility.
  
- Poll in March/April for a fall election.
  - Keep poll results confidential.
  - Conduct a random poll, not "self-selected."
  - Sample people likely to vote.
  
- Why poll?
  - Provides a reality test and perspective.
  - Helps to define the message and messenger.
  
- Poll Contents.
  - Community priorities
  - Test ballot proposal(s)
  - Cost options
  - Popular provisions
  - Arguments for/against
  - Meaningful endorsements
  - Voting propensity (ballot outcomes given various voter turnouts)
  - Demographics (who works for/against; who are the undecided swing voters)
  
- Polling Goals
  - Identify an affordable proposal in the eyes of the voter.
  - Identify compelling reasons for support.
  - Identify accountability provisions.
  - Find out what urban voters want.
  
- The first question in a poll is the most important because it hasn't been biased by previous questions.
  
- Ballot Language Checklist
  - Does it meet legal standards?
  - Does it include the benefits?
  - Does it present the costs in an understandable fashion?
  - Are accountability provisions clearly stated?
  - Does it have a descriptive title?

- Key Phrases for a Ballot Title
  - Protect water quality
  - Preserve natural areas
  - Protect fish and wildlife
  - Audit spending
  - Amount requested
  
- In a statewide effort, mandate the ballot language in the legislation; keep it focused and avoid a "Christmas Tree Effect."
  
- In campaigns, there is no cookie cutter approach.
  
- During feasibility and research stage, consider various approaches.
  - In Massachusetts, voters approved a Deed Recording Fee.
  - Sales tax is regressive in that it is a larger hit to lower incomes.
  - Sales tax can cost more per taxpayer than a property tax increase.
  - Feasibility reports can run from \$5,000 to \$8,000.
  - Must outline need and possible funding mechanisms.
  
- Gubernatorial and presidential elections tend to bring out younger voters, which usually benefits conservation measures.



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