

## Recommendations from the Upper Saucon Township Open Space Study Committee

Based upon a feasibility study conducted by The Trust for Public Land (TPL), and a public opinion survey of 300 likely voters in Upper Saucon Township commissioned by TPL, we offer the following recommendations to the Upper Saucon Township Board of Supervisors.

Timing- An open space ballot measure is not feasible at this time, but may be feasible on the November 2012 ballot. We recommend additional polling in early 2012 to gauge this.

Source/Amount- Voters favor an increase in the Earned Income Tax over a bond measure. Based upon the polling, there was little difference in support between an increase of 0.10% and 0.05%.

Duration- The inclusion of a ten-year sunset on an increase in the Earned Income Tax did not impact voter support for a ballot measure and so we do not recommend including a sunset. This would allow for the option of issuing revenue bonds backed by earned income tax revenues generated through a ballot measure.

Purposes- The top uses for funds supported by voters polled included:

- Protect drinking water sources
- Protect water quality in rivers, lakes and streams
- Preserve farmland
- Preserve natural areas
- Preserve open space

Based upon these findings, we recommend including these purposes in the ballot measure.

Accountability Measures- A large margin of voters are more likely to support a ballot measure if they knew that, 1) a citizens advisory committee would guide the Township in their decision-making, 2) there would be an annual independent audit of how funds are spent, 3) land would be purchased on a strictly voluntary basis from willing landowners, 4) the public would have access to lands purchased, and 5) funds raised locally would be matched. We recommend highlighting these accountability measures in the program design and ballot language.

Ballot Language- We recommend the following ballot language based upon the polling and best practices:

### *Upper Saucon Township Water and Land Conservation Referendum*

*"Do you favor the imposition of an additional Earned Income Tax at the rate of \_\_\_\_\_ by Upper Saucon Township to be used for the purpose of acquiring lands or interests in lands to protect drinking water sources and water quality, and to preserve farmland, natural areas and other open spaces, with oversight by a citizen advisory committee and an annual public audit of expenditures"?*

Educational Program- In the interim, we recommend an educational program to better inform residents about open space preservation issues in Upper Saucon Township, including past preservation accomplishments, priorities and needs for future preservation, and the economic and other benefits of land preservation. This educational program might include articles in the township newsletter and public meetings or events.

Upper Saucon Township, PA  
Public Opinion Survey  
April 11, 2011  
*Key Points Summary*

**Overview**

The Trust for Public Land commissioned a telephone survey of 300 randomly selected registered voters in Upper Saucon Township, Pennsylvania. The survey was conducted the week of April 4th by Barry Zepowitz and Associates of Buffalo, New York. The margin of error for this survey is plus/minus 5.7 percent.

Upon hearing sample ballot language, a slim majority of Upper Saucon Township voters would support an increase in the Earned Income Tax from 1% to 1.1% to acquire land or interests in land to preserve open space, natural areas and farmland. However, voters are divided on the measure when told the annual cost to the average household. Voters favor an increase in the Earned Income Tax over a \$7 million bond measure for these purposes.

Voters' top concerns are controlling spending, taxes and debt. Despite these concerns and mixed support for an earned income tax increase to fund land conservation efforts, voters are supportive of the possible uses of the funds presented. A number of accountability measures are likely to increase voter support for a ballot measure.

**Earned Income Tax Proposal**

- When presented with sample ballot language, a slim majority (51 percent) of voters would support a .10% increase in the Earned Income Tax to acquire lands or interests in lands, while 42 percent would oppose the increase and 7 percent are undecided.
- When told that the proposal would increase the local tax withheld from their salary or wages from 1% to 1.1% costing a household with the median income of \$92,000 annually \$92.00 a year, support decreased to 45 percent for the proposal, with 48 percent against it.
- Proposals for a smaller earned income tax increase of .05% and to establish a 10year sunset on the tax increase had little effect on voter support.
- Neither pro nor con arguments on the proposal have a significant effect on the level of voter support. After hearing a series of arguments both for and against the proposal, support remains unchanged at 50 percent , with 39 percent opposed, and 11 percent undecided.

## Voter Concerns

- 39 percent of voters said that controlling spending, taxes and debt is the most important issue facing Upper Saucon Township, followed by improving schools and education (18 percent), preserving open space and farmland (14 percent), and the weak economy/high unemployment (13 percent).

## Voters Support Possible Uses of the Funds

Voters are quite supportive of the possible uses of funds. All receive at least a majority of support.

Proposed use	Approve	Disapprove	Not sure
Protect drinking water sources	86%	13%	2%
Protect water quality in rivers, lakes...	78%	16%	6%
Preserve farmland	76%	22%	3%
Preserve natural areas	75%	20%	5%
Preserve open space	72%	23%	5%
Protect wildlife habitat	67%	28%	5%
Develop parks and outdoor recreation	55%	39%	6%
Create new parks in township	51%	43%	8%

## Accountability Provisions Increase Support

Respondents were more likely to support the proposal if it included the following accountability provisions.

Information	More likely	Less likely	No difference	Not sure
Citizens Advisory Committee to guide the township in their decision-making	64%	13%	17%	5%
Independent audit of how funds are spent	63%	11%	20%	7%
Land will be purchased on a strictly voluntary basis from willing landowners	60%	13%	19%	9%
Public will have access to land purchased	59%	13%	17%	11%
Funds raised locally would be matched	56%	18%	17%	9%