



Decoding the Jargon: Local Budget Basics for Funding Safe Routes to Parks



When advocates ask city staff for infrastructure improvements, the number one question they are asked is “how will we pay for it?” This factsheet offers an overview of how active transportation and parks and recreation are typically funded. Use this information to learn more about your local budget and prepare for conversations with your city staff and elected officials to advocate for active transportation and park access improvements.

How Active Transportation and Parks and Recreation Are Funded

Parks are typically funded through budget appropriations, taxes, bonds, and fees and service charges. They are also supported by a variety of other funding streams such as grants (federal, state, and philanthropic), public-private partnerships, and other creative support like civic groups and friends of the park groups.¹ Active transportation is funded through a combination of federal, state, regional, and local sources at varying amounts depending on the location. The most common local funding sources, beyond what may be included in capital budgets and general funds are bonds, taxes, and fees and fines.² A partnership between parks and active transportation can help use resources more effectively, complete more projects, and even pull in new sources of funding.

Basic City Budget Terms

Here are key terms to understand your city’s budget. Every community is different, so make sure to research where funding comes from for different departments and projects by exploring public documents and/or connecting with city staff.

- **General Funds** are the main bucket of money. The city’s revenue, such as taxes and fees, goes into that bucket and from there, portions get scooped out for different budgets. Basic city operations like maintenance and smaller capital improvement projects may be paid directly from the general fund.³
- **Capital Improvement Program** is a budget that supports capital projects and equipment. A capital project refers to a project that maintains or improves infrastructure above a set cost. A capital improvement plan (CIP) is a multi-year plan that prioritizes specific capital improvement projects to be funded. This plan is typically updated every few years. Money for this budget can come from the general fund as well as grants and other revenue sources like bonds, grants, and fees.
- **Departmental Budgets** are developed to guide the spending for each department of a city. The process for crafting departmental budgets depends on the jurisdiction, but there are typically chances for public review and input. These budgets can be supported by the general fund as well as other revenue streams like bonds, grants, and fees.

Getting the Attention of City Leadership Can Pay Off

In Honolulu, Hawaii, Blue Zones Hawaii led community advocacy to revitalize Old Stadium Park. They held a five-day park event with workshops, a park cleanup, and a major art project. They worked with a local artist, Safe Routes Partnership, AARP Hawaii, and community members to install a traffic calming art installation. Through these activities and advocacy, in addition to the leadership of a Council Member, the Honolulu City Council passed Resolution 18-225 in late 2018, requesting the city prepare a master plan for Old Stadium Park. In June of 2019, \$250,000 was set aside in the city's Capital Improvement Program and Budget for developing the park's master plan.⁴

Equipped with this overview, look up your city budget and look at the departments you most often interact with (parks and recreation, transportation, public works, etc.). Typically, cities will share budget documents on their website in the interest of transparency. If you can identify when the budget is produced and approved, you may be able to time your advocacy work to align with that. It is also good to see what the city plans to spend money on because there may be opportunities to align your work with their planned projects. For a more detailed look at the budget process, read this brief overview from [Lewisville, Texas](#) and this more in-depth explanation of process and tips for advocacy based on work in [Los Angeles, California](#).

You now know enough to get started learning about your city's budget process, but do not hesitate to ask what different terms mean and ask for clarification from city staff. Figuring out your city's process for allocating funding may be the key to drawing more funding toward community park access priorities.



References

- 1 Matt Eldridge, Kimberly Burrowes, and Patrick Spauster, "Investing in Equitable Urban Park Systems: Emerging Funding Strategies and Tools," 2019. https://cityparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Equity_and_Parks_Funding_7.16.19.pdf.
- 2 Sara Zimmerman and Holly Nickel, "Investing in Health: Robust Local Active Transportation Financing for Healthy Communities," 2019. https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/011119-srs-kp2report-at-final.pdf.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 City and County of Honolulu. The Executive Program and Budget Fiscal Year 2019, accessed June 4, 2021. http://www.honolulu.gov/rep/site/bfs/bfs_docs/BFSCIPBOOK_B18.pdf.