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Bixby Sets Election to Repurpose Vision 2025 tax for November 2015

BIXBY, Okla., Sept. 14, 2015 – Over the past several years, growth in the Tulsa metro has continued southward. As people and businesses looked for the most attractive areas in the high-growth portions of Tulsa County, Bixby catapulted to the fastest growing community in the state. Progress and growth have led to an unprecedented opportunity to secure the city's identity and unique place in the region. Based on a vision of Bixby as a leader in pursuing and creating opportunities for a high quality of life, the Bixby City Council adopted four propositions to be brought before registered voters in Bixby on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2015. City leaders see the propositions as a way to continue to build on the progress Bixby has made over the past several years while maintaining current tax rates.

The four propositions cover:

- Development of the Downtown River Corridor
- Additional public safety staff, including police, fire, and street department personnel
- Enhanced funding to operate, maintain, and improve Bixby parks and recreation facilities
- Improved resources for capital expenditures

Proposition 1, the City of Bixby 2015 Downtown River Corridor Sales Tax, repurposes a three-tenths of one cent of the expiring "Vision 2025" sales tax. Vision 2025 was a Tulsa County sales tax totaling six-tenths of a penny and is set to expire December 31st, 2016. The proposition would fund enhancements to the Arkansas River Corridor including a new park and access amenities along with bank stabilization measures; in-channel river excavation for recreational waterways on both the north and south banks; and reclamation of river bottom deposits for elevating City-owned properties in strategic locations, bringing them out of the floodplain to encourage additional Arkansas River development.

These improvements will be connected and expanded to include downtown Bixby through an expanded streetscaping initiative, incorporating landmark and directional signage installation

plans that have been developed as part of the Charley Young Event Park project. “Our investment in the Downtown River Corridor is the core of our strategy to combine economic development objectives with quality of life enhancements for both residents and existing businesses,” said Bixby Mayor John Easton. The sales tax extension would go into effect on Jan. 1, 2017 and yield an estimated \$20-\$28 million over 20 years.

“The Arkansas River development plan will capitalize on our most successful destination locations for both residents and visitors alike – Washington Irving Park and Bentley Park – by linking them to one another using our most underutilized resource, the Arkansas River. The river and two parks will be connected in turn to a new downtown venue – Charley Young Event Park, creating a center for both local activity and development,” Jared Cottle, Bixby City Engineer, said.

Proposition 2 repurposes twenty-five hundredths of one penny of the expiring Vision 2025 sales tax and would fund additional public safety personnel within the Bixby police, fire, and streets departments. The proposition is expected to generate more than \$700,000 a year, enough to hire, train, and equip three additional firefighters, four additional police officers, two communication officers, and two street and drainage laborers. “The Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Public Works Director all agree that even though the city has trended upward in growth for the past ten years, staffing levels have not kept pace with the population expansion. All three departments have experienced little or no growth during the same period,” Easton said.

Proposition 3 repurposes a portion of an existing half-penny tax originally approved by Bixby residents in 2006 as a means to regulate the debt service burden on property owners. However, due to on-going growth, the portion allocated for debt service commitments, one-quarter of a penny, is no longer necessary and would be reallocated as one tenth of a penny for capital improvements in the city of Bixby and fifteen hundredths of a penny for parks and recreation funding. The supplemental parks funding would be combined with the remaining one-quarter of a penny existing tax supporting parks and recreation to create a total allocation of four-tenths of a penny for the upkeep and maintenance of City of Bixby parks. Proposition 4 would extend the 2006 sales tax for the maintenance and upkeep of all Bixby parks until it’s repealed by voters. “With citizens investing over \$10 million in the last two bond issues to create premier park and recreational facilities, additional funding is vital to ensure that we can continue to maintain them at the level expected by our users,” Don Cash, Bixby Parks Director, said.

Bentley Park provides a good example of the role that parks can play in both local quality of life and economic impact. During this past baseball season, nearly 950 teams participated in regular season games at Bentley Park. In addition, the park hosted 14 tournaments and three World Series. The softball complex hosted nearly 335 teams play in regular season games and 13 tournaments. There are 735 soccer teams registered for this fall season, including the OKACL Academy League, which brings in teams from Arkansas and Dallas. Meanwhile 7,000 players, parents, volunteers, vendors, and referees participate in the two major soccer tournaments hosted at Bentley Park.

“The City Council recognizes that we have reached a critical decision point setting a direction for the future of the city. By targeting our investment in the areas with the greatest potential for combining both citizen and commercial opportunities, we believe that we can continue to remain the regional community of choice and provide the services that go along with that distinction,” Easton said.

Public meetings to discuss the proposals in detail and receive public input have been scheduled for 7:00 PM on September 22nd and again on October 22nd at the Bixby Community Center.

