

Oakland County Voters to Decide on DIA Support

(C. Proxmire, Ferndale 115 News, June 1, 2012 ed)

Urged on by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Paterson, and over two hour's worth of public comment, seven Oakland County Republicans joined eight Democrats (Mattie Hatchett of Pontiac being absent) in voting to create an authority to place a millage on the ballot to give 0.2 mil property tax collection to fund the struggling Detroit Institute of Arts.

Over sixty Oakland County residents signed up to speak at the May 17, 2012 County Commission meeting, with only a few that spoke against it. Additional supporters left standing room only for much of the meeting, which lasted over two hours. Residents from all over the County, including many business owners and representatives from larger corporations spoke in support. Many talked about their experiences being inspired by field trips to the museum as children, or how having cultural attractions helps attract business, families and investment in the area. Those opposed cited the importance of uncompromised political party solidarity and a disdain for paying taxes.

✘ In a [Daily Tribune Interview](#) with Charlie Crumm days before the vote, Patterson noted that the vote only puts the question on the ballot for the voters to decide; it was not a vote to increase taxes. He also said, "Some people think that it creates a quality of life. I try, in my 20 years as County Executive, to create an environment in Oakland County that makes it a good place to live, work and raise a family. And part of that quality of life in in fact playgrounds, swimming pools, golf courses and frankly the arts is also part of that."

Republicans Bill Dwyer (Farmington Hills), David Potts (Birmingham), Mike Gingell (Orion Twp), Kathy Crawford (Novi), Robert Hoffman (Highland Twp) Phil Weipert (S. Lyon) and

Angela River (Auburn Hills) voted in favor of establishing the authority and putting the measure on the August 7 ballot, along with every present Democrat.

The 10 year 0.2 mil property tax would cost the owner of a \$200,000 home \$20 per year. If voters in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties vote yes, it will mean \$20-\$23 million in steady revenue to fund the DIA, which has already slashed its budget from \$32 million to \$25 million. According to [Kathleen Gray of the Detroit Free Press](#), the State of Michigan has gradually cut back funding over the past 10-20 years, once providing \$16 million a year, now contributing nothing. 

The millage is similar to one approved by voters in 2008, giving the three Counties authority and support to the Detroit Zoo. Other regional arts and education attractions have folded in recent years without stable public support, including the Detroit Science Center and the Bell Isle Aquarium.

The 127-year-old DIA attracts over 400,000 visitors each year. According to their website, "The DIA's collection is among the top six in the United States, comprising a multicultural and multinational survey of human creativity from prehistory through the 21st century. The foundation was  laid by William Valentiner, a scholar and art historian from Berlin, who was director from 1924 to 1945 . His extensive contacts in Europe, along with support from generous patrons, enabled him to acquire many important works that established the framework of today's collections. Among the notable acquisitions during his tenure are Mexican artist Diego Rivera's [Detroit Industry](#) fresco cycle, which Rivera considered his most successful work, and Vincent Van Gogh's [Self Portrait](#), the first van Gogh painting to enter a U.S. museum collection."

Oakland County Commissioners Craig Covey and Helaine Zack shared their opinions. Though currently in different

Districts, Covey and Zack are running against each other in the Aug. 7 Primary [thanks to the newly-drawn Commission Districts](#). “First I am glad that the DIA initiative is on the ballot so that residents have the democratic right to choose to support or not. Personally I love the DIA and am very supportive of the arts. As a child, I took art classes there. Our family regularly visits DIA and other art museums. I hope that residents will choose to invest in our gem,” Zack said.

Covey is a fan of the arts as well. “I totally support the Detroit Institute of Arts, and understand the importance of art in general, and the DIA specifically, to our region,” he said. “But my vote to enable the county to create the authority and the ballot question is also about giving the people of our county the ability to vote on this small tax increase.”

Learn more about the DIA at <http://www.dia.org/about/history.aspx>. Learn more about Oakland County governance at <http://www.oakgov.com>.

The people speaking in the video below are just a couple of the 62 who signed up to speak that day.

