



Board of County Commissioners

Aaron D. Mays, 3rd District
200 SE 7th St. Room B-11, Courthouse
Topeka, Kansas 66603
Ph. 785.251.4040
Email: Aaron.Mays@snco.us
Website: www.snco.us

House Committee on Taxation

HB 2732 - Proponent Testimony

Aaron Mays – Shawnee County Commissioner

March 14, 2022

Chairman Smith & Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 2732. My name is Aaron Mays and I currently serve as the Chairman of the Shawnee County Commission. I want to make sure to state that I am speaking for myself today and this testimony is not an official position of Shawnee County.

Shawnee County operates all of Gage Park except The Topeka Zoo and the Kansas Children's Discovery Center. Gage Park serves a destination for both Shawnee Countians and visitors from abroad. The park sits on 160 acres that were donated to the City of Topeka in 1899. Over the years, amenities have been added to the park making it the premier destination for family friendly entertainment in Shawnee County. The park hosts our community with countless summer camps, concerts, theatrical performances, weddings, fundraisers, sports tournaments, family reunions, and much more. We encourage tourism with the historical mini-train and carousel, Blaisdell Aquatic facility, Helen Hocker Theatre, and Reinisch Rose Gardens. Our corporate sponsors support us with partnerships such as the Hill's Bark Park.

While we are very proud of the park, there is a significant amount of deferred maintenance needed to bring it back to its former glory. The mini train is old and parts are no longer available. To keep it running safely and reliably we estimate it will cost up to \$600K. The tracks for the train also need safety improvements that will likely cost up to \$500K. We have three old stone shelter houses that are at the end of their useful lives and need replaced. Playground equipment is heavily used and needs to be replaced regularly. The Westlake Dam had a significant leak last year and needed emergency repairs. The pool needs continued on-going maintenance. The Helen Hocker Theatre building is very old and needs to be renovated, moved, or replaced. The list goes on. Funding is often hard to come by. When looking at the totality of the Shawnee County budget, Parks & Recreation is typically one of the first items cut when revenues slow.

Rather than raising property taxes to accomplish necessary improvements, the bill before you would allow us to ask our citizens if Gage Park is a high priority to them and their quality of life. Many Shawnee Countians have a strong sentimental attachment to Gage Park and the amenities within it. It's not uncommon to hear of three and four generations of families riding the mini train together. While I can't predict if the voters will approve the Gage Park Authority and the accompanying sales tax, I think we owe it to them to ask. The only way for us to do that is by first asking you to approve HB 2732.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of House Bill 2732. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.