

## **20 children's programs slated to get levy cash**

**Portland commissioners say next week they'll approve the money that will mainly help low-income children**

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SCOTT LEARN

Twenty after-school and mentoring programs are in line to receive up to \$6.4 million in the next two years from the children's property tax levy that Portland voters approved in 2002.

An allocation committee headed by Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman selected the 20 winners from 51 applicants. Saltzman's council colleagues said Wednesday that they'll approve the funding next week. The county board already has signed off.

The money from the Children's Investment Fund established by the levy will go to 12 after-school programs for fourth- through eighth-graders and eight mentoring programs throughout the city. The programs are mainly aimed at children from low-income families.

Saltzman said there were \$22 million in requests for the two-year grants, more than triple the available money. That's "a sobering reminder that the need in our community far exceeds the available funding," he said.

At the council hearing Wednesday, representatives of one mentoring program, REAP Inc., protested that their program had not made the cut.

Director Mark Williams noted that REAP's proposal scored higher than four other programs awarded a combined total of \$1 million. REAP wanted to expand mentoring in the David Douglas School District, where poverty is among the highest in the city and gang membership is growing.

Nancy Hamilton, outreach coordinator for the investment fund, said the committee liked the program, but had to balance the money between mentoring and after-school programs. The committee's recommended allocation would provide after-school programs at four David Douglas schools.

The REAP proposal requested children's levy money totaling 85 percent of its current budget, the third-highest percentage among the 51 applicants. Hamilton said committee members don't want groups to become dependent on the five-year levy, set to expire in 2008.

Voter approval of the levy increased Portlanders' property taxes by 40.26 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, or roughly \$60 a year for the owner of a home assessed at \$150,000.

Commissioners Jim Francesconi and Erik Sten said they won't second-guess the allocation committee. The panel deliberated for six hours after community and academic volunteers ranked the applicants.

"The fact that there are not 30 other programs in here (protesting) is a good sign," Francesconi said. "It's not for us to micromanage."

The levy is expected to raise \$8.5 million, with as much as \$500,000 for administration and \$8 million for programs. The latest round allocated \$3.2 million a year to after-school and mentoring programs. Two earlier rounds spent \$4.8 million a year on early childhood education and child-abuse prevention.

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