



Cincinnati Area Board Fights City Council on Proposed Property Tax Hike and Wins

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"My Home is not UR ATM!" read one of the hand-lettered signs held high by a concerned citizen at Cincinnati's City Hall last June. The lively annual debate over a proposed property tax hike was underway, and the Cincinnati Area Board of REALTORS® (CABR) had mobilized its troops.

Although limiting property taxes has been an ongoing fight for the 4,200-member association, this was the first time it had the resources of the REALTOR® Party behind it. Mark Quarry, CABR's Director of Governmental Affairs, notes, "As a local association, we only have so much in terms of resources at our disposal.. The REALTOR® Party has been a huge development for us; it's propelled us so far forward in terms of our ability to advocate for homeowners here!"

In a two-step Issues Mobilization campaign funded by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, CABR first produced a compelling telephone survey of Cincinnati residents, showing a whopping 74 percent opposition to the latest proposed tax increases. "With that tool, alone, we were able to apply pressure directly to the City Council," explains Quarry, who shared the survey with local radio, television, and newspaper outlets -- as well as in his testimony before the Council.

Next, working closely with one of NAR's veteran political consultants, CABR launched a robo-call campaign in the week leading up to the special session when the vote was held. "For all practical purposes, she did a lot of the heavy lifting for us," admits Quarry. "She helped us develop a game plan and advised us on the most effective strategy." The consultants put together the robo-calls, which got many citizens to City Hall to show their opposition – and wave signs – and also patched willing recipients through to their Council Members' offices for more immediate protest. "I was down there in City Hall, and Council members and their staffers were coming out of their offices asking me to make it stop!" laughs Quarry, "I told them, 'You have the power to make it stop: are your Council Members interested in being re-elected?'"

In the end, CABR succeeded in holding the line on the rate of the property tax that goes to the General Fund; this portion is capped, thanks to CABR's vigorous property tax rollback efforts dating back to 1999. However, the Council did vote to increase the rate of the property tax used to fund bond payments for capital projects, from 5.9 to 6.25 mills for 2013 and 6.50 mills in 2014; this portion of the property tax is not controlled by city charter, representing a significant vulnerability for Cincinnati homeowners. Says Quarry, "We want to be pragmatic about this, and we're certainly not opposed to the city floating a bond to make necessary capital improvements. The Council just can't expect to pay for them with property taxes, at will."

CABR is now working with NAR to find ways to cap this open-ended property tax rate. Using another of the REALTOR® Party services, it has submitted the city charter for a complete analysis by Robinson & Cole, particularly questioning the unlimited portion of the property tax code. "Our hope is that they'll help us with ideas and strategies to



reduce and limit the vulnerability of homeowners,” says Quarry, who notes that it may take a charter amendment to restructure the way the city receives property tax revenue. “In the meantime, we’re gearing up for our annual budget dance with the City Council...”

For more information on how the Cincinnati REALTORS® are tapping into REALTOR® Party resources to control property taxes, contact Mark Quarry, Director of Governmental Affairs of the Cincinnati Area Board of REALTORS®, at MQarry@cabr.org or 513.842.3014.



Cincinnati REALTORS® and citizens put pressure on City Hall to stop the property tax increase.