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City Councilors Discuss Concerns with MAPS 4 Proposal at Community Event

By [KAYLA BRANCH](#) Published: Mon, August 26, 2019

Three city councilors emphasized one central point at a community event Monday night: The MAPS 4 proposal has its issues.

Attendees at a forum hosted by **VOICE**, a local civic engagement organization, listened as city council members James Cooper, JoBeth Hamon and Nikki Nice - Wards 2, 6 and 7, respectively - discussed their concerns over the proposal.

At the top of the list were the Innovation District proposal, the use of public funds to build or renovate sporting stadiums and the lower-than-requested funding given to address homelessness.

“When we talk about compromise, we’re actually asking the people who are hurting the most to do all the compromising,” Hamon said.

Nice said there are many positives in the current proposal that will directly impact Ward 7, which encompasses Northeast Oklahoma City, such as the creation of a civil rights museum and various upgrades to community centers and parks.

But she said to get the good, most people will have to vote for projects they don’t support.

“Unfortunately, all of these great things are encompassed in a lot of stuff where we’re like ‘I don’t really know if I want that,’” Nice said. “But in order for us to get the great things, we have to vote for everything else.”

The MAPS 4 proposal is estimated to raise nearly \$980 million over eight years and includes 16 projects that will be funded at various levels.



Local civic engagement organization VOICE hosted a community forum to discuss the MAPS 4 proposal Monday night at the Tower Theater. [Kayla Branch/The Oklahoman]

This MAPS package is the first to focus most of its funding on human and neighborhood needs, such as mental health facilities, a family justice center, affordable housing and a diversion hub connected to county jail operations.

But since the proposal was unveiled last week, many community members said they would like to see even more money go to fund critical social needs rather than projects they believe could be financed by the private sector.

“My concerns are about \$278 million dollars,” Cooper said, referring to the amount meant to fund stadium upgrades and the Innovation District. “But the things that I love total about \$700 million.”

Cooper said he has reservations about publicly funded arenas, but did go on to say that since the Chesapeake Arena is owned by the city, the city should fund upkeep. And with the multipurpose stadium, Cooper said he would support it being built in south Oklahoma City where he has students who dream about playing pro soccer.

The city council is set to vote on the MAPS proposal at its Tuesday morning meeting, but Hamon and Nice said they would be interested in pushing back the vote.

“As of Tuesday last week, when I was told the vote would be tomorrow, I said, ‘I still feel like I’m not there, why are we rushing this?’” Hamon told the crowd. “I essentially got the response, ‘Well what more is there to talk about?’ And I said I thought there was a lot more to talk about.”

Cooper said he doesn’t believe delaying the vote would make any real difference in the proposal outcome.

VOICE members also presented the need for a different approach to operational funding during the event. MAPS dollars only go to fund capital projects, meaning they are used to build things rather than providing ongoing funding to maintain and operate those projects.

The current plan is to have roughly \$100 million of MAPS 4 dollars diverted to an endowment fund for operational and maintenance funding, which VOICE said would only generate roughly \$4 million a year to be split between various projects.

“This will be a drop in the bucket compared to the need,” said VOICE member Nick Singer.

If the city council does approve the MAPS 4 package at its Tuesday meeting, the package will go to a vote of the people this December.