

The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) believes that progressive forms of taxation are more just and equitable, for that reason alone, we urge a Yes vote on the Fair Tax Amendment. The cumulative tax burden on Illinois' low-income and middle-income residents is regressive, and shifting to a progressive state income tax is one step toward solving that systemic inequity. That is the opportunity on the table, we do not know when it will come again, and we should seize it.

Illinois cannot equitably recover from the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racial inequalities without creating additional revenue to invest in job creation, infrastructure, education and more. One danger in not adopting the Fair Tax now is that as revenue pressures build, future tax increases will continue the pattern of placing a disproportionate taxation burden on those who can bear it least. This is an opportunity to forestall that by instituting progressive tax policies. It is also a moment to live up to our commitments to end systemic racism – the regressive nature of our cumulative tax burden hits Black and Brown communities the hardest – and again, this a real opportunity to do something tangible about it. So, vote Yes.

And then demand more. More from our leaders in Springfield, more from our 7,000+ units of government, more from the private sector and philanthropy, more from civic organizations, and more from MPC. We cannot help but feel some sense of collective shame that this – a shift to the normal mode of taxation in most of the U.S.– is the only thing on the table. We know that State and local governments have crushing pension obligations. We know we could be investing in our communities and infrastructure more wisely. We know there is more to be done about our regressive cumulative tax burden. We know the Fair Tax will relieve some burden on those that need it, but only some, as the State still needs revenue. It is a part of narrowing the racial wealth gap, but we know it is not enough. We know all these things, and yet, the table is laid with one choice. A fair and just one, but the only one. Why?

There are meaningful steps we can take to make our pension obligations more manageable, so that more of our tax revenue goes to paying for the needed government services of today, rather than the unaffordable employee benefits of yesterday. Yet that dialogue has gone cold.

The State can lean on all the school districts, townships, single-purpose districts and more to consider consolidation, shared services and other measures to bring that regressive cumulative tax burden down. Instead we have Task Force after Task Force resulting in little or no change.

We can spur growth in communities that need it by coordinating investments across and between state agencies, and reshaping the distribution of resources from the State to villages and cities throughout Illinois. But will we?

The State can adopt more rigorous selection criteria for major infrastructure projects, leading to more equitable, sustainable and economically catalytic outcomes. In recent weeks, the Governor's Office, legislative leaders and the RTA have indicated support for this approach – let's get it done.

And there's more, so much more. Demand more. If the Fair Tax is the first step, what's the next, and the next, and the next? Together those steps could create a path to recovery, racial equity, fiscal health and our collective, brighter future.

The Fair Tax is just; it just isn't enough. It's necessary, but it isn't sufficient. Comprehensive reforms are needed. Instead, voters are already at the polls, being asked to support either a progressive income tax or the status quo. There's no third option of equitable revenues plus true reform. We wish that was the case, but it isn't. Vote Yes, because it is the right thing to do. And then hold everyone accountable, again and again, to shape that option, to chart those next steps, and to create the Illinois we all deserve.