

Parkland Dedication FAQ

12% on August 12

What is Parkland Dedication?

The Parkland Dedication ordinance is a tool to diversify the funding structure for our park system. As St. Paul develops and re-develops, land is set aside or money is deposited into a special fund, to support the improvement, development, and acquisition of parks, playgrounds, recreation facilities, wetlands, trails, open space, or conservation purposes.

What can I do?

The St. Paul City Council will vote on an amended ordinance (we currently have an ordinance that is being updated) on August 12. **Please contact the City Council and the Mayor before August 12.** Their contact information can be found at the City of St. Paul's website, www.stpaul.gov. **Tell them you SUPPORT our suggestions and to change it into a REAL Parkland Dedication ordinance that will actually BENEFIT our parks, trails, and open spaces. Ask them to support 12%.**

Why is it being changed?

The current ordinance is based on increased parking spaces with development and is widely accepted to be ineffective. In areas such as the transit corridor of the Green Line, development is not necessarily adding parking spaces even though increased residents and usage put added demand on the parks and trails. In 2013, the MN Legislature gave us clear legal authority to collect at platting and permitting, and we should make the most of the opportunity. Minneapolis enacted their current ordinance in 2014.

Why should I support your recommendations?

As drafted, the amended ordinance is very weak for multiple reasons. Here are just a few of them:

1. **“Shall dedicate” is changed to “may dedicate.”** (Anyone who has ever lived with a teenager knows the different outcome one can expect with those word choices!) It turns the ordinance from a requirement into an option.
2. In cases where cash would be accepted instead of land, the per residential fee is proposed at \$1,200 per unit. Minneapolis has a \$1,521 fee and other cities throughout the metro area have much higher fees, with an average of \$3,284. In 2006, when our current ordinance was debated, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended \$3,000. Today, we are recommending \$3,500 - \$4,000 to account for inflation and acquisition of parks and trails called for in adopted city plans. Some cities in the metro use \$6,500 as the per residential unit fee.
3. Many of our neighbors have strong ordinances with a common maximum of 10% at both platting and permitting, for residential, commercial and industrial. St. Paul's proposed ordinance recommends maximums of 4.5% residential and 0.5% commercial/industrial at permitting, which is most often when parkland dedication will occur because we are a mostly-developed city. In the rare cases of platting, the recommendation is a maximum of 9% residential and 4% commercial/industrial, but with multiple exemptions, including an exemption for up to 25,000 square feet of buildings, not counting parking and additional land use. **We are recommending removing the exemptions and a maximum of 12%** based on the 2006 Planning Commission recommendation of 12% and that we have 11.7% parkland. If we want to keep our parkland rate steady, (which is what the city claims to want) and acquire land as city plans call for, 12% is reasonable and necessary. In 2006, the understanding was that if the ordinance didn't work, it would be fixed. Time to do it and do it right.

Why do parks, playgrounds, recreation facilities, trails, wetlands, open space or conservation areas matter?

1. Studies have repeatedly shown that parks increase the value of investments. Throughout the city, but especially in areas that NEED investment, increasing funding for our parks is a way to INVEST in these communities.
2. Having parks accessible to ALL our citizens is important as we build EQUITY in our city. We have wonderful parks in our community, but if they are difficult for many of us to access, how is that equitable? There are about a dozen parks throughout the city that most people don't even realize are parks because they are just areas filled with weeds and trash. The money from Parkland Dedication can be used to improve these areas and make them look and function as parks.
3. Climate change will affect all of us, but the MN Department of Health has projected that it will affect the most vulnerable amongst us the most. Parks help cool the urban heat island. Trails encourage commuters to drive less, so less pollution.
4. Green spaces are important to filter water, to cleanse air, as places to mentally refresh ourselves, as habitat for wildlife and food for pollinators, and to connect and build community.

Will the new ordinance add more to our parks than the current ordinance?

Without our suggested changes, it's anyone's guess, really. As pointed out above, by making it an option rather than a requirement, I'd say “no.” In addition to that basic fact, there are multiple exemptions and various formulas in the proposed ordinance, making it difficult to even compute what a particular project might generate, yet alone compare that to the current ordinance. The City of St. Paul has adopted wonderful neighborhood and city-wide plans, including The Great River Passage Master Plan, that call for improvement and acquisition of parks, trails, and green space. But, where will the funding come from? An effective Parkland Dedication ordinance is a tool to help us achieve these shared community goals.