

Legacy Amendment

Minnesota voters overwhelmingly supported the Legacy Amendment to the state constitution in the November election. To all of you who supported the amendment by voting YES for the environment, we thank you. Some of you put up signs, make phone calls to friends or wrote letters to the editor. It all helped and together we won. The additional 3/8 of 1% of the sales tax will go into effect July 2009. Distribution of funds will likely begin in 2010.

One of the provisions of this Constitutional Amendment was that the new money raised could NOT be used to replace other state funding. The Amendment made it clear and the people voted for more money for the environment, not the same amount of money coming from a new source.

But, and here comes the hard part, Minnesota is facing a \$4.85 billion shortfall in the 2010-2011 budget. Would it surprise you if the governor or state law makers began looking at the money raised by the Legacy Amendment as a way of filling the budget hole? No. We didn't think you would be surprised. Those who voted for the Amendment will need to hold the governor and the legislature accountable to not undo the will of the people by disproportionately cutting parks, water and conservation funding when they apply the budget cutting scalpel.

The Amendment called for 14.25% of the revenue raised to be spent on parks and trails, an estimated \$39 million in fiscal year 2010-11. That seems pretty clear, but it is anything but clear. How much of that \$39 million will be spent in the metro area verses spent in greater Minnesota? That is the question for the legislature and the governor to decide. The seven county metro area collects 66% of the sales tax collected for the entire state. Is the only fair thing to do to spend 66% of the tax collected in the Metro area? Or, because Greater Minnesota is so much larger than the metro area, should it get the lion's share of the money?

Governor Pawlenty's budget favors Greater Minnesota with out-state getting 62% of the money and the Metro Parks System getting 38%. The Friends support an allocation of 45% to 50% of funding for the Metro Park System.

Two things support greater funding for the Metro system: amount of tax collected plus the number of visits per year. There were 30 million visits to the Metro Regional Park System in 2004 compared to 8.1 million to the State Parks and less than 1.5 million to greater Minnesota regional parks, according to the *Parks Study Group Report* of the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources.

Natural areas and wildlife habitat is set to receive 33% of funds raised through the Legacy Amendment or about \$180 million. Again, Metro needs are competing with the needs of Greater Minnesota. Prairie restoration projects and other natural resources projects costing \$4 million have been identified in the Metro area. As the legislative session moves forward we will keep you informed about how the debate is evolving and steps you can take to assure adequate funding for Metro parks and natural areas.

Planning for a future gift to the Friends

When you remember the Friends in your will, it makes a difference. Please consider the Friends when you write your will. One story of a Friend who chose to remember the Friends in her will

came to us recently.

Several years ago when our 'Friend' was revising her will, she looked around the community at the organizations which were working hard for the causes she most valued. She wanted her legacy to reflect the things she valued and spent her time and money on. Topping the list of good causes for her and her partner was the park system in Saint Paul and Ramsey County. Protecting the Mississippi River, which she sees from her window and regularly walks, rose to the absolute pinnacle of that list. She and her partner felt a deep connection to the river and knew the importance of parks and open space to the citizens of this area. On her daily walks it was clear that the river was a place for all types of people and people of all incomes. It included walkers, bikers, skaters, fishers and birders.

She had watched the Friends of the Parks fighting to protect the river and protect the parks from loss and inappropriate development. When she couldn't be at public meetings to speak on behalf of her treasured river, she knew the Friends would be there for her to make sure the public was represented.

When her partner died, she asked that the memorials be given in his name to the Friends and many people responded in kind. Today there is a memorial grove that will stand watch over the river for years to come. Adding the Friends to her will ensures her legacy will also stand watch over that river valley.

Active Living Ramsey County

Cancer, heart disease and stroke are the top three causes of death in Ramsey County. All of these are impacted by life style choices and all are associated with physical inactivity. Overweight and obesity are a ballooning problem with 223,600 Ramsey County adults being overweight and at risk for chronic disease.

BOX THIS IN BORDER

Ramsey county residents are sitting down

57% of urban residents are inactive*

32% of suburban residents are inactive*

75% of residents face obstacles to being active*

Obstacles include: poor street lighting, fear of crime, lack of sidewalks and heavy traffic

31% of boys exercise 30 minutes a day**

16% of girls exercise 30 minutes a day**

*2007 Active Living Ramsey County! Survey

**Ramsey County youth, 2007 MN Student Survey

In response to growing concerns about rising health care costs, obesity rates, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and a need for an increased sense of community, Commissioner Jan Parker brought together stakeholders from across the county to explore ways to begin an Active Living Initiative. The goal? Active living becoming a way of life where residents can safely and conveniently incorporate physical activity into their daily routine.

The Active Living coalition strengthens its work by bringing cross discipline perspectives from

partners ranging from public works, parks and recreation, police, to public health. The cross discipline work forges new partnerships among people and organizations which often have not seen themselves as having a common mission. Together they are working to create and promote environments that make it safe and convenient for people to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines, without having to go to the gym. They create partnerships and work to bring sustained changes in design, transportation and public/private policies to support physical activity.

If you want more information about this program or want to get involved, visit www.activelivingramseycounty.org

QUOTE IN MARGIN, “You can’t expect people to get out and walk if they don’t feel safe crossing the street!” Ramsey County resident

Farewell to an old friend

Mark Davis died on December 31, 2008. The Friends AND the parks in Saint Paul have lost a great advocate. Mark served on the board of the Friends since 2003 and played a significant role in developing our 20th anniversary book.

Mark loved the outdoors and passed that love on to his children and to the hundreds of children he took camping every summer. Mark’s undergraduate work was in forestry and he worked as a forester in Alabama for a number of years. He was also a poet and later made and sold wooden toys for children.

While living in northern Wisconsin he decided he wanted to teach history and commuted to the University of Wisconsin at Madison where he qualified to become a history teacher. In the early 1990's he moved with his family to Saint Paul and there taught history at Century College.

Mark was a wonderful writer and helped write the history of the Friends of the Parks for our 20th anniversary in 2005.

Mark died of leukemia on New Year’s Eve. He will be greatly missed by his family, the Friends of the Parks and all the people who loved the outdoors. A tree will be planted in Mark’s honor in a Saint Paul park this spring.

Off leash dog areas in Ramsey County

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department operates four off-leash areas. Each area has a unique environment, terrain and size. The locations of the sites are easily accessible for County residents. The areas are: Rice Creek Trail Corridor in Shoreview (13 acres), the Lower Afton area of Battle Creek Regional Park in Maplewood (12 acres), Woodview Open Space site in Roseville (4 acres) and the Otter Lake site in White Bear Township (10 acres).

In 1997 Ramsey County dipped its paw in the off-leash issue by establishing a pilot program at Battle Creek and Rice Creek. Time and trends have changed since those first pilot projects. There has been a dramatic increase in use and user conflicts due to expanded use of designated areas. The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department is evaluating the use patterns and boundaries of the existing off-leash areas and has been working closely with volunteers, dog

owners and user groups to develop new off-leash area standards and identify an improvement plan for each site.

The off-leash standards, still in development, will include: delineating areas with fencing, implementation of a new educational sign package, transitional entrances, and the possible expansion of the Battle Creek Regional Park Off-Leash Area. Additionally, the Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department will design a manageable off-leash area maintenance plan focused on natural resources conservation. The county is very fortunate to have volunteers who assist with maintaining the current sites and who will continue to be critical partners in the transition into the new off-leash area standards.

Ramsey County has no plans to designate any additional off-leash sites. The County is encouraging local municipalities to share the responsibility of planning and designating new off-leash areas to help reduce the impact of existing overuse within the county system. "Municipalities need to make a commitment to provide space for pet owners to exercise and socialize their dogs without being leashed," said Greg Mack, Ramsey County Director of Parks.

How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife

Douglas Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home, How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*, will speak at 7:00 at the John B. Davis Lecture Hall in the Ruth Stricker Dayton Campus Center at Macalester College on March 16. "We help decide which animals will make it and which will not every time we plant or remove something from our yards," according to Tallamy. The event is free and open to the public. For more information contact valwrites@comcast.net

Tree Sale 2009

Tree Sale 2009 is underway and the tree brochure is included in this mailing. For the first time we had a professional graphics person lay it out and we have printed it in color. We hope you enjoy the improvement as much as we liked doing it. If you receive duplicates of the brochure, please pass it on to a friend or neighbor. Information about the tree sale is also posted on our website. A real plus of going to the website is you can click and see a more comprehensive description of each tree and a larger photo. www.friendsoftheparks.org

The tree sale is the Friends' only fund raiser. Please consider buying a tree or shrub for your yard, or a tree for a park. This year the Friends are contributing a 'tree gator' to accompany all trees donated to parks. The last few summers July and August have been extremely dry and the drought has taken a heavy toll on young trees. 'Tree gators' are heavy plastic watering bags that zip around the trunk of a young tree. The bag can be filled weekly then the water gradually seeps into the soil, providing adequate moisture during the tree's first years after transplant. If you wish to make an additional \$5 contribution to help defray the cost of the tree gators, we would greatly appreciate it.

It has been a long cold winter, but spring will come and with it time to plant your trees and shrubs. Please place your tree order soon. We have limited quantities on a few varieties and orders will be filled in the order received.

Funding for the tree gator program is made possible through the generous bequest of Paula “Sunray” Culp. This year the Friends will also upgrade the size of trees donated to parks in Ramsey County with funding from Sunray’s estate.