

Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County support a robust Parkland Dedication ordinance. The Minnesota Legislature gave us an opportunity to diversify the funding structure of our park system and we should seize that opportunity.

Why is this important? According to the Pew Charitable Trust, Minnesota weathered the recent recession better than most other states because of its diversified tax structure. You, the planners and visionaries of the City of St. Paul, can apply this lesson locally in order to better fund our parks.

According to the American Planning Association report, *How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development*, “Parks provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits to our cities. They are also a source of positive economic benefits. They enhance property values, increase municipal revenue, bring in homebuyers and workers, and attract retirees. At the bottom line parks are a good financial investment for a community.”

Neighboring cities are collecting parkland dedication fees and supplementing their park budgets. For example, Woodbury adds around \$1 million to their park budget annually through Parkland Dedication.

Percentages for dedication vary, but 10% of estimated market value of the land is commonly used. We think we can be a little bit better than “common” here in St. Paul and suggest a 12% dedication. Indeed, that was the unanimous recommendation of the Planning Commission in Resolution 06-80, dated October 20, 2006, when the City of St. Paul first undertook the issue of Parkland Dedication.

Some will tell you that St. Paul cannot afford a robust Parkland Dedication ordinance. Quite the opposite is true. We can’t afford to miss this opportunity. By having a weak ordinance, the result is lower revenue and therefore subpar amenities compared to our neighboring communities.

An interesting trend developed during the recent recession that should be carefully noted as decisions about how to fund our park system are considered. Many private citizens recognize the value of parks. When those private citizens happen to be very wealthy private citizens, they are willing to fund parks when the public funding is scarce. According to a recent New York Times article, “The Billionaires’ Park”, this trend is occurring in places like New York City, Philadelphia, Houston, and Tulsa.

While extra money for parks is hard to turn down, when it comes from the private sector instead of the public sector, it leaves the decision of where to invest in the hands of the donor. Conveniently, the donor invests in areas of the community where they live and/or work. This is yet another example of the “haves” getting more and the “have nots” getting less. At a time when our country is examining equity issues, we in St. Paul should be aware of how our funding decisions can have these unintended consequences.

As the planners and visionaries of “The Most Livable City in America,” you have an opportunity to give the citizens of St. Paul what they are asking for. Last fall, when the Shepard-Davern Plan was brought before you, it was noted that one of the outcomes of the two-year planning process was a desire for more parks and for the parks that do exist, such as McDonough Park, to actually look and function like a park. Please seize this rare opportunity to give the citizens of St. Paul what they so richly deserve and diversify the funding structure for our park system with a robust Parkland Dedication ordinance.

Thank you.