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120 Kellogg Boulevard West  
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St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
15 Kellogg Boulevard West  
St. Paul, MN 55102

**Subject: Statement of Support Re Sale of HRA-owned parcel to Charter School Property Inc.**

Dear HRA Board Commissioners,

Regarding the sale of an HRA-owned parcel located at 192 Sherburne Avenue to Charter School Property, Inc., an affiliated building company of St. Paul City School, I would like to express my support for this property transaction.

Selling this parcel to Charter School Property, Inc., is a critical factor in permitting St. Paul City School (SPCS) to design a new campus that consolidates their PK-12 program at one physical location with adequate space that would provide many benefits for SPCS families and their students. One of these important benefits would be the addition of green space where students could enjoy outdoor physical play activities and fresh air.

According to Sanford Health, one of the largest health systems in the U.S., the average American child spends four to seven minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play compared to seven or more hours in front of a screen. The following are their five top reasons for getting children outdoors to play:

**1. Build physically healthier children.**

Nowhere is better than the outdoors for running, jumping, throwing balls, catching, pulling things, lifting and carrying objects. All these actions require motor skills that improve with practice. Children playing outside get aerobic exercise and gain skills, such as pushing and pulling outdoor play equipment. Studies show children burn more calories outdoors, helping to prevent obesity and strengthen bones and muscles. Playing in the sun builds vitamin D in the body, which means stronger bones and less likelihood of chronic diseases. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, many children have vitamin D deficiencies.

**2. Contribute to cognitive and social/emotional development.**

Unstructured outdoor play helps kids learn to take turns, share and develop other positive behavioral skills. They are more likely to be inventive, explore and learn about the world around them and use their own abilities. While they invent and play games with siblings or friends, these interactions help improve communication, cooperation and organizational skills. Additionally, fresh air and free play reduce stress levels.

### **3. Improve sensory skills.**

An optometry and vision science study showed children who play outside regularly have better distance vision than children who are always indoors. Preschoolers, in particular, learn new things through their senses. Think of a toddler's delight at seeing new animals (sight), stopping at a bed of fragrant flowers (smell and touch), watching the water form puddles for stomping (hearing and touch) or eating a parent-approved berry from a bush (taste). On the other hand, children glued to television and electronic devices use only two senses (hearing and sight). This can negatively affect development of perceptual abilities.

### **4. Increase attention spans.**

Children who play outdoors regularly are more curious, self-directed and likely to stay with a task longer. Children who spend most of their time indoors with little exposure to activities requiring their own initiation and follow-through show less ability to initiate or participate in new activities. In fact, studies of children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder found that children with ADHD who spent significant time outdoors exhibited fewer symptoms.

### **5. Grow in happiness and immunity.**

Outdoor light stimulates the pineal gland. This part of the brain is vital to keeping our immune system strong and making us feel happier. Spending time in nature is also associated with improving mood and happiness. An added bonus is that children who identify with nature are more likely to become adults who appreciate nature and want to protect the environment.

As a community partner who has worked directly with SPCS students and has observed the benefits of outdoor play, I fully support the sale of this parcel and the subsequent building of a new campus with green space. The new facility and space will bring improved educational opportunities for all SPCS families and their students.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Vikki L. Getchell  
Director, Equity Systems Change  
Science Museum of Minnesota