

Dear Council Members:

Later today you will consider revisions to the city's Legislative Code regarding the current Parkland Ordinance. I am writing you to urge the adoption of amendments to the proposed ordinance that would create as much additional green space as possible whenever new development takes place in St. Paul. Based on my reading of the available information, I believe the 12% dedication requirement advocated by Friends of the Parks represents the best approach and should be followed.

While I appreciate the role of city staff in explaining legislative intent and providing comparisons from other jurisdictions, the reality is that the council has not sought to survey residents regarding their preference when it comes to adding more green space in the community. However, at the one public hearing held last month on this issue, those residents who did testify all supported the position of the Friends of the Parks.

As I noted in my testimony that evening, what are we trying to achieve by reducing the obligation of developers to provide more green space? Is there any credible information that suggests development projects won't happen because of the 12% requirement? More importantly, what kind of city are we trying to be—one that sets us apart from other places because we offer our residents more parkland amenities—or one where we make sure that we ease the burdens of developers so that more profit can go back into investors' pockets?

The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce argues that we should not increase the parkland dedication requirement because "96% of Saint Paul residents live within a 10 minute walk (1/2 mile) of a public park," but fails to note that in several parts of the city our parks are in disrepair and the playground equipment in need of replacement. If any council member thinks our parks system is adequate, perhaps they should review a tape of the June 1 CIB Committee public hearing in which residents seeking long overdue park improvements in their respective neighborhoods were once again pitted against each other because of limited funding citywide.

I am aware that maintenance costs may not be generated from parkland dedication fees, but I see no plan in place to make sure we have available green space throughout the city. Requiring those developers who stand to profit from their investments in St. Paul to also contribute usable green space seems more than fair given how generous the city has been with TIF funding during the past two decades. And it might be the only way that we can address the gaps in our recreational opportunities—a particularly important concern in light of the major redevelopment that may occur at Midway Shopping Center and the former Ford Plant site.

Let's do something for once that actually benefits neighborhoods and sets us apart from other cities, something that will make St. Paul a more attractive place to live for all of us. Please support the 12% parkland dedication requirement. Thank you.

Regards,

Tom

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