

Dear Mayor Coleman and City Council members,

I would like to give my opinion on whether parks are “a net drain on the city” as St. Paul Chamber of Commerce President Matt Kramer describes. I think what he means to say is that parks and dedicating money to parkland are a net drain on development. Parks, to those of us who don't have millions of dollars tied up in development, or rather, most of us, are a gain for the city. If parks were a net drain, how could it be that every study ever done on livability and quality of life points to acres of parkland as a huge benefit?

I live in the Merriam Park neighborhood of St. Paul. My husband and I specifically sought out a home in St. Paul when we returned to the Twin Cities a decade ago for many reasons. Sadly, once we moved, we realized just how few and far between neighborhood parks and green space were compared to Minneapolis. We do, indeed, have a park within a 10 minute walk from our home (which by the way, a 10 minute walk when my kids were small would have been too far - there were four of them under 5 years old), but it is across two rather busy streets. The intersections one must cross provide no visible crosswalks, and lots of cars who don't pay attention to pedestrians. Once one arrives at the park, it is clear that some investment has been made in playground structures, thankfully, but not in much else. When given the choice, I would pack the kids into the car and drive a few miles to a nicer park.

The point being, there are not enough parks or green space in St. Paul neighborhoods, in my opinion. The point being that asking developers to contribute 0% to parkland development is absolutely ridiculous. I'd love for there to be a new soccer stadium built at the site of the old bus barn near Snelling and 94. But that development should be done thoughtfully, wisely, and with community input. And with parks. How about a few soccer fields for kids? How about a playground? How about lots and lots of trees and a lovely pedestrian zone amongst restaurants and tiny shops? How about for once the building of a major sports stadium actually benefits its neighbors by investing in its neighbors and not just the owners of a team?

Sincerely,
Kelly Martinson