

Minneapolis taxpayers already fund parks generously

After speaking with countless leaders, youth advocates and park commissioners, I vetoed a request for more funds, and I stand by that decision.

By Jacob Frey | SEPTEMBER 26, 2019 — 6:00PM

When I first moved to Minneapolis, I found community among thousands of people on summer nights at the Lake Harriet Band Shell. As mayor, I find peace in our parks during evening runs and weekend lunches with my wife, Sarah, at our favorite bench in Chute Square.

Whether seeking solitude after a long day or communing with nature and celebrating with neighbors, Minneapolis parks have helped shape our residents' lives for the better.

And in Minneapolis we have collectively committed to supporting parks that for generations have given our city so much. In fact, on a per capita basis, no city demonstrates a deeper commitment than ours. The average Minneapolis resident contributes \$346.97 in taxes annually to support our parks. That's 30% more than the next closest figure, Seattle's, at \$268.42 per resident.

Those investments are being put to good work, for both the near-and-long-term.

The vision laid out in the city's 20-year Parks and Streets Plan is becoming reality with another \$12.5 million set aside in this year's budget for badly needed maintenance and repairs.

On top of last year's \$3.5 million levy increase, this year we are again increasing the parks budget — to the tune of \$3.8 million in additional funds.

So, after recommending millions in new funding, I paused when Park Board President Brad Bourn insisted on over \$1 million more.

After countless conversations with Minneapolis leaders, youth advocates and park commissioners, I vetoed the request and stand by that decision.

President Bourn has argued that the Park Board needs even more than the millions in increased funding to advance youth development goals.

The level of funding the Park Board receives is my decision, and I chose to recommend a record amount of city funds for the coming year. How that money gets spent? Unlike other city departments, that is the independent Park Board's decision and theirs alone.

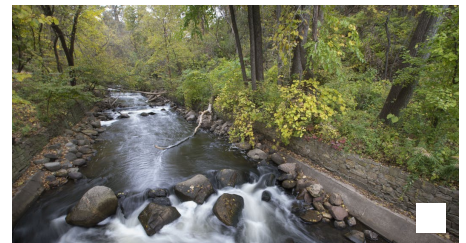
To make it exceedingly clear, I allocate the money and they are charged with balancing competing priorities and spending it.

Our parks have always supported the health, equity and vitality of our city.

In turn, Minneapolis residents are right to expect their elected officials will support the staff who keep our parks clean and sustainable and the Park Police who keep them safe. They are right to expect we will help to ensure our park system is consistently ranked among the top in the nation. And Minneapolis residents are right to expect that we will spend their tax dollars wisely and efficiently in providing that support.

The amount of city funding set aside for our parks is as high as it's ever been. And that strong investment will ensure our parks staff are able to continue doing their work with excellence while developing new initiatives.

Going forward, we can and should continue working toward new ways to support Minneapolis kids. That's why I'm convening a working group with representatives from the Minneapolis City Council, the Youth Coordinating Board, the Park Board, Hennepin



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Minneapolis residents give more per capita to parks (like Minnehaha Falls Park, above) than any other city, Mayor Jacob Frey says. The

County and Minneapolis Public Schools.

Our focus will be on collaborating with all of Minneapolis youth development partners to bring forward the best ideas. We can identify areas of overlap, pursue efficiencies, and move forward on innovative programming through regular, sustained communication.

That approach will serve our city, our parks, and our taxpayers well in the years to come.

Jacob Frey is mayor of Minneapolis.
