

# Funding for youth park programs can't wait, Mayor Frey

City leaders are quick to show fiscal restraint on programs for low-income youths.

By AK Hassan | OCTOBER 3, 2019 — 5:54PM

As vice president of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, I appreciate Mayor Jacob Frey's supportive rhetoric regarding our work ("City taxpayers already fund our parks generously," [Sept. 27 \(http://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-taxpayers-already-fund-parks-generously/561470472/\)](http://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-taxpayers-already-fund-parks-generously/561470472/)). However, many of us at the Park Board are concerned that his kind words are incongruent with his opposition to an additional \$6-per-household investment in the young people of our city.

My constituents urgently need expanded youth programs, not platitudes and work groups.

Frey and I are both relative newcomers to our city, and that is the perspective we bring to this issue.

Unlike the mayor, I didn't come here to work at a downtown law firm. I fled to Minneapolis as a refugee from a war-torn nation.

The mayor says he found his community at the picturesque band shell and a park bench in the shadow of luxury condos. For me, it was the parks youth programs that changed the trajectory of my life, not manicured running paths or wine and yoga at the Commons.

Rec center workers at parks like Peavey, Brian Coyle and East Phillips provide kids the tools they need to grow into healthy adults. I believe that's why we have the greatest park system in the world. I'm unapologetic in my efforts to expand these investments even in the face of the mayor's delays and opposition.

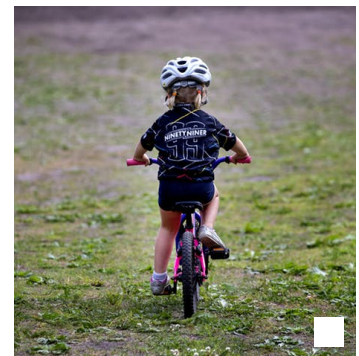
Frey's fiscal prudence regarding park funding is in contrast to his proposed 14% increase to the city's general fund. While the mayor keeps referencing "historic levels" of funding for parks, in reality the proportion of property tax dollars going to parks is decreasing under his watch, from 8 cents on the dollar to 7 cents since he became mayor. This downward trend would accelerate under his current proposal.

While I do believe the mayor is generally supportive of our young people, I question his urgency. Our young people are in crisis, and park programs like Teen Teamworks and Rec Plus are proven tools to keep kids safe and out of trouble. The parks and recreation system is the city's best mechanism to immediately provide young people with constructive activities and improve public safety.

The city's own "Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence in Minneapolis" and the Strategic Racial Equity Action Plan both say that increasing youth programs are among the most effective ways to reduce crime and violence. The mayor's budget fails to support the city's own blueprint, and instead only prioritizes putting more police on the street, a heavy-handed, nonholistic solution to addressing the violence our kids face.

The mayor believes young people can wait while yet another committee holds meeting after meeting. I disagree. Our kids can't wait.

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Investing in the city's park program is investing in the children, Hassan argues.

