



PHILADELPHIA PARKS ALLIANCE **VICTORIES AND ACTION PLAN TO** **REFORM AND REVITALIZE OUR PARKS**

A “YES” Vote for PARKS!

The citizens of Philadelphia overwhelmingly said YES to parks on November 4, 2008 --- with 73% of voters approving the Charter referendum to reform the city’s park and recreation system.

Spearheaded by the Parks Alliance, this referendum was born out of several years of vigorous study and dialogue that included park users and residents from all over the city, community and business organizations, national experts, and government officials. The goal - improve parks and recreation for every citizen in every neighborhood across Philadelphia.

Ultimately the Charter referendum passed, thanks to the support and leadership of Mayor Michael Nutter; City Council, particularly Councilmembers Clarke and Reynolds Brown who authored the legislation; the Next Great City coalition; the Committee of Seventy; dozens of park friends groups and community organizations; and the editorial endorsement of the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Daily News.

What does approval of the Charter change mean? It paves the way to:

- Create a new unified Department of Parks and Recreation by combining Fairmount Park and the Department of Recreation. Allows the Mayor to attract top-talent to the new position of Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.
- Open up park governance and make it more transparent, with the appointment of a new Parks and Recreation Commission – to be selected in public and appointed by the Mayor.
- Establish for the first time ever, guidelines for parkland protection.
- Make the Mayor directly accountable for the management and revitalization of the City’s parks and recreation system.

In These Difficult Economic Times We Need These Reforms More Than Ever

Now is the time to seize on the new opportunities that this reform creates. Especially in these economically challenging times, our parks and recreation must be at the strategic center of the health and vibrancy of our city. A strong green infrastructure with revitalized parks - including open space, historic structures, recreational amenities and protected watersheds will position Philadelphia to thrive as a sustainable city in the 21st century.

The Parks Alliance believes that the Charter change victory is a huge step forward in making this happen. But it won't happen automatically. To do this, we need visionary and accountable leadership, effective partnerships among key stakeholders, strong and modern land use policies, expanded investment, and a growing base of citizens organized and focused on parks.

The Parks Alliance is committed to working together to create new opportunities for collaboration and partnership, to expand and diversify funding, to hold our public officials accountable for the effective and successful implementation of these reforms, and to continue to build an increasingly powerful and empowered constituency of advocates and supporters.

What's Next?

Governance & Leadership

1. Mayor Nutter appoints a new Parks and Recreation Commissioner.

The Parks Alliance expects that with a newly unified Parks and Recreation Department the City will recruit a top-flight Parks and Recreation Commissioner to lead the new department.

2. Effective Merger of Recreation Department and Fairmount Park Commission into one new combined department.

On July 1, 2009 the new Department of Parks and Recreation and the new Commission on Parks and Recreation will assume all of their powers and duties. The merger of the staff and operations will be completed no later than July 1, 2010. This makes it all the more important that Mayor Nutter appoint the new Parks and Recreation Commissioner as soon as possible.

3. Appointment of Members of a New Parks and Recreation Commission.

The current Fairmount Park Commission, appointed by Court of Common Pleas Judges in June 2007, will serve until July 2009. Commissioners may apply to serve on the new Commission.

The new Commission will be composed of 15 members, 6 of whom will be ex-officios: the Commissioners of the Parks and Recreation, Water, Streets and Public Property departments; the City Council President; and the Executive Director of the City Planning Commission.

No later than February 1, 2009, City Council will make a public call soliciting Commissioner nominees for the remaining 9 positions. The application period will be open for at least 30 days, after which City Council will hold a public hearing. Within 90 days after the close of applications, City Council will forward between 18 and 25 nominations to the Mayor who will make the appointments.

The Parks Alliance will hold City Council and Mayor Nutter accountable to ensure that an open and transparent process is implemented, that the best possible candidates with a diverse range of experience and qualifications apply, and that the most qualified people become Commissioners.

Protection of Parkland

1. First Ever Land Use Guidelines.

The newly established Parks and Recreation Commission will for the first-time ever establish standards to protect parkland, including guidelines for the acquisition, lease, sale and development of land and resources. Under the former system, land deals involving parks have been done on an ad hoc basis, often with limited or no public input.

2. Parks Alliance To Host Major Convening.

The Philadelphia Parks Alliance will sponsor a major convening of national experts, government officials, citizens, park supporters and other key stakeholders to explore in depth the opportunities that Philadelphia has in this new and historic moment. The Parks Alliance's purpose is to ensure that key constituents are engaged, and that best practices around the nation are considered, with the ultimate goal of developing the best and strongest land use guidelines to protect parkland for generations to come.

Park Funding

1. Budget Increases ... Budget Cuts.

In May 2008, Mayor Nutter proposed and City Council approved the most significant increase in funding for Fairmount Park in decades. The \$2.5 million increase took the operating budget from \$13.1 million in FY 2008 to \$15.6 million in FY 2009.

Confronted with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression - facing a deficit of \$108 million in this fiscal year and over \$1 billion gap over the next 5 years – Mayor Nutter in November announced drastic budget cuts impacting all departments.

The bad news is that Mayor Nutter reduced the park budget by \$3.1 million. However, the Mayor has publicly committed to not eliminate the budget increase, but rather to defer it until FY 2011.

The good news is that the historic increase the park received in spring 2008 helped protect the Park from even deeper cuts. However, the Parks Alliance and our supporters are acutely aware that the Park has been so chronically underfunded for decades that any budget reduction is a major setback. Therefore, the Parks Alliance will hold the Mayor accountable for the re-instatement of the budget increase.

2. Diversify Funding.

The Parks Alliance continues to believe, as we did before the current economic crisis, that funding for Philadelphia's parks must be diversified. Rather than fight for municipal funding that is scarce and getting scarcer, the Parks Alliance is committed to advocating for new sources of revenue; creative public - private partnerships; federal funding for park infrastructure improvements and green jobs.

In June 2008, the Parks Alliance released the results of the groundbreaking Trust for Public Land study funded by The Lenfest Foundation, which for the first time ever quantifies the economic value Philadelphia receives from its parks and recreation. It's huge – over a billion dollars annually!

We now know in dollars and cents why it makes sense to invest in Philadelphia's parks and have quantified what we have always known – that our parks and recreation systems are an essential part of the economic engine that revitalizes and shapes our neighborhoods and city.

The Parks Alliance believes and will advocate for investment in our parks and recreation, especially in these tough economic times. Our parks - with their historic treasures and trails, recreation facilities and picnic areas, neighborhood parks, natural lands, playgrounds and ball fields - are essential to a thriving, healthy, beautiful, safe, and sustainable city.

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