

Why Does Funding for Parks & Recreation Matter?

**How can you make your voice heard at the City's Community Budget Forums?
See details below about how to participate on February 12, 18, 19 & 23, from 7 to
9:30 PM; Registration begins at 6:00 PM ...**

Philadelphia's Five Year Budget Shortfall

On January 15, 2009, Mayor Nutter announced that due to the global economic crisis, Philadelphia is facing a second budget deficit of \$1 billion over five years. The Mayor explained that balancing the five year budget as required by PICA, the state oversight board, will require a second round of cuts to be made throughout city government.

The Administration has instructed every City Department to develop budget cutting scenarios of 10%, 20% and 30%. This, on top of the deep cuts already suffered in the fall. Mayor Nutter says "everything is on the table".

Tough Times, Tough Choices Forums

The following forums are being facilitated by the University of Pennsylvania's Project for Civic Engagement in partnership with the City of Philadelphia. **Participants will review and discuss budget options and will be asked what city services are most important to them and what should be cut.**

**Registration at 6pm.
(Limited Seating Available)
Sessions from 7:00 to 9:30pm**

Thursday, Feb. 12: St. Dominic's School 8510 Frankford Ave. (Northeast)

**Wednesday, Feb.18: Mastery Charter School, Pickett Campus, 5700 Wayne Avenue
(Germantown)**

Thursday, Feb 19: St. Monica's Catholic School, 16th & Porter Streets (South Philadelphia)

Monday, Feb. 23: Pinn Memorial Baptist Church, 2251 N. 54th Street (West Philadelphia)

(Keep in mind that due to the global, federal and local economic crisis, Fairmount Park and Department of Recreation budgets were cut by 20% in November 2008.)

Budget Shortfall – “Everything is on the table.”

Mayor Nutter has said that “everything is on the table.” Good. The Parks Alliance believes that before another dime is cut from vital services and infrastructure – like parks and recreation, children’s services and housing, literacy and police – that we need to take a hard look at everything – red tape and inefficiencies, cars and patronage, pet projects and perks. We need to even look at some things that made sense but no longer do. We need to collect every dollar the city is owed.

We believe that although the leadership and citizens of Philadelphia, like cities across the United States are facing previously unimaginable budget decisions, we also have an opportunity to make government more efficient, productive and entrepreneurial. The Parks Alliance doesn’t believe that the budget shortfall is a reason for indispensable operating departments and the people they serve to be put in the position of competing with one another for the same dollars for essential services.

Why Philadelphia’s Urban Parks and Recreation Matter?

Parks and recreation are now at the center of political, economic and policy discussions. Leaders in health care, education and business; researchers and philanthropists now understand the unique role that thriving urban parks and recreation play in the creation of sustainable 21st century cities.

Healthy, vibrant urban parks and recreation are recognized as essential tools for community, economic, & cultural revitalization & development; healthy, fit citizens; retention and attraction of residents, businesses and tourism; protection of land and water; crime prevention; education and quality of life.

Chronic Underfunding

Fairmount Park: The Fairmount Park Commission (FPC) has been underfunded for decades, lagging significantly behind increases to the total city budget.

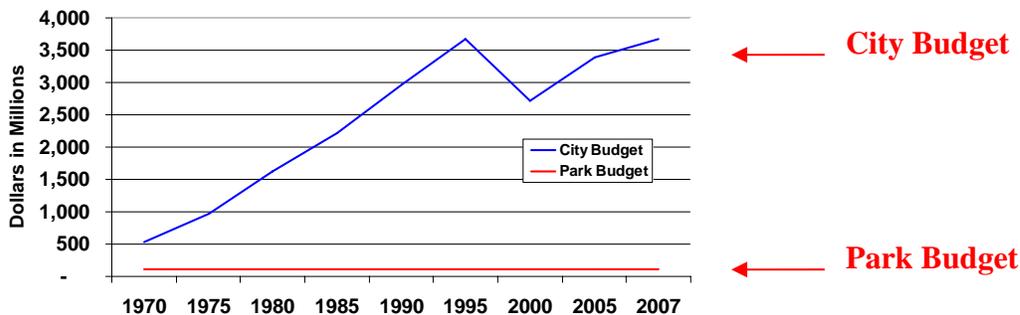
Adjusted for inflation the park budget is less than half of what it was 20 years ago. In 1970 FPC had 637 full time employees. Today it has 169.

In spring 2008, Mayor Nutter and City Council approved an increase of \$2.5 million for FPC that took the budget from \$13.1 to \$15.6 million. This was a major step in correcting years of underfunding.

However, faced with a \$1 billion deficit over five years, in November 2008, the Mayor and City Council were forced to make drastic cuts, including a 20% (\$3.1 million) cut in FPC’s budget from \$15.6 to \$12.5 million, essentially eliminating the gain.

It has been estimated that at least \$30 million may be needed for annual operations, along with \$85 million for capital repairs due to accumulated deferred maintenance.

Budget Neglect of Fairmount Park



Dollars in millions, not adjusted for inflation, rounded to the nearest million.
Comparison of Fairmount Park Budget to Total City Budget.

Source: *City of Philadelphia*

Philadelphia Department of Recreation: The Philadelphia Department of Recreation (PDR) has also suffered from a dwindling budget and much deferred maintenance. In Fiscal Year 2000, it had 613 full time staff. In Fiscal Year 2008 it had 469, with only 1 person assigned solely to PDR’s 76 parks and 40 part time Seasonal Maintenance Attendants. The City’s November 2008 Rebalancing Plan cut PDR’s budget of \$40 million by 20% (\$8 million) to \$32 million.

Compared with other major cities, Philadelphia ranks at the bottom in park spending. Philadelphia spends less than half (\$47 per resident) what the average (\$105 per resident) spent by 19 large select cities. Cities like San Francisco (\$268 per resident) and Seattle (\$242 per resident) lead the pack.

What’s the Cost of Underfunding? It’s not just about numbers. It’s about us – people. Kids. Families, Congregations. Students. Communities. It’s about broken and dangerous playground equipment, dumping, invasive species, basketball courts without rims and tennis courts without nets. It’s about unusable benches and picnic areas, and serious deferred maintenance of trails, structures and historic buildings.

The Parks Alliance 2007 report “Parks in Trouble” is the outcome of citizens’ systematic inspections of one third of Philadelphia’s FPC and PDR parks. In 92% of the parks inspected they found insufficient maintenance and decay. (See the report, including many photographs at www.philaparks.org at “Newsletter and Publications.”)

Thanks to the remarkable work of dedicated FPC staff, citizen volunteers, partners and friends groups, many parks shine. But as any park staff or volunteer will tell you, parks require vigilance. It doesn’t take long for good conditions to turn bad. The sad state of many of our parks is from underfunding and a dearth of creative solutions.

New Department of Parks and Recreation

Last November, the citizens of Philadelphia voted to combine FPC and PDR into a new Department of Parks and Recreation. This change is a big step forward in creating a strong green infrastructure with thriving parks that include vibrant open space, recreational amenities, historic structures and protected watersheds. But it won’t happen automatically. Now is the time to seize the opportunities this reform creates. The future of the new department depends on the ability of its leadership to creatively guide the department through these hard times so that it is positioned to leverage new opportunities as soon as the economy recovers.

Why Invest in Parks and Recreation?

The Trust for Public Land study, commissioned by the Philadelphia Parks Alliance and funded by the Lenfest Foundation, was released in June 2008. (Download “How Much Value Does the City of Philadelphia Receive from its Park and Recreation System” at www.philaparks.org at “Newsletter and Publications”)

This groundbreaking study for the first time quantifies the value of Philadelphia’s parks and recreation in dollars and cents. The income and savings to the city of Philadelphia and its citizens is **hundreds of millions of dollars per year**, as reflected in the chart below.

The Estimated Annual Value of the Philadelphia Park and Recreation System *	
<i>Revenue Producing Factors for City Government</i>	
Tax Receipts from Increased Property Value	\$18,129,000
Tax Receipts from Increased Tourism Value	\$5,177,000
Tax Receipts from Real Estate Transfer Tax	\$1,137,000
<i>Estimated Total</i>	<i>\$24,443,000</i>
<i>Cost Saving Factors for City Government</i>	
Stormwater Management Value	\$5,949,000
Air Pollution Mitigation Value	\$1,534,000
Community Cohesion Value	\$8,600,000
<i>Estimated Total</i>	<i>\$16,083,000</i>
<i>Cost Saving Factors to Citizens</i>	
Direct Use Value	\$1,076,303,000
Health Value	\$69,419,000
<i>Estimated Total</i>	<i>\$1,145,722,000</i>
<i>Wealth Increasing Factors to Citizens</i>	
Property Value from Park Proximity	\$37,887,000
Net Profit from Tourism	\$40,263,000
<i>Estimated Total</i>	<i>\$78,150,000</i>
<i>Center for City Park Excellence, Trust for Public Land, 2008</i>	
<i>* This summary table from errata sheet – corrected 9/08.</i>	

More investment will produce more revenue and more savings. Less investment will produce less revenue and fewer savings: Over \$1 billion isn't a bad return on investment. And yet because of years of underfunding of parks and recreation, the city has been missing a chance to earn and save much more.

If Philadelphians already save \$70 million in medical expenses by using parks - that number would rise if our parks were cleaner, safer, and stocked with amenities like bikes to rent, well marked trails to hike, water ice to slurp, and greened recreation centers for our children to enjoy inside and out.

If Philadelphia's parks and recreation already bring in \$40 million in tourist revenue - how might they perform if fully equipped with functioning restrooms, water fountains, restored historic homes, repaired picnic tables, well maintained ball fields and basketball courts and upgraded trails.

Philadelphia's parks, woods, riverbeds and open space already provide at least \$7 million worth of storm water and air pollution control each year.

Each new tree fights asthma, cuts noise pollution, saves on air conditioning costs, reduces CO2.

Every new and improved ball field and trail fights obesity and keeps our kids fit and busy.

Every cleared streambed dries out a basement and unclogs a storm drain.

Inner-city greening lowers crime rates.

Natural urban settings reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder in children.

Hospital patients with views of trees, recover much faster and with fewer complications.

Consider all this, and then imagine investing less in parks and recreation. It's unimaginable. But it is happening. What will it mean?

- **Dirty and run down parks. Short dumping. Trash.**
- **More crime. More vandalism. More broken swing sets.**
- **Polluted air. Dying trees. Basements with sewage backups.**
- **The few restrooms that exist are closed. Fountains get turned off.**
- **Kids and grown-ups – less healthy. Less safe.**
- **Declining property values. Fewer tourists. Less revenue.**

It just doesn't make sense.

Cutting parks and recreation means less – less savings, less health, less safety, less green, less growth, less income.

Frankly, we can't afford it.

February 6, 2009