

MPLS Park Board Questionnaire

Introduction:

Our population is aging, both in Minneapolis and nationwide. People over 60 now comprise more than 25% of the Minneapolis population, and people over 65 comprise nearly 11%. As part of this significant demographic, the Minneapolis DFL Senior Caucus is concerned about issues that affect the general community as well as issues that pertain specifically to them.

District Sought, or At-Large

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Candidate Name

Jody Wynen

Candidate Email

jody4parkboard@gmail.com

Candidate Phone

3147049492

Manager

Carter Casmaer

Manager email

casmaer@gmail.com

Manager phone

3143746980

1. Based on the mission of the Park Board, what are three to five long- and short-term priorities for the Park Board?

Protect our natural areas from invasive species and illegal dumping. Preserve access to our parks by making sure that there are no physical barriers or excessive parking fees. Maintain the infrastructure and core services that make our parks exceptional. Support our Park police with resources and policy to help them fulfill their mission to keep our parks and patrons safe.

2. Natural areas are important ecologically and for the physical and emotional health of city residents. Sports and other activities are important for all ages, providing healthy activities. How would you balance these important missions?

I would balance these important missions with much consideration and care. I personally prioritize the protection and restoration of natural areas, but as Commissioner I would balance any necessary cuts due to financial burden equally between the two, also keeping equity at the forefront of my mind as to how the distribution of cuts land across different segments of Minneapolis.

3. Describe how taxation is balanced between the city and the park board and how you would protect the park board's ability to fund its mission.

I know that 80% of MPRB's budget comes from property taxes, that current vacancies downtown are leading to budgetary shortfalls and that individual property taxes have gone up multiple years in a row to try and make up the difference. In my mind this is unsustainable. I am aware the the Minneapolis Parks Foundation has an endowment that is ten years away from maturity, which will be very helpful to stabilizing the revenue stream whenever it becomes available. While we wait for the next ten years until that funding is available the best ways that I can see of securing funding for projects and programs will be to collaborate with as many partners as possible to ensure that our mission is accomplished. I am also very open to hearing about novel forms of revenue streams to potentially bridge the gap. For example, generating income by having engraved dedication bricks for donations to be used in building projects. Another idea is for MPRB to host a premier Minneapolis Triathlon that could not only generate income, but also bring in a lot of business for the rest of the city as well.

4. What is your vision for the future use of our parkways?

My vision for our parkways is that they have no potholes and more painted crosswalks.

5. It's easier to get capital funds than maintenance funding. How would you balance preserving existing park assets versus new projects?

I would aim for a strategic balance that protects existing assets while allowing for innovation. Capital funds by definition can be used for improving long-term assets, the scope just has to be a bit more grand. If you frame major repair or rehab work as capital improvement then you can tap into capital funding while preserving existing assets. I would also use new projects to bundle maintenance.

6. Will you make clean water a priority? What must be done to stop lake eutrophication and keep our creeks and the river clean?

Absolutely. I think that a combination of in-lake interventions, shifting towards green infrastructure like permeable pavement, and a continuing public engagement campaign will help to keep our waterways clean. I hope to continue the work that our current commissioners started with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District.

7. What can the Park Board do to maintain existing tree canopy and increase the total canopy, alone and in partnership with the City, County and Met Council?

Responsible and mindful planting is essential. Planting as many trees as possible doesn't necessarily lead to a long term robust tree canopy, especially if they are planted in an area that is inundated with invasive species. I think that planting should be done in coordination with restoration projects so that freshly cleared areas are immediately seeded and planted with the right trees in the right places. We need to plant with diversity and longevity in mind. Freshly planted trees require ongoing routine maintenance including watering. I have seen enough trees get planted, are never watered, fail to establish and then perish. Nothing is worse than wasted tax dollars. Protecting and expanding the tree canopy needs sustained, collaborative effort. MPRB has the potential to collaborate with the City of Minneapolis to plant and water boulevards. We can use data from Hennepin County to help us apply jointly for state or federal grants, and we can work toward regional funding mechanisms or cost-sharing models large scale planting. I am aware that MPRB is currently collaborating with a third party to sell carbon-offset credits to qualifying businesses as a way to fund planting new trees in our parks. I think that this is a promising path forward and I hope to continue this work.

8. Have you served as a board member in any organization previously? How do you balance a board member's oversight role and community advocacy versus letting professional staff manage the organization?

I have not previously served on a board but I am confident in my role as a community advocate. I have a deep respect and appreciation for the expertise and experience of the staff. My intention is to stay informed, stay curious and understand what is happening, while letting the staff do their jobs. My job is to represent the interests of my constituents, and provide strategic direction and transparency.

9. Should the Park Board's Environmental Stewardship Department be included in all stages of planning?

All major park redesigns and restoration projects should have full collaboration with the ESD from start to finish. Routine maintenance and small projects should only require a consultation unless there are public concerns.

10. Some residents complain that the MPRB moves park directors too often. How will you balance the community's wishes with promotional opportunities for recreational staff?

Park directors are trusted members of the community, and the disruption can feel personal. Transparency and balance are the keys to keeping everyone informed and happy. All staff deserve career paths that include upward mobility, but promotions do not necessarily have to mean reassignments. I think that park directors should have the opportunity to opt-in to stay longer without being penalized and that growth can come in many forms.

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