

# 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

District 6

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

My focus for the MPRB is on supporting Minneapolis youth, protecting our environment and water resources, and improving how we manage park assets. Below are my proposed short- and long-term priorities to advance these goals.

Short-Term Priorities (2025):

- Build a Balanced 2026 Budget: Address challenges in property tax revenue to maintain park services and staff positions without cuts.
- Continue to Improve Centralized Registration: Refine the registration process and expand it to include more programs, such as adult sports, to serve the community better.
- Girls' Softball Fields: Begin design for the first dedicated fastpitch softball diamonds in the park system and secure funding for construction.

Long-Term Priorities (Beyond 2025):

- Find New Funding Sources: Explore revenue options beyond property taxes to support park maintenance and programs.
- Focus on Water Quality: Use recent new funding to develop a Capital Improvement Plan that prioritizes clean water and environmental projects.
- Plan the Next Neighborhood Park Funding (NPP20): Prepare for the next phase of neighborhood park investments, with an emphasis on adapting facilities to climate change.

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?

As a water resources engineer, I value both the ecological benefits of natural areas and the community benefits of recreational spaces. My approach to balancing these missions is to fund and prioritize projects that support both, ensuring our parks meet diverse needs.

For natural areas, we've increased management funding from \$100,000 to \$500,000 annually to protect ecosystems and enhance green spaces. We've also established a new stormwater management team, funded without relying on property taxes, to improve water quality and environmental health.

For recreation, we've invested in trail improvements to enhance access for all ages and conducted a diamond sports facilities study to plan better athletic spaces. These efforts show my commitment to maintaining vibrant parks that serve both ecological and active community purposes, with careful budgeting to support both priorities.

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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.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) relies heavily on property taxes, which account for about 80% of its budget, unlike the city, which has more diverse revenue sources. This makes the Park Board's funding more vulnerable to tax constraints, requiring careful coordination to maintain its ability to deliver essential park services.

As the Park Board's representative on the Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET) for three years, I've worked to secure adequate funding for the MPRB's mission. In 2024, I collaborated with BET members to successfully increase the MPRB levy beyond the mayor's proposed budget, ensuring resources for parks and recreation. Moving forward in 2025, I will use my BET role to closely review city spending, ask tough questions, and advocate for a fair tax balance that protects the Park Board's ability to maintain high-quality parks, trails, and programs for Minneapolis residents.

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

My vision for Minneapolis parkways is to preserve their unique role as accessible, connected routes for all residents while enhancing their environmental and infrastructure quality.

First, I support maintaining parkways for vehicle use, especially for seniors and others who rely on driving. The parkway system's continuity, a historic asset, ensures equitable access across neighborhoods and must be protected. Second, as we rebuild parkways, we will improve stormwater management through underground systems, rain gardens, and swales under our "green parkways" initiative to reduce runoff and protect water quality.

Finally, we've secured better pavement maintenance through a renewed joint powers agreement with the city, now including inflationary funding increases. Recent repaving in Northeast Minneapolis shows progress, and Lake Harriet Parkway is set for repaving in 2026/27. During that project, we will follow the adopted plan to remove the lower road on the lake's east side, complying with all statutory requirements. These steps ensure parkways remain functional, sustainable, and valued for future generations.

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

Balancing the preservation of existing park assets with new projects requires strategic funding decisions to ensure long-term sustainability and community benefit.

This board has significantly increased maintenance funding, a shift I'm proud to have led, to protect and extend the life of current park facilities. For new projects, I back the adopted NPP20 Capital Improvement Plan and I'll continue to support projects tied to city growth, such as developments north of the falls. Looking ahead, as the next board plans the future of NPP20 or its successor, I will advocate for upgrading park buildings to improve energy efficiency and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. By prioritizing maintenance to preserve what we have and selectively investing in new, sustainable projects, we can keep Minneapolis parks functional and forward-looking.

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

As a licensed civil engineer specializing in water resources, I've made clean water a top priority for the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). My nearly 20 years as principal civil engineer at the University of Minnesota, implementing hundreds of stormwater treatment systems, informs my approach to tackling urban runoff and protecting our lakes, creeks, and river.

To prevent eutrophication and keep water bodies clean, we must intercept and treat urban runoff before it reaches lakes, creeks, and the Mississippi River. Our urban storm sewer system, while necessary to prevent flooding, often delivers untreated runoff directly to these waters. To address this, I led the creation of a stormwater enterprise fund at MPRB, which supports a dedicated team to identify and build runoff treatment systems, such as biofiltration and retention basins. Though the city and MPRB have made progress, more investment is needed to catch up.

I'm also proud of our partnership with the City of Minneapolis and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. This ongoing collaboration is developing creek improvement projects, set for construction in the next few years, to enhance water quality and stream health. By expanding treatment systems and strengthening partnerships, I will continue to prioritize clean water and protect our vital water resources.

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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?

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) plays a critical role in preserving and expanding the city's tree canopy, and I support a proactive, data-driven approach to ensure a healthy urban forest.

To maintain the existing canopy, the MPRB Forestry Department uses detailed data to monitor canopy diversity and address threats like disease. The board has successfully managed diseased trees, including on private property, and I'm proud we've implemented measures to reduce assessment impacts for lower-income property owners. To increase the total canopy, MPRB plants nearly 10,000 trees annually, targeting diverse, resilient species to withstand climate challenges.

In partnership with the City, County, and Met Council, we can expand these efforts. Ongoing collaboration with the city has laid a foundation, but we can strengthen joint initiatives, such as shared funding for tree planting in underserved areas or coordinated removal of invasive species. Working with the County and Met Council, we can align on regional canopy goals, like integrating trees into infrastructure projects. By building on MPRB's strong forestry program and deepening partnerships, we can protect and grow Minneapolis' tree canopy for future generations.

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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 my experience as a Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) member has taught me the importance of balancing oversight, community advocacy, and respect for professional staff's expertise.

To achieve this balance, I prioritize being well-informed and engaged. I invest significant time studying park-related issues, from budgets to environmental projects, to provide meaningful oversight without micromanaging. I also stay closely connected to constituents, listening to their concerns and priorities to ensure my advocacy reflects community needs. This involves regular communication with residents and stakeholders, not just reacting to issues but proactively seeking input. At the same time, I trust MPRB's professional staff to manage day-to-day operations, relying on their expertise while asking critical questions to ensure alignment with board goals. This approach avoids being a rubber stamp and fosters a collaborative partnership that serves both the community and the organization effectively.

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

Yes, the Environmental Stewardship Department should be involved in every stage of park improvement project planning to ensure projects are sustainable, maintainable, and aligned with environmental goals. This department provides critical expertise, reviewing plans from design to implementation to confirm that new facilities or upgrades can be effectively operated and maintained after construction. While the Park Board uses Project Advocacy Committees for larger projects, this process sometimes falls short. To improve, I support adopting collaborative review tools, like those I use in my civil engineering work, to facilitate consistent input from Environmental Stewardship. As MPRB continues to embrace data-driven processes, I'm committed to prioritizing this improvement in my next term to strengthen project outcomes and environmental stewardship.

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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?

While I haven't often heard concerns about frequent park director reassignments, I recognize the value of stability for communities and take such feedback seriously.

My approach is informed by my positive relationship with AFSCME, the union representing MPRB recreation staff. Through discussions with them, I've gained insight into their views on professional opportunities and career development, and I've advocated for their interests with MPRB leadership. To balance community wishes for consistent park leadership with staff advancement, I would seek further input from both residents and AFSCME to better understand the issue. This could guide future discussions with MPRB leadership to explore solutions that support both community stability and fair career paths for staff.

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