

Archie Harper, Chairman
West Valley Community Alliance Network
901 Lynn Road
Helena, Montana 59602
July, 20, 2020

Lindsay Morgan
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316 North Park Avenue
Helena, Montana 59623

Dear Ms. Morgan:

Once again I am commenting in follow-up to the public hearing/meeting held at the Civic Center Wednesday, July 8th to consider an additional landuse not reflected in section 2.4.b of the draft Tenmile Alluvial Fan Zone District Regulations. Ms. Anjanette Brooks brought up an important landuse that I feel is in desperate need in growing communities and neighborhoods: parks and open spaces.

This letter draws from rationale in a white paper published by the Trust for Public Land (Paul M. Sherer, 2006) highlighting overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the benefits of city/community parks.

The Public Wants More Parks

Voters have repeatedly shown their willingness to raise their own taxes to pay for new or improved parks. In the November 2002 elections, voters in 93 communities in 22 states approved ballot measures that committed \$2.9 billion to acquire and restore land for parks and open space. Voters approved 85 percent of such referendums in these elections.¹

Public Health Benefits of City Parks and Open Space

Access to parks increases frequency of exercise. Strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, they exercise more. In a study published by the CDC, creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week.² When people have nowhere to walk, they gain weight. Obesity is more likely in unwalkable neighborhoods, but goes down when measures of

walkability go up: dense housing, well-connected streets, and mixed landuses reduce the probability that residents will be obese.³

Exposure to nature and greenery makes people healthier. Beyond the recreational opportunities offered by parks, a growing body of research shows that contact with the natural world also improves psychological health. An extensive study published in 2001 in the Netherlands set out to determine the link between green space and health. The study produced several key findings. First, “in a greener environment people report fewer health complaints, more often rate themselves as being in good health, and have better mental health,” the study found. Second, “when it comes to health, all types of green seem to be equally ‘effective’”.⁴

Economic Benefits of Parks

“The real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for a property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity,” writes John L. Crompton, a professor at Texas A&M University who has published extensive research on parks and recreation.⁵

Repeated studies over the years have confirmed that people prefer to buy homes close to parks, open space, and greenery. One key study in Boulder, Colorado showed that, other things being equal, there was a \$4.20 decrease in the price of residential property for every foot one moved away from the greenbelt, and that the average value of homes next to the greenbelt was 32 percent higher than those 3,200 feet away.⁶

The same study showed that the greenbelt added \$5.4 million to the total property values of one neighborhood. That generated \$500,000 per year in additional potential property taxes.⁷

Quality of life is a determining factor in real estate values and economic vitality. A 1998 real estate industry report calls livability “a litmus test for determining the strength of the real estate investment market. If people want to live in a place, companies, stores, hotels, and apartments will follow.”⁸

Organized events held in public parks--arts festivals, athletic events, food festivals, musical and theatrical events--often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities, filling hotel rooms and restaurants and bringing customers to local stores.⁹

Environmental Benefits of Parks

Unpaved areas absorb water, slowing the rate at which it reaches stormwater facilities; but according to the American Forests Urban Resource Center, “By incorporating trees into a

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community's infrastructure, managers can build a smaller, less expensive stormwater management system."

Trees and the soil under them also act as natural filters for water pollution. Their leaves, trunks, roots, and associated soil remove polluted particulate matter from the water before it reaches storm sewers.

Social Benefits of Parks

Reducing Crime: Access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and in particular to reduced juvenile delinquency. Recreational facilities keep at-risk youth off the streets, give them a safe environment to interact with their peers, and fill up time within which they could otherwise get into trouble.¹⁰

Recreation Opportunities/The Importance of Play: For small children, play has proved to be a critical element in their future success. Play helps kids develop muscle strength and coordination, language, cognitive thinking, and reasoning abilities.

Creating Stable Neighborhoods with Strong Community: Research shows that residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces are more likely to enjoy stronger social ties than those who live surrounded by barren concrete. A study by the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago found vegetation and neighborhood social ties were significantly related to residents' senses of safety and adjustment.¹¹

Conclusion

Given projections in population growth for the greater Helena Valley (another 10,000 people within 20 years), it is clear how important bringing parks, open spaces, and greenways into the neighborhoods will become. The significant message is that we all benefit from them—not just a few.

Sincerely,

Archie Harper

Cc: Anjanette Brooks

Notes

1. Land Trust Alliance, "Voters Approve \$2.9 Billion for Land Conservation," press release, November 6, 2002, updated January 31, 2003, http://www.lta.org/newsroom/pr_110602.htm.
2. CDC, "Increasing Physical Activity," p. 11.
3. Dr. Lawrence Frank (findings from SMARTRAQ study in Atlanta presented at the Congress for the New Urbanism, Washington, D.C., June 19, 2003).
4. Sjerp de Vries, Robert A. Verheij, and Peter P. Groenewegen, "Nature and Health: The Relation between Health and Green Space in People's Living Environment" (paper presented at the conference "Cultural Events and Leisure Systems," Amsterdam, the Netherlands, April 2001).
5. John L. Crompton, *The Impact of Parks and Open Space on Property Values and the Property Tax Base* (Ashburn, Va.: National Recreation and Park Association, 2000), p. 1.
6. Mark R. Correll, Jane H. Lillydahl, and Larry D. Singell, "The Effect of Greenbelts on Residential Property Values: Some Findings on the Political Economy of Open Space," *Land Economics*, May 1978, cited in National Park Service, "Economic Impacts," *Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors*, 4th ed., (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995), p. 14, http://www.nps.gov/pwro/rtca/econ_all.pdf.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
8. Steve Lerner and William Poole, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space* (San Francisco: The Trust for Public Land, 1999), p. 42, http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cdl.cfm?content_item_id=1145&folder_id=727.
9. Crompton, *Parks and Economic Development*, pp. 31-48.
10. Peter A. Witt and John L. Crompton, "The At-risk Youth Recreation Project," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 14, no. 13, 1996: 1-9. For a version of this paper, see <http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/Faculty/Witt/wittpub5.htm>.
11. Frances E. Kuo et al., "Fertile Ground for Community: Inner-City Neighborhood Common Spaces," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26, no. 6 (1998), webs.aces.uiuc.edu/herl/docs/KuoSulColeyBrunson.pdf.

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Sherer, Paul M. 2006. *The Trust for Public Land - Reprint of "Parks for People" white paper*, published in 2003. 32 pp. Available online @ https://conservationtools-production.s3.amazonaws.com/library_item_files/729/663/The_Benefit_of_Parks_Why_America_Needs_More_City_Parks_Open_Space.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIQFJLILYGVD4AMQ&Expires=1595262548&Signature=%2FJKUdEKh1zRhUilrIXyFAuDDAx4%3D