

MEG FORNEY

Response on question What is your position on Property Taxes?

As a Realtor for Coldwell Banker Burnet, I know the impact that homeowners like my clients and myself have borne. The road to countering property tax increases will come with outside-the-box perspectives and partnerships with mission-based agencies, leverage of existing funding, establishment of sustainable practices, and promotion of tax reform.

There are numerous opportunities to offset fiscal challenges: hiring grant writers, partnering with mission-based agencies like Three Rivers, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Metropolitan Council, and advocating for tax reform that incentivizes governmental agencies to be sustainable and not to be punitive when they raise complementary funding. I believe that the Park Board has been a leader in crafting new paradigms of revenue generation like the Legacy Act where the Park Board was at the helm in collaborating with multi-jurisdictions and like the Park Dedication Fee that the Legislature passed some 5 years ago although the City has refused to bring it to reality, missing opportunities for new revenue to come to our parks.

What Budget Cuts Would You Make As Commissioner?

The answer is actually occurring now in Committees of the City Council that are paring down the already bare-bones budget the Park Board submitted so they can lower the Mayor's proposed 11.3% real-estate tax hike.

What we do know is that the Park Board has received less than half of their proposed budgets for the last seven years. I am very concerned that we are down three Park Police Officers already. I am concerned that the present policy is no-new-hires as attrition naturally continues. I am concerned that the Park Superintendent's salary is one of the lowest nation-wide of comparable cities at a time when a new hire could occur in the next term of the Board of Commissioners. I am concerned that St. Paul has already closed 40% of their recreation centers, although Minneapolis has been able to continue with 100% of their recreation centers still open and continue quality programming, though at a diminished quantity.

To me a more appropriate question is: How would you address the critical fiscal issues facing the Park Board?

- I would advocate for addressing the big picture as the recently passed Legacy Act established. With the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board at the helm, a vast coalition of common mission-based agencies collaborated in an over 10 year push to forward this legislation to the statewide ballot. It will provide \$3 to \$4 million dollars a year for 25 years for water quality projects in our regional parks like the Chain of Lakes. The re-do of the parking lot with a center wetlands at the south end of Lake Calhoun is made possible through these funds.

This is an example of how collaboration with mission-based agencies can leverage dollars. I will advocate for seeking more partnership opportunities.

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- The Park Dedication Fee was passed by the Legislature nearly 5 years ago with our City's Senator Linda Higgins and House Representative Frank Hornstein as a couple of the authors of the bill. This bill would obligate developers in the City of Minneapolis to either donate land from their development for public park use or pay a fee to the Minneapolis Park Board to support our public park system. This method is very common in municipalities throughout the state and the nation. It is a way of giving back to open and green space that defines the quality life and the urban livability in Minneapolis.

With eight highrises already at the north end of Lake Calhoun and another due to break ground at Knox and Lake Street, it is apparent that developers benefit from the long history of stewardship of our parks and that is why they seek to build in our City. It is only appropriate for developers to give back directly.

The City Council has not adopted this legislation. Presently our City Senator Scott Dibble, Senator Higgins and Representative Hornstein are working to address their concerns to actualize this. I have working relationships with these legislators and would work with them to bring this funding source to our Parks.

- The Metropolitan Council has launched a massive fundraising program of \$23 million dollars to acquire lands through foundation funding like McKnight. I would advocate to hire our own grant writer to tap foundation funding.

- Support fundraising efforts, not punish them. After my fundraising committee for the Lake Harriet Bandstand raised \$250,000, the City was going to "deduct" that amount from our tax revenue. To me this is poor tax policy to be punitive when there is a public effort to supplement public dollars with private dollars and thereby achieve sustainability. I would seek tax reform to incentivize public entities to be sustainable.

- Enhancing our giving efforts as the Arboretum has done with programmed planned giving is a natural for our Park System to develop and I would support our Minneapolis Park Foundation to adopt similar strategies.

We need to develop non-traditional sources for support including private donations, foundation grants, earned income and other complementary fundraising revenue streams. It's important that this effort adds to but doesn't cause the loss of current levels of funding.

- I would advocate the Park System when updating any building use only sustainable methods, to be models for our zero carbon footprint and zero waste in all our facilities. With programs such as the Federal Stimulus Package, it is time to set the bar high and deliver. The cost to operate our numerous recreation centers can be reduced through prudent, thoughtful use of alternative energy and environmental building practices.

- Budget cuts should not be tied to administrative salaries such as an opponent's suggestion of a cap of no more than 105% of our City's Mayor. This lacks an understanding that Public Administrators and Elected Public Servants are paid at two

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entirely different rates. The City's present administration supports over 50 Public Administrators with salaries greater than the Mayor's and the Chief of Police being 146%. The Superintendent of our Minneapolis Park's salary of \$139,818 is actually one of the lowest nation wide when comparing relative city size, with comparable salaries actually being above \$150,000. To convey this perspective to the public and therefore to any future applicant that a potential salary is out of scale is both inappropriate and lacks an understanding that Minneapolis is one of only a handful of cities with a World Class Park System and to attract the best and brightest leadership will require a comparable salary.

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Candidate for Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board District 6 Commissioner

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