

October XX, 2023

Dear Mayor and City Council,

We write as members of the Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (SPRAB) encouraging the continued prioritization of parks and recreation funding in the coming year. We recognize the challenging budgetary situation the City is facing, but strongly believe that the community, wellbeing, and economic benefits are essential investments for our community to thrive.

Our Board is concerned about the projected budget shortfalls and the impact it will have on our community's ability to enjoy their parks. While we understand the need to limit new positions and programs, projected cuts currently proposed would drastically impact existing access through closures at neighborhood parks, removing drinking fountain access, and increasing fees in a way that will make usage less accessible to many in the community. We believe that any cuts should be accompanied by a plan to recover those services in the future, and we as a Board stand ready to assist Council in this effort.

The Covid-19 Pandemic showed us the negative impacts of reducing City amenities and cutting off access to parks and natural areas. As we emerge from the pandemic, there has been a renewed appreciation for our urban green spaces that is backed up by research showing the positive benefits these areas provide. City Parks encourage active lifestyles and reduce healthcare costs. Parks strengthen local economies and create job opportunities. They attract residents and businesses. City parks increase community engagement and reduce crime.

It is often the case that there are no easy decisions when it comes to budget cuts or revenue generation. However, our Board strongly believes that the benefits of park access, recreation programs, and robust green space vastly outweigh the relatively low cost needed to provide these services to our entire community. As our Deputy City Manager said, parks and playgrounds are not options. They are necessities. We ask that you strive to limit or omit cuts to Parks and Recreation services in the ongoing budget conversations.

Sincerely,

Dylan McDowell
Board Chair
On behalf of the Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board