

Why Vote “YES” on the Charter Change Referendum On Parks November 4?

- 1. To Protect Park Land:** A newly established “Parks and Recreation Commission” will for the first-time ever establish guidelines for the acquisition, lease, sale and development of land and resources, including a process for community input. Currently land deals are dealt with on an ad hoc basis often to the exclusion of or with limited public input.
- 2. Create an Open and Transparent Process to Appoint Park Commissioners:** The Board of Judges will no longer appoint commissioners in private. Again, for the first time, there will be an open process with public hearings to nominate qualified candidates, with related expertise. The Mayor will make final appointments.
- 3. Improve Park and Recreation System:** A unified system will create new opportunities to revitalize and invest in one of Philadelphia’s most precious, but neglected assets – its watershed and neighborhood parks, recreation facilities, and historic treasures. Most cities in America, including those with similar assets, have a combined Parks and Recreation department. In this merger, the two departments will have the opportunity to build on their unique and shared strengths, find new areas of synergy, and coordinate efforts to maximize the intersection of health, recreation, ecology, public safety, historic preservation, youth development, education, and neighborhood revitalization.
- 4. Expand Funding:** As part of an overall reform package, Mayor Nutter and City Council have just approved the largest increase in park funding in decades – a significant first step toward full funding. With increased mayoral accountability and leadership, new and diverse funding sources will be developed.

More To Consider ...

... The New Commission will Establish Guidelines for Land Protection:

Disposition of parkland must be approved by City Council. This has always been true and will continue to be true with the Charter change. The difference is that the first charge of the new Parks and Recreation Commission will be to establish policies for use of land and assets - that will be guided by community input. City Government will for the first time be held accountable to these guidelines.

... The Parks Alliance Supports Consolidation: Three years ago, the Philadelphia Parks Alliance opposed a proposal to merge Fairmount Park and the Recreation Department for two reasons. The first is that it was perceived to be a cost cutting strategy. This time it's different. In May 2008, Mayor Nutter proposed, and City Council approved, the most significant increase in funding for Fairmount Park in decades. The Department of Recreation also received new resources. Mayor Nutter has proposed a historic 46% increase for Fairmount Park over the next 5 years.

The second reason the Parks Alliance opposed the merger in 2005 is that there was little to no discussion with key stakeholders or the public. Since then, the Parks Alliance and its partners have facilitated a vigorous ongoing dialogue with experts, citizens and government officials.

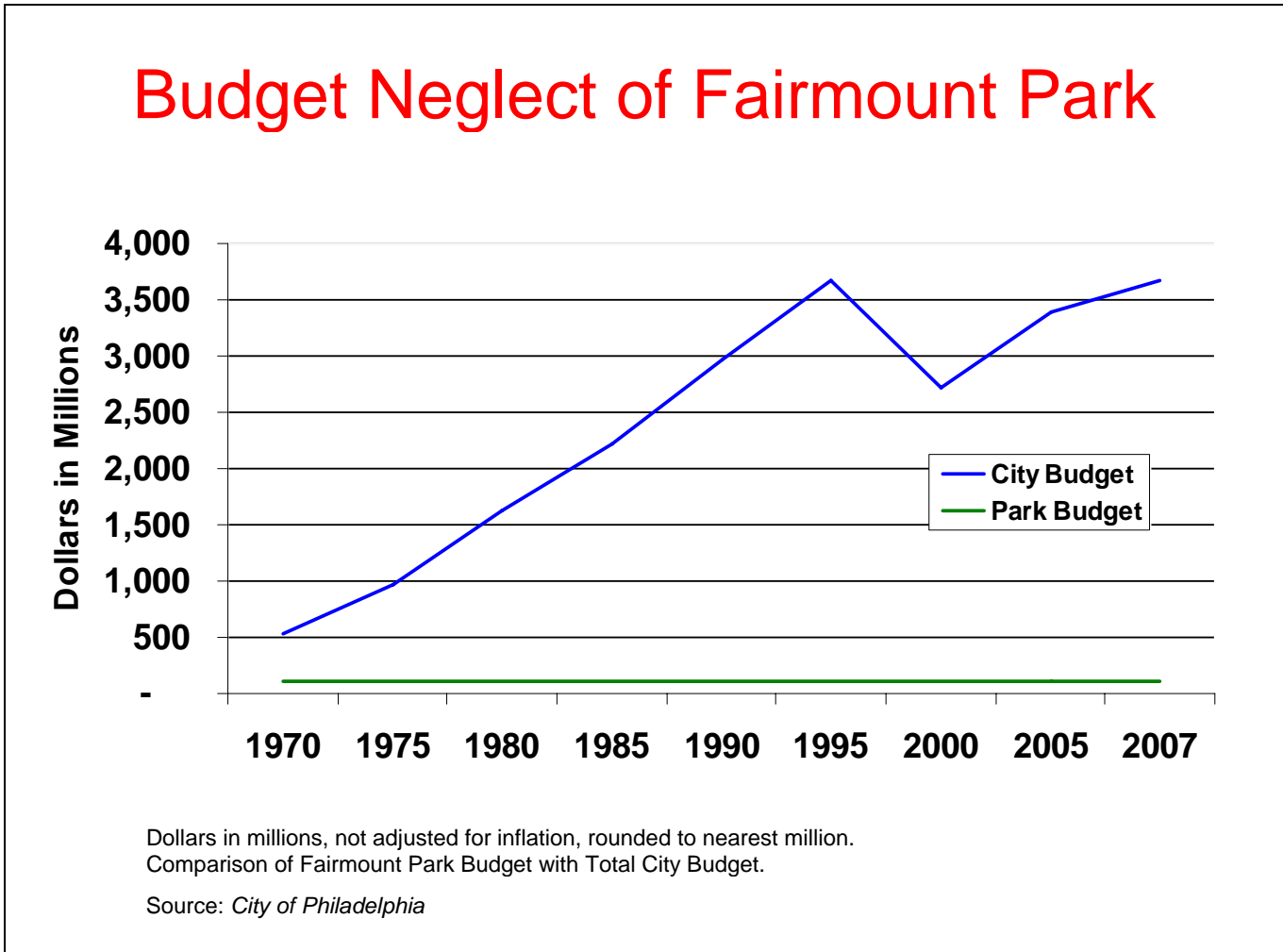
This merger is not about cost cutting, nor about secrecy. It is about increased accountability and transparency, more public input, better management, and ultimately cleaner, greener and safer parks and recreation facilities.

... Along with Fairmount Park, the Department of Recreation Currently Manages Some of the City's Best Parks:

The talent, dedication and passion of the leadership and staff at Fairmount Park is well known and highly regarded. Perhaps less known, is the extensive expertise the Department of Recreation has in park revitalization. No stranger to parks, the Department of Recreation, currently manages 76 of Philadelphia's neighborhood parks. Over the past 15 years, Philadelphia Green has partnered with the Department of Recreation and community leaders on a program that is a national model. In recent years they have expanded this partnership to include Fairmount Park.

... Decades of Budget Neglect: Fairmount Park has suffered from decades of budget neglect, in spite of the heroic work of dedicated and hard working staff and the tireless commitment of many park commissioners. In fact, while all other city departments have more resources, Fairmount Park's budget, adjusted for inflation, is less than half of what it was twenty years ago. Many people believe that the Fairmount Park Commission, in the name of "independence," has in fact been marginalized. Historically, mayor after mayor has ignored the Park – being neither responsible nor accountable for its maintenance and funding.

The chart below graphically illustrates the discrepancy between funding for Fairmount Park and all other City departments and why Philadelphia's Mayor should have more authority and responsibility for the City's parks.



The deterioration of Philadelphia's parks has been well documented. Most recently in May 2007, the Parks Alliance released its report, "Parks in Trouble", which documents the results of citizen inspections of one third of the city's parks. The Daily News exposed chronic underfunding and poor park conditions in their "Acres of Neglect" series in 2001.

With this Charter change, Philadelphia's Mayors will be held directly responsible for the condition of our parks. Funders who have been unwilling to invest in the current system will be more likely to invest in a reformed agency. The role of citizen and advocacy organizations like the Parks Alliance is now and will remain critical to the improvement and revitalization of our parks and recreation system. That's the nature of our democracy.

...100's of Million of Dollars in Economic Value: Ironically, Philadelphia's park and recreation system generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic value. In a recent groundbreaking study commissioned by the Philadelphia Parks Alliance - "*How Much Value Does the City of Philadelphia Receive from its Park and Recreation System?*" - The Trust for Public Land quantified in dollars and cents the wealth, revenue and cost savings generated by Philadelphia's parks and recreation resources. It's enormous. It's over a billion dollars. Yes, that's billion with a "b". If this is the value from a neglected, underfunded asset, imagine if we begin to invest in our parks and facilities in new and strategic ways!

...Reform Now: The Parks Alliance believes that the state of Philadelphia's parks is not good enough - and we will not settle for less. We know that when our parks and recreation areas are run down and littered, dark and dreary; our kids are less healthy, happy and safe; our communities suffer; and our city is weaker. We also know that when our parks and recreation amenities are well funded and well tended, our children play and grow healthy. They learn about bugs and water and one another. Families picnic and hike and teenagers bike and play ball. Our neighborhoods are revitalized and our overall quality of life is substantially improved. Our parks and recreation facilities are the center of our communities. That's why we need them to be safe, beautiful, clean and green.

There is no better time to undertake fundamental reform and reorganization of Philadelphia's Park and Recreation system. Now is the time – with the confidence and competence of a Mayor who has made this issue a priority. Thanks to the leadership of Councilmembers Clarke and Reynolds Brown, City Council approved park reform legislation last spring. In June, at a press conference to release the Parks Alliance and Trust for Public Land study, Mayor Nutter declared: "Now we are working together to expand the resources and extend the reach of what the parks and recreation can do for Philadelphia... I will create the best park system, not just in the nation, but in the world."

Mayor Nutter has put a down payment on this commitment with the largest increase in park funding of any mayor in years. He has publicly committed to make our city the greenest and most sustainable. He is committed to establishing policies and practices that will create more effective management of parks and recreation and that will guide future administrations by establishing new practices and precedents; thus laying the groundwork for investment in a first class system for a first class sustainable city.

The Parks Alliance, with an ever-expanding base of people and organizations, will remain steadfast and independent in holding this mayor and future mayors accountable for these reforms; and to ensure that every park, in every neighborhood is cleaner, greener and safer and that the entire city and region benefit from one of Philadelphia's most significant assets.

For more information contact the Philadelphia Parks Alliance:
Call 215-879-8159. Email friends@philaparks.org. Check out our website at: www.philaparks.org.