

John Erwin – Park Board – At Large

Why are you running for this position?

I am running for Park Board Commissioner At-Large because I love our Park System and want to make a contribution, because I believe that as a horticulture professor in floriculture and landscaping that I am qualified and bring a needed skill set to the Board, and because I have a record of achievement from my previous term. I am also running for Park Commissioner At-Large because I want to lead an effort to identify our generation's legacy to our Park System. I believe, that if we come together as a community and City, that we can do amazing things to leave our mark on our parks and city!

Describe your background and why it makes you a good candidate for the position you seek?

I am a horticulture professor at the U of M, dad of an adopted son who played sports in the Park System, and former Park Board Commissioner. I am the ONLY current At-Large Park Board Commissioner Candidate endorsed by the DFL, Labor and Sierra Club! The Mayor, Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Scott Dibble, and 10 of 13 City Council members also endorsed me. Why? Because I have a record of achievement including doubling street tree planting, helping start the Loppet Ski race, finishing Lake of the Isles improvements, starting the Tree Commission, the Joint Watershed Research Center, Mobile Movies in the Parks, installing 4 skateboard parks, increasing police officer number, increasing community gardens, and initiating the City's wireless system discussion. I accomplished these things during 1 term right after 9/11 when funding was severely cut back. How? By reducing costs through collaboration with the Mayor, City Council, U of M, and School Board, by increasing revenue through new relationships and increasing private giving, and by working hard. In short, I am a qualified candidate with a record of achievement that works on creative ways to work together, rather than fighting, to get things done for the residents of Minneapolis!

If elected, how will you work with the Lyndale Neighborhood Association and Lyndale community members to help us improve our neighborhood?

For too long, the Park Board has sought input from neighborhoods after the fact. I would seek to establish a citywide Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of a representative from each neighborhood. The Park Board would present its annual plans to this CAC to seek input, and keep everyone informed.

With respect to street trees, I would organize an effort with the Tree Commission to review the street tree planting plans which are, in many cases, outdated. I would also look at ways to 1) designate Lyndale Ave as a 'garden route' and 2) increase boulevard planting throughout all neighborhoods including the Lyndale Neighborhood.

I would have listening sessions at all neighborhood recreation facilities annually in coordination with the Neighborhood Associations to seek input and hear of concerns from local neighborhoods.

In short; I would seek to create a new culture of public engagement, respect, and openness between the Park Board and neighborhood residents.

What will your top priorities be if you are elected?

If elected, I will focus on:

- 1) Increasing citywide greening,
- 2) Reducing costs to hold-the-line on property taxes,
- 3) Increasing lifelong sports opportunities and senior programming,
- 4) Refocusing on neighborhood parks,

- 5) Eliminating fees kids pay to play sports and parking fees in parks for Minneapolis residents,
- 6) Eliminating parking fees for residents to park in the regional parks (the Lakes, River, Minnehaha falls, and Boom Island areas).
- 7) Creating a culture of transparency and public engagement on the Park Board, and
- 8) Working with all units of government collaboratively.

How will you improve the amount and quality of youth programming in the parks?

As a father of a son who played sports in the parks and as a regular runner and biker, I appreciate the critical role our parks play in offering access to sports and exercise opportunities. I would:

- 1) eliminate the fees (typically \$40) kids have to pay to play sports in their own neighborhood parks.
- 2) refocus improvement efforts on neighborhood parks. Too much funding is going to support remote larger athletic facilities that benefit a few. Residents need great fields IN their neighborhoods!
- 3) work with the Parks Foundation and local businesses to increase support of sports teams, and music and art classes. This would also include uniforms, equipment and supplies, weightlifting equipment and exercise stations along running paths and trails.
- 4) have a citywide recruiting effort to recruit and reward coaches. In many neighborhoods we are short coaches.
- 5) initiate community building events with kids that include dances, contests, and outreach programs to increase the total number of kids who feel welcome using our parks.
- 6) Find ways to extend Rec Center hours in needed neighborhoods.

How will make sure the Park Board and local parks are responsive and connected to the communities they serve?

- 1) Establish a citywide Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of a representative from each neighborhood. The Park Board would present its annual plans to this CAC to seek input, and keep everyone informed.
- 2) Initiate listening sessions at Rec Centers annually, in coordination with the Neighborhood Associations, to seek input and hear of concerns.
- 3) Engage all park users to identify what they like, and what they find lacking. This would include senior and kids. We will also need to talk to people who are not using the parks to find out why and make parks more relevant to them.
- 4) Increase the range of activities in parks. For instance, I believe that Rec centers can be places where people go to receive flu shots, find gardening and greening information, lift weights, do yoga, etc. Some of these activities may result in increased funding to increase rec center hours.

I short; I would seek to create a new culture of public engagement, respect, and openness between the Park Board and neighborhood residents to increase their relevance.