Minneapolis Charter Commission
Community Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 28, 2009 - 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
North Regional Library
1315 Lowry Ave N
Minneapolis MN 55411

Commissioners Present: Bernstein (Chair), Connell, Ferrara, Kadwell, Lazarus, Lichty, Metge, Rubenstein
Commissioners Excused: Bujold, Clegg, Dolan, Jancik, Remme, Stade, Street

Chair Bernstein called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., a quorum being present. He thanked the North Regional Library for allowing the Charter Commission to meet in their facility. He explained that the purpose of the community meeting was to accept public comment on the amendments to the Minneapolis City Charter as proposed by Council Members Ostrow, Remington, and Samuels. Speakers would be allowed approximately 2 minutes each. Comments were taken in the following order:

a) Creation of a City Administrator Position
b) Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation
c) Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Bernstein requested that anyone who wished to speak, sign in on the Sign-In Sheets available for each topic. He stated that he would first call on people to speak who had not spoken at a previous meeting before calling on those who had spoken at a previous meeting.

Council Member Paul Ostrow summarized the proposed amendments. He had also passed out a summary of the proposals, as well as draft ballot language.

City Administrator Position: This proposal will significantly strengthen the management of the city. It is well known and well documented from many sources that Minneapolis has an extremely antiquated system of governance. This proposal would give considerable additional authority to a position that would now be called a City Administrator rather than a City Coordinator. The City Coordinator currently has limited jurisdiction over a few of the city departments. This proposal would provide that all of those department heads would report to and be accountable to the City Administrator, and that individual would have the authority to discipline, review performance, and ultimately terminate department heads. This provides the authority needed to strengthen management controls while at the same time make sure that the elected officials continue to be the ones to make policy decisions to govern the City.

Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation: The decisions about the property tax levy and other authorities of the Board of Estimate and Taxation would be transferred to the City Council. Right now, the Council and the Mayor do not set the property tax levy or determine how the dollars are split between the City Council and Park Board functions. That function should be taken over by those that are most politically accountable, the Council and the Mayor.

Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board: The proposal would replace the current situation with a separate Park Board, which functions separately and distinctly from the City Council departments, and would create an advisory board of citizens. This is a model very successful nationally. It is a model that is not dissimilar to what Hennepin County now has for libraries. The citizen advisory board would advise the City Council and the City Council would have the ultimate authority on final decisions governing the parks.

Creation of a City Administrator Position

a) Father Michael O'Connell, 1723 Bryant Avenue North, Pastor of Ascension Catholic Church, stated that as the state legislature agonizes in cutting 4.6 billion dollars in the next biennium because of the global economic crisis; and despite the good news of one-time stimulus money coming from the federal government, there will be more restrictions on revenue coming to the cities from the federal government in the near and intermediate future. Because our city government badly needs a more efficient, accountable, and transparent method of representative decision-making to help plan, prioritize, and spend ever-diminishing financial resources, he asked that the Charter Commission place on the municipal ballot next fall separate amendments that will ask the voters to approve (1) establishing a city manager appointed by the Mayor and the City Council for a five-year term who will be supervised by the Mayor and the City Council; and (2) realigning the existing Board of Estimate and Taxation into the regular function of city planning and management. The proposals will create a more efficient, accountable, and transparent decision making process through the oversight of elected and appointed government leaders enabling citizens to continue to enjoy sufficient quality of life. Diminishing financial resources demands greater stewardship. The electorate deserves to vote on these critical questions.

b) Polly Keppel, 10 Luverne Avenue, representing the League of Women Voters (LWV), displayed a chart that the LWV included in the 2005 - 2006 studies on city government. The chart is an example of why the LWV believes that the city needs to have a structure that better incorporates accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity, and accessibility in making solid decisions in creating effective governance. City staff should report to one authority so that there are clear lines of responsibility. The current structure frustrates the key values of accountability and transparency in government.

c) Joan Niemiec, 4239 Harriet Avenue, stated that as a previous City Council member (1984-1993) and Director of Community Planning for the Park Board (1998-2001), she felt she brought unique qualifications to the discussion. Even though she felt that changes were needed, she did not criticize any city employee or elected official, and the city is fortunate to have such capable people working for them. The problem is that these people altogether result in a sum which is less than the parts. The proposed Charter change would help to eliminate that problem and create a more cost effective process. The organizational system is not working very well. There is redundancy. It is hard to attract quality people, particularly managers, who could earn more money in other settings rather than to come into a system like this where it seems difficult to have a decision made in a timely fashion or to know who the final arbiter is. She thought that

a strong city manager would do that. People can argue that the city needs checks and balances, but property taxes cannot continue to increase by 8% every year while property values go down

d) Sean Kershaw, 555 North Wabasha, St. Paul, Executive Director of the Citizens League, stated that over the past 55 years, the Citizens League has looked at the structure of Minneapolis government at least three different times. Each time they concluded that the city needs to develop clearer lines of political and policy accountability and efficiency. For example, their 1969 report concluded that Minneapolis required major consolidation of functions between the Mayor's Office and the President of the City Council and a stronger role of the City Coordinator. The Citizens League has not studied this issue since then. However, it appears that the underlying conditions that resulted in their conclusions 40 years ago remain the same. The Citizens League supports a thorough and genuine public conversation of all the proposals to improve the accountability and efficiency of Minneapolis city government.

e) Leslie Davis, 622 Lowry Avenue, stated that when the present City Coordinator was appointed, he had asked questions of the Mayor as to why he made that appointment; where they found this person, and upon what information he was recommended. There was no communication on file. He was told it was all done by phone. No resume was provided until after the hiring took place. Mr. Davis sued the City in order to try to find out where the City Coordinator came from and the receive information he requested under the Data Practices Act. Mr. Davis knew the City Coordinator had been the Chief of Staff in the Ventura administration. He strongly objected to the current City Coordinator being given any more authority since he has not yet been provided the information he had requested under the Data Practices Act.

f) Barbara Johnson, City Council President, Ward 4, 350 South 5th Street, stated that the call for a City Administrator type of government is heard every once in a while. She had always thought that Minneapolis citizens had a good relationship with their government, and they liked being able to have the access that they have to their Council members and Mayor and the personal relationships that develop. She had concerns about an unelected bureaucrat being in charge of all of the city's functions. Minneapolis is not a suburb; it is a city of the first class. The City Administrator type of government is a suburban model. To think that one person would be in charge of all of the departments of the city is a scary thing. The City Administrator would be responsible for the discipline and firing of the Police Chief. That is a function that is unique; the No. 1 Public Safety Department of the city and someone would be above that person. She had concerns about this. When someone serves in a position such as City Administrator, there can be personality conflicts that can roil through the whole enterprise and the city is a huge functioning entity with 5,000 employees. There are multiple functions and multiple businesses within the city. The city of Minneapolis runs a parking system and a water department among many other enterprises. To have one unelected person in charge of all that enterprise really troubled her.

g) Adam Faitek, 2814 Colfax Avenue South, stated that he had been working with Council Member Ostrow on these proposals. "Vision without execution is hallucination". The city has elected officials who really look out for the city's vision, but there is a disconnect in the actual execution. It is important to have political leadership along with

the capacity for effective management. Half of the 40 largest cities that have received a AAA bond rating have a city manager. The National Civic League adopted the installation of a government charter. He passed out a city of Minneapolis organizational chart and asked if anyone could tell him who is actually in charge. He passed out a city of St. Paul organizational chart and stated that it was very clear and understandable who was in charge in St. Paul.

h) Lauren Maker, 4059 Sheridan Avenue North, stated that she strongly urged the Charter Commission to shoot down the proposal to move to a city manager position. She has worked in a city manager position in a city manager government. She is currently a public employee with the city of Minneapolis, but was speaking on behalf of herself. The city manager is a great model for a small town. It does not work in a city as large as Minneapolis. The previous speaker pointed to St. Paul. St. Paul is not working at all. Minneapolis is doing well. Despite budget problems, Minneapolis is still functioning as a city, still meeting the needs of citizens, and actually balancing the budget; something that St. Paul seems incapable of doing. It is very unrealistic in today's complicated world for one man (there has been only one woman City Coordinator in the entire history of the city of Minneapolis and no people of color) to do this job all by himself. Frankly, it is too complicated for one person to keep track of everything in all departments. A one-person system lends itself to the tyranny of a strong personality.

i) Joe Biernat, 701 Main Street, stated that the role of any Charter Commission member in any municipality is to look at Charter change proposals and embrace them if the end result will bring efficiency to city government. It is striking that over the years many have called for stronger professional management within the City Hall organization. These outcries have emanated from former city coordinators, budget directors, elected officials, newspaper editorial writers, the League of Women Voters, Citizens League, etc., and the consensus is abundantly clear that City Hall can work better. He believed that every City Council candidate over the years has been a visionary. They all have goals to accomplish if they get elected. The problem, however, is that time after time new Council members find themselves immediately immersed in a bureaucratic web of organizational issues that literally drains their time and their office resources. It would be extremely beneficial to incorporate the organizational update that would foster less management falling on the Council members. This would help free elected officials to devote more of their time to the ward that they are elected to represent. Department heads are subject to so many meetings and the repetition is abundant. For example, if a department head proposes a new initiative, he or she begins by scheduling 14 different meetings with elected officials. This is inefficient, unproductive, time consuming, and ultimately very costly. Establishing clear lines of authority and accountability will help create a more efficient local government in the future.

Elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation

a) Polly Keppel, 10 Luverne Avenue, representing the League of Women Voters (LWV), stated that the membership of the LVW overwhelmingly supported the elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and supported the Mayor and the City Council setting the mil levy.

b) Joan Niemiec, 4239 Harriet Avenue, stated that she strongly supported the elimination of the Board of Estimate and Taxation for the following reasons: (1) Transparency - The average person in Minneapolis doesn't know there is a Board of Estimate and Taxation and they don't know how the members vote. When the City Council votes on the budget, it is recorded in the paper; and (2) It is outdated. Of the seven members that were once on the Board of Estimate and Taxation, one position has been eliminated with the elimination of the Library Board. Now it is unfair for the Park Board to have an extra place at the table, particularly when they have a fewer number of employees than the Police and Public Works Departments.

c) Barbara Johnson, City Council President, Ward 4, **350 South 5th Street**, stated that she wanted to make sure that it is clear that people understand that one of the functions of the Board of Estimate and Taxation is to sell bonds. As a First Class city, Minneapolis has the ability to sell bonds because they have a Board of Estimate and Taxation that was granted statutory authority to do so. If the city would have to go to the legislature to ask to sell bonds, like other cities such as St Paul, it would create a barrier and be a serious problem. Local administration and local ability to decide what sort of bonding the city wants to have is an important decision.

d) Lauren Maker, 4059 Sheridan Avenue North, stated that she was in opposition to abolishing the Board of Estimate and Taxation. It is a necessary check and balance on the entire system of government in the city. It has two citizen members that are directly responsible to the public. They do not represent other boards; they represent the public's interest. It is crucial to have the Board of Estimate and Taxation because not each of the participants of the board has equal levy limit options. For example, the Park Board does not have full control over their own levy limit; it has to be approved by the City Council. This is a necessary check on capital expenditures, and it also leads to more deliberative policies because balance is built into the system. The Board of Estimate and Taxation must be retained to make sure that the city is looking at its overall bonding capability through all the agencies that are capable of bonding on behalf of the City.

e) Carol Becker, 3201 48th Avenue South, stated that she was a member of the Board of Estimate and Taxation. The Board of Estimate and Taxation does three things: (1) They set the maximum property tax levy. They do not set the tax levy. The Park Board and the City Council set their tax levy. The Board of Estimate and Taxation creates a framework for the City Council and the Park Board to work together. If the Board of Estimate and Taxation were eliminated, this framework would still be needed. That function of coordination is critical to the city and the financial planning of the city. (2) The Board of Estimate and Taxation sells bonds because the legislature did not entrust cities of the first class with the authority to sell bonds. If the Board of Estimate and Taxation were eliminated in November, in December there would be no way to pay for fire stations, water treatment plants, streets, etc. (3) The Board of Estimate and Taxation audits the city's books. Clean government doesn't just happen. It happens because an auditor looks at the city's financial practices. The auditors should not report to the people who are being audited. That's why the Board of Estimate and Taxation exists.

Elimination of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

a) Dick Miller, 5240 Hollywood Road, stated that he had a unique point of view on the Park Board since he had served for two different governors early in his career and served as a staff person in the City Coordinator's Office before he was a City Council member. He had also sat on the City Planning Commission, the Public Housing Authority, and on the Airports Commission. He currently served on the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. Change in government is not new and never pleasant, but it is almost always caused by fiscal stress. He cited examples of other boards that had been eliminated in the past: the Minneapolis Board of Public Welfare, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Sanitary Sewer System, the Minneapolis-St Paul Airports Commission, the HRA, and the Library Board. In 1971, two members of the City Council were eliminated from the Park Board. In 1976, the terms of the Park Board were reduced from six to four years and the Mayor was given veto power.

b) Polly Keppel, 10 Luverne Avenue, representing the League of Women Voters (LWV), stated that from 1974 until the conclusion of their 2006 study on independent boards, the LWV supported an independent Park Board. However, they now have no position on this issue and believed there is a need for deliberation on the issue.

c) Joan Niemiec, 4239 Harriet Avenue, stated that when she was a City Council member, she represented the 10th Ward which at that time encompassed about half of Lake Calhoun and half of Lake Harriet. She found that a lot of her work on the Council was dealing with Park Board issues; not because of incompetency with the elected officials or the staff, but because it was different jurisdictions. When streets in the area needed to be repaved or noise issues needed to be addressed, the meetings always involved the Park Board and a city department such as Public Works or the Police Department. So while the city and the Park Board do work together, it is a duplication of services. It is time to revisit this discussion. Finances are tight. The duplication of services is resulting in fewer resources for our children. She didn't think the electorate was ready to eliminate the Park Board because there are other issues such as the public's fear that if the City Council takes control of the park system, they will develop the land. She felt that the city should look at the possibility of merging with Three Rivers Parks system and continue to have some kind of park system, and the City Council should set the broad overall policy.

d) Dan Thibadeau, 2922 Girard Avenue North, stated that the Minneapolis Park system is a wonderful system. Minneapolis has a world class park system. He saw no reason to change something that works and stated that he thought the City Council would be well advised to keep their nose and fingers out of the parks.

e) John Dietrich, 150 Second Street Northeast, stated that he was a 35-year resident of Minneapolis. He was in support of an independent Park Board in order to maintain the nationally recognized park system. He believed that if the independent Park Board was absorbed by the City Council, the budget would get consumed by maintenance, Public Works, etc. He strongly believed that the Park Board should remain independent so that the park systems could continue to serve to recreate and promote healthy life styles.

f) Don Samuels, City Council Member, Ward 5, stated that this meeting was being held in a library. Many people thought that the elimination of the Minneapolis Library Board would bring dark days. However, now many libraries that were going to close are still open, and some libraries will be re-built. The result is much more positive than many people had hoped. So here we are again thinking about another consolidation. His conviction was that taking over the parks by the city would be a positive thing. This is an intelligent and thoughtful conversation with good points on both sides. It is a conversation that we are obligated to have in these difficult financial times. He deeply respected all of those on both sides of the issue. This conversation must take place. Nothing can be off the table. Nothing is too sacred to consider. If the people decide that it is too extreme, then they will vote. Please be articulate and passionate, but let's have the conversation.

g) John Derus, 4046 Xerxes Avenue North, stated that he was initially in favor of the proposal to eliminate the Park Board. But he had had a four-and-a-half year journey with the Park Board regarding the De LaSalle athletic field which was a very difficult thing for the Park Board to decide, and he admired their process — although it took a long time. Don Samuels was right; this discussion should take place. But in the end, he thought the Park Board should stay the way it is.

h) Duane Arens, 602 4th Street Northeast, representing the Metropolis Rugby Football Club at Columbia Park, stated that they have a very creative, innovative contract with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. Through grants and labor, they have turned swamp land into the best rugby field in the Midwest. He couldn't think of any other place in the state where they could have worked out a contract like they have with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. It was the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, with their innovation and creativity, working with a non-profit to make it win-win for both organizations. The Metropolis Foundation supported keeping the Park Board as it is now.

i) Leslie Davis, 622 Lowry Avenue, stated that he was the founding president of the local chapter of an environmental group. The parks are our most valuable resource. If the authority is taken away from the people who have been managing this resource for all these years and given to the City Council, look at the record of the City Council. The Minneapolis Library has disappeared. The planetarium is gone. Hennepin Avenue is dying. A ball park being built under the plume of the garbage burner. Turning the parks over to the city of Minneapolis, rather than the Park Board, would be like turning the Boys and Girls Clubs over to the pedophiles of America.

j) Barbara Johnson, City Council President, Ward 4, 350 South 5th Street, stated that she had served for 18 years on the Metropolitan Parks and Open Spaces Commission and represented both the Minneapolis park system and what at the time was the Suburban Hennepin Park District - now Three Rivers Park District. She felt this gave her a unique perspective on the value of an independent park system. These two systems are the premier systems in our region because they have an independent structure. They are a little bit different. The suburban parks set their own levy. They report to the County, but there is less oversight than the Minneapolis Park Board has. The Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board and the park system is respected throughout the country. This park system was designed by some of the foremost landscape

architects of their time. It would be very difficult in these tough times for parks to compete with the needs of public safety, the Health Department, and street maintenance. The Park Police in Minneapolis provide a different type of service than the Minneapolis Police Department provides. The Minneapolis Police Department investigates serious crimes taking place in parks. But the Park Police have the ability to look into some of the nuisance crimes such as break-ins into cars around the chain of lakes. However, when the chips are down, both departments work together completely. The Park Board was able to switch gears in the 1980s to pay attention to the riverfront. If the city did not have an independent Park Board, it would be much more difficult to protect the riverfront and enhance it.

k) David Luce, 426 29th Avenue North, stated that he lived by Farview Park which was originally paid for by subscription of residents of north Minneapolis. The parks would not be the first priority of the City Council. The amendment proposes to eliminate two elected bodies which would be a decrease in democratic representation in a city which is essentially a one-party town to begin with. Park funding would be threatened if it was under the control of the City Council. There would always be a threat to the funding of the parks. This proposal would probably be a worse disaster than Block E.

l) Lauren Maker, 4059 Sheridan Avenue North, urged the Charter Commission to keep an independent Park Board. She had heard a lot of discussion recently that there is duplication of the Park Police and the Minneapolis Police Department. When the city of Minneapolis decided to save costs and combine the 4th and 5th precincts, combining the Northside with Downtown, what happened was the Northside got no police service. The cost savings need to be looked at in the long term. The Park Board is nationally and internationally recognized. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The City Council taking over the Park Board at this point in time would literally be taking a chain saw to the city's budget instead of a scalpel because they would walk in with limited knowledge of the operations and where the most efficient cuts could be made. The Park Board should remain independent.

m) Lisa Beck, 4503 Pleasant Avenue South, stated that she found it odd that the proposal would abolish the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board and establish an advisory committee for the City Council over park issues. People elected by the public would be replaced with people appointed by the City Council/Mayor to advise in an area where they are not necessarily educated. While it is being considered to place the question of abolishing the Park Board on the ballot, she has seen no analysis or opinion regarding the cost savings that will result or what the new structure would look like. Citizens would be asked to vote blindly on the issue. Between now and November, will there be a plethora of information that will make the issue clear to citizens?

n) Jennifer McMacken, 3537 18th Avenue South, stated that as a stay-at-home mom, she strongly opposed the elimination of the independent Park Board. She felt the result would be that park buildings would close and/or they would have limited hours with a part-time staff earning minimum wage. The staff at her local park has worked very hard to provide a very safe environment for her children. She believed that it takes a village to raise children. If you walk into any of the park centers, you will find the park staff is not there just for a paycheck. They are there because they love recreation, the programming, and the kids. They want to serve the community.

o) Starla Krause, 2300 Victory Memorial Parkway, stated that she was positively in favor of an independent Park Board. The parks are the jewel of our city, the nation, and throughout the world. Let the Park Board do what it does best: being stewards of our parks, forestry, and riverfronts. If the Park Board was eliminated and the main function given to Public Works, they would be maintained in same manner as the streets. Let the Park Board do what they do best. They are doing a magnificent job, and the parks are beautiful. She was strongly opposed to eliminating the Park Board.

p) Jeff Screnes, 2617 3rd Street North, stated that he was the Housing Director of the Hawthorne Neighborhood Council, but was speaking tonight as a resident. He stated that he looked at the three proposals, especially the Park Board proposal, through the lens of a community organizer and thought, what do each of these three decisions do in terms of the average resident and their ability to have an impact and make their lives better by working with the city of Minneapolis. It was his belief that the proposed amendments will take that power away and silence that voice. He was not in support of any of the three proposals.

q) Helen Williams, 1418 Hall Curve, stated that these are very difficult economic times, and they affect people who don't have dollars. If we do not provide kids with positive programming, what will happen? That is what the Park Board provides. The parks are valuable. It is the only place that parents can take their kids and feel safe without paying anything. It takes kids off the streets. We need to embrace and engage the people of the community. She could not imagine anyone voting to give up empowering the people of the community. The city has enough to deal with; why burden them with this? Empower the people and leave the Park Board alone. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

r) Tracy Nordstrom 3301 East Calhoun Parkway, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Commissioner, stated that she would be an elected official until December 31, 2009. She supported keeping and celebrating the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. It had been a great honor to serve on the Park Board. She made $5.11 per hour. If the 9 positions on the Park Board were eliminated, it would save approximately $90,000. Today, between the bus stop and her house, citizens stopped her to talk about hockey, skating, and wrestling. She was accessible. Her colleagues are accessible. They were there to show focus, finesse, leadership, and above all, to take the claims, worries, and joys of the citizenry and translate that into fantastic green space, healthy waterways, and clean air. 20% of the Park Board budget goes to trees. Will the City Council do that given the very incredible demands on them? This was a short-sighted fix for a long-term city.

s) Joe Biernat, 701 Main Street, stated that he had participated in many efforts over the years to take a comprehensive look at ways that city departments could work together and provide essential services. Local government has no choice but to pursue redesign, re-thinking, and reinvention relating to how city services are delivered and then finally assessing what services need to be delivered. Many years ago, a study was done which identified many areas of duplication of services. Does this municipality need two police departments, police chiefs, investigative units, and administrations? Last fall, his son was robbed on a city sidewalk adjacent to a city park. By the time the

issue of who had jurisdiction was sorted out, the crime could, perhaps, have been solved. Ten years ago, a study commission recommended several areas which clearly revealed the need for consolidation: 911 response; case investigations, special events, training, criminal justice record management, and department management. Toda, this study sits on a shelf at City Hall collecting dust. Extraordinary times require extraordinary actions.

t) Cam Gordon, City Council Member, Ward 2, 914 Franklin Terrace, stated that he agreed that there was room for improvement in the Park Board, the Board of Estimate and Taxation, and city administrative government. He disagreed, however, with the solution and the proposed conclusions. Even more than that, he disagreed with the timing and the process that has been used. As a city, we haven't had time to look at the alternatives and options and really understand the problems and what possible solutions might exist. Two reasons he felt the Park Board should be persevered were: (1) It made his life and job easier to have a group of people who were focused and paying attention to this incredible resource, our parks; and (2) It hurts our democracy to do away with independent boards. He was still smarting over the loss of the Library Board. It is important that people have connections to their government. He suggested an alternative path: (1) Determine that this is an inappropriate time to be placing these matters on the ballot. (2) We should focus on the massive Charter revision that the Charter Commission is bringing forward so that the community can get engaged in those issues and figure out if there is anything that is substantive. (3) The independent bodies should each pass a resolution reaffirming the value, importance, and support for the other bodies. (4) Set up some kind of group to come back and report to the Charter Commission where we can have representatives selected from our independent boards so we can look at how we can improve. (5) The city really needs to take a look at and give a chance for the department heads, the city coordinator, the Mayor and the Council to look at the idea of an administrator.

u) Denita Cloud, 3105 Girard Avenue North, stated that whenever she has an out-of-town visitor, she drives them around the city on the parkways. Everyone is very impressed with the parks and the parkways. There is no question about the Park Board's performance. She gave an example of a Park Board employee who went out of her way to let her know of activities in the parks for her children. How many great Park Board employees will lose their jobs if the Park Board is eliminated?

v) Bennett Siems, 3532 Aldrich Avenue South, stated that he was a professional musician in a jazz trio. When his group performs, they are paid and they are paid well. The only time they play without being paid is at three outdoor shows per year in the Minneapolis parks. They do so to participate in one of the greatest traditions in the country - the summer music series. The Minneapolis parks and their programs are absolutely incomparable to anything else in this country and the Park Board has made it possible. In times of economic duress, do not jeopardize your most precious assets. To eliminate the Park Board is like turning over the maintenance of Big Ben to a plumber. Leave the Park Board in the hands of those who have always kept it ticking.

w) Steve Jackson, Boys & Girls Club, 2410 Irving Avenue North, stated that he has coached youth sports for 25 years in north Minneapolis. It costs almost $3,000 for a basketball program per season. The kids he coaches would have been doing nothing

if it were not for the Park Board. As an outside agency, the Park Board helped them increase participation in their programs at no cost. If the Park Board disappeared, he didn't know what they would do with the kids. Sports gives coaches an opportunity to talk to kids and teach them about character.

x) Gary Arntson (sp?), 3015 Benjamin Northeast, stated that he was strongly in support of the city administrator proposal, but if the Park Board is placed under the administrator, that is too much. Leave the Park Board and Board of Estimate and Taxation the way they are.

y) Karen Ba, 4017 Zenith Avenue South, stated that it takes a village. Her son had trouble in school and thank goodness for the coaches at the park who were there for him and helped build his character. The Park Board has a lot of influence on everyday life. If it becomes a line item on the city budget, how would a city park be distinguished from a ball park?

z) Scott Vreeland, 2437 33rd Avenue South, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Commissioner, stated that he took this very personally. People love their parks, and they also love having the ability to have an impact about their parks. He totally disagreed with Don Samuels. He didn't think that this is the right discussion. The right discussion should be, "What should we be doing to face the financial crisis in front of us?" He presented a chart entitled, "MPRB Debt Bonds/CDBG - Neighborhood Park Capital" showing decreasing funding for the parks from 1998 to 2010. In 2001, the city and the Park Board looked at Public Works and Park Board infrastructure. We need to replace our wading pools and buildings. We need to make decisions in concert with the City Council. The City Council and the Park Board have never met informally. We need to work together to solve our problems. Where are the meetings to do that? This is a destructive conversation that avoids the real issues of whether we will keep our buildings open or not.

aa) Lyall Schwarzkopf, 4840 Bloomington Avenue, stated that he read the Park Board amendment and found that we need to integrate the park services with the rest of the city rather than having two separate agencies. The athletic, recreational, and senior citizen programs will continue to be in the park just like they are today. None of those things will change. The changes will integrate the park service into the city service rather than having it separate. The park employees will be incorporated with the city employees and their unions. The Superintendent of the Parks will become the department head of the parks. It may not be the same person. The Park Board levy will be set by the City Council rather than the Park Board itself. It is important to integrate the services to eliminate duplicate administrative services which means more money will be available for parks and/or tax savings for the tax payers.

bb) Audie Gillespie, 3225 24th Street East, stated that democracy is messy. Let's preserve it; both the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.

cc) Carol Becker, 3201 48th Avenue South, stated that no money would be saved by eliminating the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. The Park Board has a Forestry Department; if it goes over to the city it will cost the same amount. The Board of

Estimate and Taxation members cost the taxpayers $800 a year out of a $1,400,000,000 city budget. This is a question of democracy. Fewer hands lead to corruption and bad decision making. This city is known as one of the best managed cities in the country. If you terminate these boards, you have lost another way of having people be involved in their government. This is really about democracy.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Peggy Menshek
Council Committee Coordinator