

What grade would you give your local Anchorage park?

COMPASS: *Other points of view*

By JEFF DILLON

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Anchorage residents recently celebrated the grand opening of Cuddy Family Midtown Park, the city's dramatic new park setting. This beautiful urban space is a result of many years of hard work and active public involvement, as well as generous funding from state, federal and local bonds, and private donations, in particular from the Cuddy family.

No matter where you stood watching more than 1,000 Anchorage residents enjoying the wide variety of park activities -- from roller skiing to watching musical performances in the amphitheater -- it was thrilling and rewarding. It has been even more exciting to watch people visit the park over the past few weeks, walking, talking, jogging, sitting, skating, roller skiing, biking, dog walking (on leashes) or kite flying. Anchorage is already experiencing the park as it will be used and enjoyed for years to come: as a place to gather, socialize, exercise, and build community.

Cuddy Family Midtown Park sets a new standard for active urban green space in Anchorage. If we graded this park project today, it would certainly receive an A+, for public engagement, public use, and community building in the center of Midtown.

But are all of our parks meeting your needs? What grade would you give your neighborhood park? How should we take better care of what we have?

It's time for us to find out.

This fall, I'm proud to announce the Anchorage Park Foundation and the Parks and Recreation Department are embarking on a new project to expand public involvement in Anchorage parks. The Anchorage Parks Report Card is an opportunity to evaluate the condition of your neighborhood park. We encourage you to get involved.

The Report Card will focus initially on small, neighborhood parks with playgrounds, and then expand to larger community parks, trails and natural areas.

When evaluating your neighborhood park, you will be asked to focus on five criteria: cleanliness, safety, structure, appearance and functionality. Is your swing set broken? Are the trash cans an eyesore? Are the signs falling down? Participants will note these "Fix-It" items that require immediate attention.

The whole process will take about an hour (in most small neighborhood parks), and we're asking our recreation programmers to make sure it is fun and family-friendly.

We know that you care about how we spend your money, and you should! We are eager to ensure that we are spending taxpayer dollars and private donations effectively to make sure that our parks meet your standards.

This project will strengthen Anchorage community involvement in the park planning process. We'll

know what you're most concerned about, and we'll know what needs the most work. The "Fix It List" will keep us busy this winter planning for safety and function upgrades in summer 2009. It will help the community hold us accountable as you check our work.

I hope that you will take this opportunity to get involved. Take an hour with your family before the snow falls to make a difference in Anchorage parks. With your help, we will continue to care for our beautiful parks and enhance quality of life in Anchorage.

Let us know how your neighborhood park is working for you, and make an investment in Healthy Parks -- Healthy People. For more information, please visit www.AnchorageParkFoundation.org.

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