

Opinion

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Parks boost *Foundation is a way to contribute*

Like that pocket park in your neighborhood? The Chester Creek greenbelt? The chalets at Kincaid and Russian Jack?

Now you can write a check to the Anchorage Parks Foundation to help keep up the city's parks and fields of play, expand programs and begin new ones. And thanks to the Rasmuson Foundation, there's a good chance your contribution may increase with matching money.

The Rasmuson Foundation has bankrolled the parks foundation with a \$400,000 grant and will provide another \$400,000 in matching grants. That's a tremendous start. Jeff Dillon, director of the city's parks and recreation department, said last week that at first foundation money will be used for capital improvements. With good luck and good will, years from now the parks foundation will grow big enough to become an endowment, with a small percentage of its value used every year to help pay for parks.

In recent years parks bonds have had a tough time at the polls; they always seem to be issues on the bubble, either passing or failing by narrow margins. The city hopes the parks foundation will provide a steadier, long-term source of money, take some of the burden of parks maintenance from property-tax payers and give residents a stronger voice in how their parks are used, maintained and improved.

Mr. Dillon plans a series of meetings after the first of the year to find out what residents want from their parks and figure out ways to deliver.

Mayor Mark Begich has been aggressive in finding ways other than property taxes to pay for city services. The parks foundation fits that agenda. But there's no getting around the old axiom of economics -- no such thing as a free lunch. Want a healthy, vibrant city? We're going to have to pay for it, whether in user fees, stiffer fines, civic donations, taxes or all of the above. We can tap Uncle Sam -- or Uncle Ted -- for federal money, too, but in the long run we'll get what we're willing to pay for.

The Anchorage Parks Foundation is a treasury of the willing. Anchorage will benefit in better parks that do what city assets are supposed to do -- serve the people.

BOTTOM LINE: Anchorage Parks Foundation will help provide a steady source of money for our fields of fitness, play and reflection.