

## Parks bonds

### Yes on Prop 2 investment in parks

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Most of the parks bond money -- totaling \$3.95 million -- will go to the basics in our parks. That's irrigation, parking lot and trail repair, trail hardening, bridge repairs, sidewalks, playground equipment and lighting.

Specifics range from improvements to the hockey rink at Tikishla Park -- the Scotty Gomez rink -- to continued work on soccer fields and ski trails at Kincaid Park, to trail maintenance at the equestrian center in Ruth Arcand Park. The bond proposition lists 14 parks for specific upgrades or repair projects, along with areawide improvements in pedestrian safety and trail upkeep.



Name that 'Toon (Peter Dunlap-Shohl)

Parks bonds are a tough bet in Anchorage. Roads are a cinch, school bonds better than even, but parks often are on the bubble -- with voters leaning toward a "No" vote. But Anchorage would be wise to make the investment called for in next week's balloting. Whether it's winter activities, baseball, running, walking the dog, picnics, flying a kite or just an afternoon with the kid in a stroller, an endless parade of tens of thousands of us use the parks, one way or another.

Proposition 2 asks property tax payers to pony up an additional \$4 a year on the average Anchorage home to pay for the parks improvements. That's a small price in higher taxes -- about a penny a day -- for so much in return.

Thinking of taxpayers as investors in the community, the bond money becomes an even more attractive investment thanks to the Anchorage Park Foundation. The nonprofit community group is working hard to secure private funding, state and federal funds to go along with the bond money. An active municipal Parks and Recreation Commission is also part of the improvement effort.

Park users seem more united than they were a few years ago, when the politically charged battle over the location of the Simonian Little League fields pitted one park supporter against another -- to the detriment of both.

Community leaders also have toned down the self-defeating war over "trails versus roads." Anchorage needs both.

The city has 10,000 acres of parkland, 200 parks and more than 250 miles of trails and greenbelts. We're richly blessed, and we have the means to take care of what we have without much of a burden on taxpayers. Let's do so.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Parks bonds are a good investment in improving our fields of play and relaxation.

### Props 3, 4, 5

Yes to better golf and land swaps

### **PROPOSITION 3: RUSSIAN JACK GOLF**

The par-3 golf course at Russian Jack Springs Park is famous for its greens. Rightly so. The greens are artificial turf atop a surface so hard and unforgiving many golfers don't bother to putt. Just reach the green, pick up your ball and walk on.

Golfers and the rest of voting Anchorage can change that April 4 if they approve a long-term lease with the Russian Jack Springs Junior Golf Association, which would invest about \$250,000 to build real greens, a pitch-and-putt area and an instruction center. The nonprofit is affiliated with The First Tee, a nationwide program that seeks to teach lessons of character and integrity through the game of golf to low-income kids. The city would still run the golf course; the association would reserve the pitch-and-putt and instruction areas for about 20 hours a week.

The rest of Russian Jack would continue to be a year-round community park. Adults, vote yes. Kids, drive on.

### **PROPOSITION 4: SOUTH ANCHORAGE LAND SWAP**

At no cost to taxpayers, the city would swap 69 acres of mostly peat land north of O'Malley Road to the Klatt family for 38 acres on the southwest corner of O'Malley and C Street, right next to the South Anchorage Sports Complex.

This swap would allow the city to expand the sports complex on good, upland property. The complex already suffers crowded parking. This would consolidate park property and not alleviate current crowding, but allow the South Anchorage complex eventually to become a south-side Russian Jack, according to city parks manager Jeff Dillon.

The land that would go to the Klatts likely would be sold for commercial development -- CIRI is interested, though spokesman Jim Jager said the corporation has no specific plans other than trying to consolidate some of its holdings, just as the parks department is trying to do. There may be wetlands conservation issues to consider, but any development would have to go through hearings and permitting.

The city's chance to gain a well-drained 38 acres for more park land in South Anchorage, where demand will only grow, makes sense. Vote yes.

### **PROPOSITION 5: MOUNT BALDY LAND SWAP**

Hikers continue trespassing to reach the trail to the summit of Mount Baldy in Chugach State Park near Eagle River. It's a gentle violation of Eklutna Inc. property, but one that voters can and should stop by a land swap.

The city proposes to trade 20 acres in the northwest corner of the Mirror Lake/Edmonds Lake Park area for 80 acres of Eklutna land to provide a parking area, trail head and trail corridor to Baldy. The 20 acres north and east of Mirror Lake Middle School would border land Eklutna already owns, although the exact acreage is yet to be determined. It may include about 5 kilometers of ski and running trails accessed from the school grounds. But John Rodda, parks director for Chugiak-Eagle River, said the deal will in no way diminish that trail use or access.

Baldy isn't nearly as traveled as Flattop, but it's a popular family climb -- and a favorite take-off point for para gliders and hang gliders who ride the winds off its summit. "The thermals are exceptional up there," Mr. Rodda said.

So is the land deal -- and the swap won't cost taxpayers anything. Vote yes, and we can climb without trespassing.

BOTTOM LINE: Propositions 3, 4 and 5 are good deals for park users that promise more room for more activities.

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