

Improving the parks Finally, there's progress

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Private donors and volunteers are stepping up to support Anchorage's long-neglected parks -- and with any luck, that community involvement will lead to much-needed public support later.

Anchorage is blessed with tremendous natural parklands and many beautiful neighborhood parks, but let's be honest: In recent years we haven't, as a community, taken very good care of them. Soccer fields gone to seed, playground equipment unpainted, gardening and landscaping neglected, parks budgets scrimped for a decade or longer. You could argue about how much parks maintenance and beautification Anchorage really needs, but you'd be hard-pressed to show that we've done a first-class job. Now, finally, there's a plan to turn that situation around.

The Anchorage Parks Foundation is off to a rousing start. Two major gifts from the Rasmuson Foundation, along with a matching requirement and other private donors, have kicked off the campaign nicely. A \$500,000 first-year goal has turned into a likely haul of \$1.2 million. A citywide fund-raising effort anticipated this fall will give citizens a chance to support anything from a park bench to an entire park.

Volunteers are leveraging those dollars. A city "Clean & Green" campaign involves more than two dozen projects to improve parks all over town. University and community groups are pitching in with elbow grease. Neighborhood meetings are helping establish priorities. Trail Watch volunteers are patrolling and cleaning up trails.

All of which ought to improve the appearance and reputation of Anchorage parks. If that leads to greater public support for improvements later, so much the better. Anchorage residents once took great pride in our parks and trails, knowing they are a huge asset for this community's quality of life. It's good to see both the municipality and the broader community treating them as such again.

BOTTOM LINE: Parks are one of Anchorage's best assets; it's good to see them treated that way.



Young volunteers scrape and paint wooden posts at Roosevelt Park in Spenard. *(Photo by JIM LAVRAKAS / Anchorage Daily News)*
