



One Parkway, 10th Floor
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

May 2006

Dear Fairmount Park Supporter,

I have served as a member of the Fairmount Park Commission since 1985 and as President of the Commission since 2002. I am very proud of the work the Commission has done.

Now, however, I strongly believe it is time to establish a new governance structure and a new approach to funding so the Fairmount Park system can deliver far greater benefits for Philadelphia.

Several months ago -- in response to a proposed Charter change that would have merged Fairmount Park with the city's Recreation Department -- I brought together a group of advisors to help me determine how to move the Park forward and how to finally make good on the Park's Strategic Plan.

At the same time, the Citizens for Better Parks and the Philadelphia Parks Alliance were doing similar work. I am pleased that all these groups came up with many of the same conclusions.

I have attached a copy of the report from my advisory group. As you will see, my current views are not based solely on these findings: my conclusions are based on the perspectives of park advocates, City Council members, Fairmount Park Commission critics and ordinary citizens.

I am sure of one thing: We have reached a moment in time when we can start to make this city's Park system extraordinarily better -- if we have the courage and will to do so.

I believe we must:

- Bring the Park clearly under the umbrella of city government so the City of Philadelphia will feel a true sense of ownership for this unique asset.
- Replace the age-old Fairmount Park Commission with a new Board of Trustees. The new Board will have both the responsibility to protect parkland AND to maximize the Park's ability to raise its own revenue in order to help supplement increased support from the city budget.

The new Board must be entrepreneurial and it must have the ability to keep the revenue it raises in order to further enhance the Park.

- Design a selection process for members of the Board of Trustees that assures that trustees are chosen in a transparent manner and with the best possible candidates, based upon clear criteria. The mayor should be involved in the process and a small number of high-ranking administration officials should sit on the Board.

Allens Lane
Awbury Park
Bartram's Garden
Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Bradford Park
Burholme Park
Carpenter's Woods
Carroll Park
Christ Church Park
Clifford Park
Cloverly Park
Cobbs Creek Park
East Fairmount Park
Fernhill Park
Fisher Park
Fluehr Park
Fox Chase Farm
Franklin D. Roosevelt Park
Franklin Square
Franklintown Park
Germany Hill
Glen Foerd
Harper's Hollow Park
Holme Crispin Park
Hunting Park
I-95 Park
John F. Kennedy Plaza
Kay Park
Kemble Park
La Noce Park
Logan Square
Loudoun Park
Manatawna Farm
Manayunk Canal
Marconi Plaza
McMichael Park
Morris Park
Palmer Park
Pastorius Park
Penn Treaty Park
Pennypack Park
Poquessing Creek Park
Rittenhouse Square
Roosevelt Boulevard
Schuylkill River Park
Somerton Woods
Southern Boulevard
Stephen Girard Park
Tacony Creek Park
Wakefield Park
Washington Square
West Fairmount Park
Wissahickon Valley Park
Wister's Woods Park
Wooden Bridge Run
Woodward Pines

Cobbs Creek Golf Course
F.D. Roosevelt Golf Course
John Byrne Golf Course
Juniata Golf Course
Karakung Golf Course
Walnut Lane Golf Course

- The de facto “realignment” of functions now in progress between Fairmount Park and the Recreation Department should proceed very carefully and openly. Further consideration of merging the departments should be avoided until at least both are properly funded.
- Create the new, more significant position of Parks Commissioner. He or she would report to both the Managing Director and the Board of Trustees.

In my view, this is what should happen next:

- We should quickly assemble a diverse Transition Team made up of individuals who represent key disciplines and chaired by a respected community leader. This group would be charged first with generating private and foundation support to fund the detail work of the transition – and especially to develop new funding strategies.
- The Team will determine what City Charter or other legal changes are necessary to put this new governance model in place. The Committee of Seventy has offered to lend expertise to this effort.
- The Team will determine the appropriate fundraising roles of the new Board of Trustees and the existing Fairmount Park Conservancy.
- Because the terms of sitting Fairmount Park Commissioners expire next June, I will ask the Board of Judges to keep the current commissioners in place until a new mayor is elected and the new Board of Trustees is created.

In short, we must use the next 20 months to put an effective new structure in place so there is far greater incentive to invest in the Park and so the next administration is in a position to select an outstanding Park Commissioner and to create a real turnaround.

It has not been difficult to imagine a Park system that touches every neighborhood, serves as a lure for tourists and suburbanites, and functions as an economic driver for Philadelphia. As you will see, the advisory committee report addresses many of the tangible benefits Philadelphians can expect from an invigorated Park.

What *has* been difficult to imagine is the formation of a genuine consensus in support of the complex and not inexpensive moves it will take to make Fairmount Park spectacular. Until now, that is.

I am committed to doing everything I can to make these changes happen. I hope I can count on your support.

Sincerely,

Robert N.C. Nix, III
President