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DATE: 8/11/2022

SUBJECT: City of Duluth announces new park levy referendum

BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer

City of Duluth announces new park levy referendum

[DULUTH, MN] The City of Duluth announced a new referendum to restore the park fund levy Thursday morning on the steps of City Hall.

The original park fund levy, approved by voters in 2012, was established at a capped dollar amount of \$2.6 million annually, with no allowances for growth or adjustment to account for inflation or market changes. The proposed change to the park fund levy would change the basis of the levy from a capped dollar amount to a fixed percentage of property value, making growth and market-driven fluctuation possible in the future. Pending Council approval, the ballot question will be presented to voters in the General Election this November.

"Our parks system is the crown jewel of Duluth, and we've been less financially able to care for it properly because of the rigidity of the way the original levy language was written. We know that investing less and less in what truly makes Duluth special and unique was never what our residents intended when they voted to support this levy in 2012," said Mayor Emily Larson. "We've heard clearly that residents want us to invest in our public spaces and we know they'll make this re-commitment to parks and restore the funding to what it is meant to be when they head to the polls and make their voices heard this November."

The referendum not only codifies the restoration of the park fund, but it also ensures geographically-equitable distribution of the park fund over the next 25 years.

The current, 2012-established Park Fund Levy payment for a home valued at \$200,000 has dropped from \$94.53 in 2012 to what will be \$58.01 in 2023 if no change is made.

For a home valued at \$200,000, the amended ordinance would restore the Park Fund Levy payment to its 2012 level of \$94.53 and maintain it at that level over time.

"The proposed resolution provides the voters of Duluth the opportunity to maintain our greatest natural resource – our city parks," said City Councilor and Parks Commission liaison Terese Tomanek. "This reinstatement of the previous voter-approved level of funding will allow our dedicated park staff to equitably care for the parks we all cherish."

"It is truly an exciting time for parks and recreation here in Duluth. We get to live, work, and play in an award-winning, outdoor recreation City," said Parks and Recreation Manager Jessica Peterson. "For the past year, Parks and Recreation has been engaging with community to develop the framework for how we will manage, maintain, and improve our park and trail system for the next decade. I am grateful for that work and for the opportunity to lift up our parks and recreation system."

City Council will vote on the ballot language at its August 15 meeting in Council Chambers. They will also be considering companion Council actions such as an ordinance to enable this change (pending voter approval), a resolution committing to geographic equity in use of the park fund, and a resolution of intent for City support of an envisioned Spirit Valley Center for Youth and Community Wellness.

For more information and a list of frequently asked questions, please visit: duluthmn.gov/parkfund/.

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