

## EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS & RECREATION

**Public parks and recreation facilities are OPEN to all – it is up to you to make sure they are AVAILABLE to all.**

Parks System Development Charges (SDCs) are under attack – but their importance has never been greater in Oregon:

- HB 2001 (2019) enhanced Oregon’s statewide efforts to increase “middle housing” – duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhouses and cottage clusters.
- With denser development, yards, places for kids to play, spaces for pets and open area for sports and recreation are decreased.
- The recent pandemic and resulting isolation exemplified the need for outdoor places for all.

As SDCs are discussed, some are quick to target Parks SDCs for elimination, reduction or assessment changes. Affluent neighborhoods will likely not be targeted, while dense “affordable development” will be used as a posterchild and proponents will rely on economic arguments that would lead to inequitable outcomes. Fact is that the areas of denser multifamily housing need parks the most.



The recently completed legislatively mandated study on SDCs found that:

- “Studies suggest that property values are higher closer to parks and that congestion is associated with ‘disamenity’ (negative) values for some economic indicators...”
- “... many studies document a relationship between factors like proximity to parks and real estate value...”
- “... higher-quality infrastructure investments can drive both higher SDC rates and higher home values, especially for facilities with visible value, such as parks. Affluent buyers and renters who value these amenities may choose to pay more to live in places that offer them, but low and moderate-income households may not have this option.”

What does this really mean? Affluent housing = Ability to pay SDCs = Parks built nearby. **But shouldn’t we be working to protect the tools we have to ensure that denser development has the same access to parks?**

- Park and recreation facilities are seldom required as a condition of development approval. This is due to the fact that a park or recreational facility is not a critical infrastructure required to create a habitable home in the same way as water, sewer or streets (other types of SDCs). This eliminates an agency’s ability to require the developer to pay for additional park and recreation facilities necessary to serve the new residents if there are no Park SDCs.
- Unlike transportation, water and sewer, developers do not typically pay additional permitting fees for parks, nor are they usually required to build (or dedicate land) for additional park, trail or recreation infrastructure or other offsite improvements as a condition of development.
- Cities and counties can and do issue revenue bonds in order to pay for water and sewer infrastructure, and then charge the rate payer for the costs of debt repayment. There is no similar method of charging park and recreation

users for development costs – leaving SDCs as the primary available funding source for park and recreation facility infrastructure.

*Urban populations of color are concentrated in historically redlined, segregated, disinvested, and marginalized neighborhoods with inadequate quality housing and limited access to resources, including quality greenspaces designed to support natural ecosystems and healthy outdoor activities...Equity-focused investments in public urban greenspaces are needed to reduce social inequalities, expand economic opportunities with diversity in workforce initiatives, build resilient urban ecosystems, and improve health equity.*

[Resilience and Equity in a Time of Crises: Investing in Public Urban Greenspace Is Now More Essential Than Ever in the US and Beyond](#)

Finally, again from the study the legislature commissioned:

- “There are few viable alternatives to SDCs for local investments in capital infrastructure, particularly in fast growing communities. SDCs also provide an important leveraging tool for state and federal infrastructure grants, particularly for parks and transportation.”
- “Parks and transportation plans are generally responsive to community-defined goals and informed by public input.”

Park SDCs are a means to ensuring that all Oregonians have equitable access to high-quality parks, access to nature, trails, and recreation facilities— not just those living in certain neighborhoods.

**Without Parks SDCs or a viable alternative, this infrastructure that the legislature and communities demand, and that *all people deserve*, is at risk.**

## PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF PARKS

### *Needed and Deserved by All*

“As cities become more densely populated and the impacts of climate change increase, planners, elected officials, and community advocates are using parks to help address critical urban infrastructure and public health issues. City parks provide access to recreational opportunities, increase property values, spur local economies, combat crime, and protect cities from environmental impacts. **Parks are now recognized as powerful tools for urban communities and local economies.**” *Cityparksalliance.org*

#### City Parks Alliance [Smart Investment Report](#):

- The need for parks and close-to home recreation has never been greater, while the physical, mental, and environmental benefits of parks have never been clearer.
- In addition to improving physical and mental health, parks and greenspaces are also critical to the environmental health of cities and are important tools for mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Low-income communities of color have historically received even lower park investments than whiter, wealthier communities. This has contributed to **health disparities** in communities of color, where rates of obesity, heart disease, anxiety, and depression are significantly higher.
- **Inequitable park investments** have also contributed to people of color suffering greater impacts from climate change, including higher temperatures and more frequent and destructive flooding.
- [Infographics](#) on why parks and green spaces are essential to the physical, mental, and environmental health of communities.

#### 2022 NRPA [Reports](#):

- Access to indoor and/or outdoor recreation facilities and frequency of park visitation correlate with greater physical activity...Greenspace exposure corresponds with improved physical health, including decreases in stress, blood pressure, heart rate, and risk of chronic disease (cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular heart disease).
- Time spent in nature positively impacts mental health by increasing cognitive performance and well-being and alleviating illnesses such as depression, attention deficit disorders, and Alzheimers.
- Children lacking parks are more likely to be physically inactive, have excessive screen-time (greater than or equal to 4 hours daily), obtain inadequate sleep, and be obese, overweight, or diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- **Every person in every community** deserves to benefit from the power of parks and recreation. The very philosophy behind public parks and recreation is the idea that all people — regardless of race, ethnicity, age, income level, identity or ability — have access to programs, facilities, places and spaces that improve quality of life and build healthy communities. Parks and recreation truly builds communities — communities for all.

#### CDC Parks and Trails Health Impact Assessment [Toolkit](#):

- Parks and trails can promote physical activity and community engagement; and provide both environmental and mental health benefits.
- Parks can affect a range of public health issues, including injuries, mental health, and pollution exposures.
- People who are exposed to the greenest environments also have the lowest levels of health **inequality** among low-income households. Physical environments, like parks and trails, that promote good health might be important to reduce **socioeconomic health inequalities**.

#### **EXAMPLE:** Tualatin Hills Parks & Recreation District

Recuerdo Park is in unincorporated Washington County (Aloha), an area growing with higher density development. It was built using Park SDCs, as well as a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant that was leveraged with the SDCs. This park serves an environmental justice area – with many residents below the poverty level and 46% of the population identifying as BIPOC.

