

August 30, 2011

To: Mike Carlin  
From: Dick Esseks

Thank you so much for your highly productive hunt for research studies that support the thesis about parks producing significant economic benefits to the community.

1) I am very impressed that you were able to identify as many as 9 separate studies on this question. Your findings surely support the second paragraph in the draft LPlan40, “**Guiding Principles** – Parks and open space enhance the quality of life of the community’s residents and are central to the community’s economic development strategy—the community’s ability to attract and retain viable businesses, industries and employees is directly linked to quality of life issues, including indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities.”

2) Like you, I am concerned by the decrease found in the draft in the “level of service (LOS)” goals for parks, compared to current policy. Let’s review the city administration’s responses so far that are relevant to your critique of the draft plan’s LOS goals:

**A) LOS for Regional Parks & Tournament Sport Facilities**

1. Your recommendation: Maintain the current standard at 2.5 acres per 1,000 Lincoln residents “with minor variances.”

2. No written response, as far as I can see. The current draft language does indicate the likelihood of “One new Regional Park . . . for the Stevens Creek area during the plan period; [and] one new Tournament Sports Facility . . . as an upgrade to the existing Oak Lake Park.”

**\*\*\*With this memo, I am asking the Parks & Recreation Department for evidence that, during the plan period, Lincoln residents in the planned growth areas who seek the recreational opportunities typically available at Regional Parks and Tournament Sports Facilities will likely be able to find those opportunities either at the planned new construction/upgraded facilities or at existing Regional Parks that are not already fully utilized and are not too far away from the planned growth areas.**

If not, I’ll move at the next Planning Commission meeting that LPlan40 state at the end of the “Level of Service” paragraph on p. 9.3: “*When the financial resources available to the City permit, the citywide LOS goal will be re-instated at 2.5 acres per 1,000 Lincoln residents.*”

**B) LOS for Community Parks:**

1. Your recommendation: Maintain the current standard at 2.9 acres per 1,000 residents
2. Amendment from the Planning Department (see the underlined passages):

[Revise text in **Level of Service**] The level of service (LOS) goal for Community Parks is based on both the financial resources anticipated to be available for park development and on programmatic standards. It is anticipated that development of future community parks will be financed primarily through voter-approved general obligation bonds. There are currently 18 Community Parks encompassing roughly 746 acres, with an average size of 41 acres. The current citywide LOS is 2.9 acres of Community Park land per

1,000 Lincoln residents. LPlan 2040 establishes an LOS goal of 1.3 acres per 1,000 new Lincoln residents in new growth areas and a service area radius of approximately 2 miles in the urban area. The resulting citywide Community Parks LOS goal for LPlan 2040 will be 2.4 acres per 1,000 Lincoln residents. While this goal is lower than the current LOS, it recognizes the financial resources projected to be available and plans for the development of three 50-acre sites during the planning period of a size that will meet the programmatic standards for community parks.

\*\*\*Although the expected average number of acres per community park, 2.4, is just a half-acre below the current goal of 2.9 acres, I am troubled by the goal set for new parks—1.3 acres per 1,000 new residents in new growth areas. **In this memo, I am asking the Parks & Recreation Department** to describe the likely traits of actual park that will be built. In a two-mile radius of new growth areas, there may tend to be enough thousands of residents that the resulting parks are likely to be both large enough in open space and sufficiently well-equipped (e.g., with playgrounds, sports fields, picnic facilities) that the 1.3-acre LOS is acceptable.

If not, I'll move for inclusion at the end of the "Level of Service" paragraph on p. 9.4, "***When the financial resources available to the City permit, the citywide LOS goal will be re-instated at 2.9 acres per 1,000 Lincoln residents.***"

In other words, if the planned reductions in standards are not likely to be cost-effective in the sense of providing sufficient recreational opportunities despite those decreases, let's explicitly label the plan's stated reductions in LOS goals as temporary. That way, developers are warned of the real possibility of returning to the higher standards, and they can plan accordingly.