

April 4, 2023

Letter of Support for HF XXX St. Paul Victoria Park Bonding Proposal

Dear Senator Pappas and members of the Senate Capitol Investment committee:

I live in St. Paul with my husband and three boys. They are 20, 18, and 14 now, but we tried to avail ourselves of St. Paul's extensive park system as much as we could when they were younger. It was difficult to do, as our middle son has autism and was physically delayed so many parks were not accessible for him and us. When I heard about the opportunity to help fund the Victoria Park Universal Accessibility Play Area this session, I knew that I needed to raise my voice in strong support of this bonding proposal.

Play is an important mode of learning and parks are the cornerstone of community. Children know the importance of community and making sure that our spaces are safe, fun and developmentally appropriate for everyone to be able to use them. My youngest child is who first told me that St. Paul had developed plans for the Victoria Park Universal Play Area back in 2016.

He and his First Lego League (FLL) team mates chose to raise money for the Victoria Park Universal Play Area as part of their research project in sixth grade. They talked to the principal at their school, the teachers, their classmates, even St. Paul City council members. Everyone agreed that this is a good idea – a universally accessible park is better for everyone.

The kids raised money, but quickly realized that this project needed more money than a go fund me account or a school concession stand could deliver. And soon their efforts were sidelined by the pandemic. They never lost sight of their dream that everyone ought to be able to play together in public spaces and were recognized for their efforts by the St. Paul City Council in May, 2021 when it was safer to gather in person.

Our children model how we engage with each other, within our community, within our systems. Funding this project this session sends them a clear message that everyone is part of the community and accepted as they are. Please vote for accessibility for all and support the Victoria Park bonding proposal this session.

Thank you, Senator Murphy for authoring this proposal, and Chair Pappas and members of the committee for supporting it!

Melissa Haley
St. Paul, Minnesota