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May 1, 2025

Dear Senator Xiong and members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee,

On behalf of the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) organization, we are writing to express our concern about a portion of the proposed amendment to S.F. 2229. GMPT comprises more than 130 cities, counties, parks groups, individuals, and others who seek to connect people to the outdoors and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans. Helping to ensure that all Minnesotans can easily access a neighborhood or regional park—whether they live in Winona, Willmar, or Wabasha—is an integral part of our work.

Like the author of this bill, we all recognize and support the need to build more housing across the state, but we also recognize that a community is more than four walls. Access to parks and trails is essential for good health. These benefits are recognized by many organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control, which has stated that parks and trails “provide a place where people can be physically active to reduce stress, which can improve their mental health. They also provide a place where neighbors can meet, which improves community connections... Parks can provide environmental benefits by reducing air and water pollution and mitigating urban heat islands. They help people reduce their risk of illness and injury by providing safe spaces to play and exercise away from busy streets and commercial zones.”¹

We are concerned that this language in the A17 amendment will make construction of parks much more difficult:

“A municipality must specify in writing, including on any application form provided by the municipality, all requirements that a request must fulfill for a request to be deemed complete and for the time limit in section 15.99, subdivision 2, to begin. Such requirements may not include a requirement that an applicant waive any rights, forgo the process established in this subdivision, or consent to exactions, dedications, or fees.”

We are extremely concerned that this language will interfere with the ability to require park dedications when new housing is developed. Such dedications are an essential part of ensuring that all citizens—regardless of income or other factors—have easy access to parks and trails. Without such dedication, those residents who need outdoor access the most may be the worst off. Moreover, failure to allow such dedications could increase urban heat islands, stormwater problems, and other issues.

We urge the Committee to reject this proposal and to encourage development that recognizes the need for all residents to experience the outdoors.

Thank you for allowing us to comment on this issue.

Gina Hugo
Parks Director, Sherburne County
President, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

Joseph Tart
Parks Director, Chisago County
Vice President, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

¹ This language is from the CDC website as of 4/30/2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/active-people-healthy-nation/php/tools/parks-rec.html>