

Minneapolis Government:

A BALANCING ACT II

The Independent Boards

a study of Minneapolis city government structure

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® MINNEAPOLIS



MINNEAPOLIS GOVERNMENT:
A BALANCING ACT II
The Independent Boards

Prepared and Published
By
THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
MINNEAPOLIS

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April 2006

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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This report is made possible in part by the following:

MEDTRONIC FOUNDATION GRANT



JOLA PUBLICATIONS

Dennis Schapiro, Owner

Amanda Luker, pinkslipmedia.org, Graphic Designer

CURA

This project was supported in part through a New Initiatives grant from the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), which funded the work of graduate research assistant Rebecca Vick. The contents of the report are those of the League of Woman Voters City Government Structure Committee and do not reflect the views of the University of Minnesota or CURA.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005 the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis (LWV Mpls) released a study titled “Minneapolis Government: A Balancing Act.” The League came to some new consensus positions about city government as a result of the 2005 study. The League reiterated its support for the mayor-council form of government with the mayor as the politically responsible citywide leader. The League recommended possible changes to increase effectiveness, accountability and focus, including an emphasis on policy making for the council with more limited responsibility for constituent services and no direct role in assigning the work of city staff. The League’s current position on city government also allows, but does not require, a smaller council.

Three independent, elected boards (Park, Library and Estimate and Taxation) also were discussed briefly (pp. 14-18) in that study. League members told us they needed more information about those independent boards in order to determine whether changes might be needed and, if so, what kinds of changes would make the most sense.

This study responds to the need for more information on the three boards by presenting additional data and exploring options for changes. In preparing the study, LWV Mpls interviewed knowledgeable members of the Twin Cities community, many from various levels of government, and gathered data from reputable national and local sources as well as surveying published materials of current and historical interest concerning the three boards.

The elected boards are of particular interest, at least in part, because of several particularly acrimonious and highly visible disagreements over the past few years that have called attention to the Park and Recreation Board as well as the current crisis in operations funding for the Minneapolis Public Library as it prepares to open a new central library.

Another impetus for this study is the financial situation of the City of Minneapolis. The city forecasts a reduction of Local Government Aid (LGA) of \$1.4 million each year beginning in 2007. The city also is committed to a policy of limiting tax levy increases to no more than eight percent. These two factors greatly constrain the ability of the city to increase budget allocations.

A third factor leading to this study is concern about declining voter participation in elections for members of the boards. In 1993, when 103,500 votes were cast in the mayoral election, successful candidates for the elected boards garnered from 33,800 to 52,000 votes, suggesting that far fewer voters, only one third to one half, were interested in these races. In 2005, 80,100 votes were cast for mayor and successful candidates for the boards received from 20,200 to 31,800 votes; only 25 percent to 40 percent respectively of those who voted at all voted for board candidates.

The current study has concluded that Minneapolis has some of the finest parks and libraries in the nation. Both systems are praised nationally and locally, but current governing structures are often described as cumbersome and counterproductive. In these days of ever-dwindling tax resources, the issue of the structure of governance of both systems raises important questions for their vitality, efficiency and effectiveness.

What do the residents of Minneapolis want? How can they get the most service from their libraries and parks with less and less public money every year? Suggestions ranged from making no changes to the current system to merging with larger units of government. This report explains the workings of the park system and the library system and presents issues for discussion.

The only thing that seems quite clear after study is that there is little support for maintaining the Board of Estimate and Taxation. It is considered an anachronism that could be abolished, with its duties easily absorbed by city departments and the City Council.

BACKGROUND ON ELECTED BOARDS

Each of the boards was established by the Minneapolis Charter. Over the years additional legislation has expanded and amended the responsibilities given to the boards. Changes to the responsibilities or makeup of the boards would require a charter amendment and could require housekeeping updates to relevant state statutes.

We discovered that there is a great deal of confusion about what it means to say that a board is “independent.” While LWV Mpls has used this term to refer to the park and library boards, there is nothing in the charter that defines Minneapolis boards as “independent.” We believe that use of the term “independent” is meant to signify that the boards are not city departments and, in fact, function as autonomous municipal agencies. However, we think many also interpret the independent terminology as an indication that the boards control their own budgets, an assumption that is not accurate. The two most important differences between the library and park boards and city departments (police, fire, public works, etc.) are that each autonomous board has one seat on the Board of Estimate and Taxation and each board has some or all members elected directly by the citizens of Minneapolis. The boards also have specific authority as provided in the City Charter.

Some Minneapolis residents fear that eliminating the elected park and library boards would inevitably lead to decline of those amenities. It is impossible either to prove or disprove that the elected boards are the reason for great parks and libraries. It is reasonable, however, to note that many other jurisdictions whose parks and libraries are equally well-regarded (and in some cases better-ranked) do not have elected boards.

Municipal boards that manage a single municipal service, like parks or libraries, can be problematic because they work at the expense of a more unified government and can disregard or undercut overall municipal priorities. Minneapolis city government has been called fragmented, complex and even absurd in part due to the autonomy of the park and library boards. However, other experts believe that autonomous boards can provide protection from political battles and are able to more easily respond to citizens’ concerns.

Many of those with whom we spoke questioned whether the boards actually have the necessary power to protect their budgets and services.

And, if they do have more control over their budgets, do residents want to continue this power structure? In terms of assessing accountability, it can be difficult to know who is responsible when there are several players with overlapping roles in the budget process. The park and library boards decide how to spend their budgets, but the City Council decides how much funding each entity will get. Whom should residents contact if they are not happy with budget decisions?

Another question researchers have asked is whether elected boards, in general, cause municipal services to be less efficient. One person interviewed said both boards (park and library) spend too much time coordinating their efforts with the city. An example is the coordination and overlap between the Minneapolis Police Department and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Police Department, which was discussed in our 2005 study (pg. 17). In terms of the city’s overall efficiency is it necessary or desirable to have elected boards govern operations which comprise only eight percent of the city’s budget, with parks at six percent and library at two percent?

While there are some costs associated with the elected boards, such as health insurance premiums, compensation for attending meetings, and reimbursement of professional travel related to board duties, it is possible that much if not all of this cost would also be incurred with other kinds of boards or other structures. For example, the annual salary for Library Board members is \$7,200 except for the President who receives \$8,400. In the 2006 budget, the total Library Board expenditures including salary and benefits are \$103,514. Park Board members receive \$11,000 per year, the President, \$12,200. The Park and Library Board members are eligible for the same health and retirement benefits as city employees. The two Board of Estimate and Taxation members elected citywide receive \$35 per meeting, but no health or retirement benefits.

If the boards were not elected, there would be a savings in campaign costs for candidates and their supporters, not in tax dollars. In 2005 the costs reported by candidates for the three boards varied considerably with Park Board candidates spending the most, \$86,688 total for the six district seats and \$61,629 total for the three at-large seats. Library Board candidates spent a total of \$67,883 for their races. Candidates for the Board of Estimate and Taxation spent \$7,856 in total. Individual candidate's spending also varied widely. Successful board candidates spent from \$2,102 to \$25,281 on their races. (For additional information on candidate spending, see Appendix A: Election Data Relating to Elected Boards)

Rather than significant cost savings, efficiencies resulting from changes to the boards more likely would come about because of greater transparency, eliminating time-consuming coordination and negotiation.

GENERAL OPTIONS FOR CHANGES TO THE BOARDS

While it may be interesting to speculate about how important the elected boards have been in creating the parks and libraries we have now, it is probably far more important to ask whether elected boards are the best mechanism to support current operations and future demands. What structure(s) will allow our parks and libraries to function effectively into the future?

In order to consider alternative forms of organization for the elected boards and alternative placements within government for their functions, it is useful to understand the alternatives that are used in other jurisdictions. Following are descriptions of possible board structures and placement from a variety of perspectives. Possible changes for Minneapolis might include some or none of these options.

Board Selection

Board members may be elected, appointed, self-perpetuating (members choose their successors) or constituted by some combination of these strategies.

Board Functions

Boards of most kinds can be described by how they function and how members are designated.

- *Authority* boards have decision making powers.
- *Advisory* boards generally are empowered to make recommendations to another (higher level) government entity.

Common board functions include: recommending (in the case of advisory boards) or creating (in the case of authority

boards) policy; recommending (advisory) or adopting (authority) budget; calling for tax or bond referenda; and authorizing tax or bond levies.

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC LIBRARY

History

The Minneapolis Public Library was established when the Minnesota Legislature approved a change to the Minneapolis Charter in March 1885. This change authorized a bond sale to establish a public library, a half-mill levy on property values to support the library and set up a Library Board. T.B. Walker was elected the first president of the board; other members included Thomas Lowry and John Atwater. The first library building opened at Tenth Street and Hennepin Avenue in 1889.

The Current Situation

The Minneapolis Public Library (MPL) is governed by an eight-member Board of Trustees, (known as the Library Board). Six trustees are elected at-large for four-year terms and two are appointed by the Mayor and City Council respectively for two-year terms. The board sets library policy and has the authority over how to spend all available funds. The board also appoints a library director who administers and coordinates operations.

The mission of the library is to “link people in the city and beyond with the transforming power of knowledge.” To achieve this mission MPL operates 15 library buildings, offers users a large collection of contemporary and historical materials and provides specialized services to respond to user needs.

Basically, the library board has the authority to determine how its budget is allocated, but it does not have the authority

to significantly determine the size of the overall budget. Any increases to library funding (budget, bonding and levy authority) are cooperatively determined with the City Council and Board of Estimate and Taxation.

Library funding is influenced by the following factors:

- One library trustee sits on the Board of Estimate and Taxation, which sets the city tax levy. That levy provided the library with 61 percent of its operating budget in 2005.
- The Minneapolis City Council influences library funding through its allocation of Minneapolis’s Local Government Aid (LGA), its two representatives on the Board of Estimate and Taxation and its influence over the city budget, which includes MPL capital improvement funding.
- The Mayor influences funding through his/her seat on the Board of Estimate and Taxation and through the city budget process.
- The Minnesota State Legislature and Governor decide how much LGA will be allotted to the City of Minneapolis. LGA accounted for 33 percent of the MPL budget in 2005.
- The final six percent of the 2005 MPL budget came from other state and private grants and miscellaneous fees.

City Council decisions about budget cuts to the library have a direct impact on service to residents. For example, cuts to the MPL’s portion of LGA have precipitated an operating budget crisis leading to drastic reductions in library hours over the past few years.

According to the Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library, since 2003 MPL's allotment of LGA has been cut by about \$3 million. MPL was harder hit by these cuts in LGA than other city services because a greater portion of its budget comes from LGA dollars. Note: The 2005 LWV Government Study reported a 2003 LGA of \$7.4 million; the original LGA was \$9.4 million, but one quarter into the budget year, the allocation was reduced due to the Minnesota Legislature's cuts to the city's allocation.

To illustrate the complex dynamics of budget decisions: in 2004 the Library Board sought City Council approval to sell bonds for major capital maintenance for the Walker Library. The library is located on a key corner in the Uptown neighborhood and the City Council had visions of selling the land for a mixed use development that would include a new library on the ground floor along with housing and retail space. While considering this option the City Council would not approve bonding authority for the library repairs. Without bonding authority the Library Board was stymied in making repairs to its building. After lengthy negotiations, including a task force jointly appointed by the Library Board and the City Council, the situation was resolved.

In 2005 the MPL operating budget was just over \$21 million or \$55 per capita. The library staff of 262 employees is a significant decrease from just two years prior. The Library's facilities are typical of older, urban library systems with a number of relatively small community libraries and one very large central library.

It is unclear how the budget crisis will be addressed in the long term as LGA is not expected to increase significantly. It is also unclear if Minneapolis residents will be willing to maintain the library system as a

statewide resource through property taxes assessed only on city residents. Minneapolis is certainly not unique in its situation. According to the American Library Association at least 41 states reported budget cuts to libraries in 2003-2004.

Perhaps more than any other public library system in the state, MPL does serve a statewide audience; its unique collections offer a deep, rich and historical resource for residents, businesses, independent scholars and the media throughout the state. Almost 54 percent of the titles in Minneapolis's collection are unique, showing the collections' depth; in Hennepin County Library fewer than 20 percent of titles are unique, but it has many titles duplicated across the system. While almost every Minnesota public library participates in reciprocal borrowing agreements (for example allowing a Minneapolis resident with a library card to borrow materials in St. Paul or East Grand Forks) few have the kinds of materials that attract large numbers of nonresident borrowers.

The library system is considered well-managed overall, but some feel it has not been as successful in securing adequate tax dollars and finding other public support as has the Park Board. Some call for Library Board members to be stronger advocates and to improve library visibility, solicitation of private funds, lobbying efforts and connections to businesses and foundations. Some have suggested that since MPL serves many needs beyond the City of Minneapolis, the board should be applying pressure on the state to provide a greater share of operating funds. The Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library has been quite successful in raising funds for the new central library building. (In contrast, although People for Parks is being resurrected after several years of inactivity, its contributions have been limited to smaller items of low monetary value

such as park benches, trees and daffodil plantings in recent years, although initially it funded larger projects.)

Minneapolis has a rich history of supporting its libraries. Minneapolis voters approved the library referendum in 2000 by a two-to-one margin. It provides \$110 million toward the building of the new Central Library (to open in May 2006) and \$30 million for community library improvements. The people of Minneapolis are committed to tax levies of \$12 million for the next 20 years. The value of the new downtown library to the community will be difficult to measure, but will stand in many peoples' view as an impressive symbol of democracy, creativity and ideas. It should be noted, however, that the referendum money is for capital improvements only (i.e., buildings and infrastructure) and cannot be used to support operating expenses, the source of the current Minneapolis Public Library budget crisis.

Some Comparisons

Minneapolis has the third largest public library collection per capita of any major city in America (after Boston and Cleveland). Unique services and materials that the Minneapolis Public Library provides include

- The largest children's book collection in the Upper Midwest.
- One of two U.S. Government document depository libraries in Minnesota.
- The only complete U.S. Patent collection in the state.
- Citizenship and English language learning materials in more than 20 languages.
- The largest picture file collection outside of New York City.

- 5,300 subscriptions to online databases, magazines and newsletters. (Friends 2005, p.1)

MPL has smaller collections that are also peerless resources. The collection of song-books, current and historical, is just one example. The role that MPL has played in the region and state in acquiring and maintaining an historic, broad and deep collection allows other libraries, especially in the metropolitan area, to focus on more popular and more highly circulated materials.

Based on sampling done in all Twin Cities metropolitan public libraries for five random weeks throughout 2005 and 2006, it appears that approximately 13 percent of the users of the Minneapolis Public Library come from outside of Minneapolis. As might be expected, the largest number of outside users comes from Hennepin County, but users come from across the metropolitan area and from adjacent areas in all directions, including Wisconsin. (The sample data are collected according to a rigorous protocol overseen by MELSA, the Metropolitan Library Service Agency, a multi-county cooperative serving nine public library systems in the Twin Cities.) If there is any weakness in these sample data it is that it probably understates actual usage, as not all users are willing to participate in the data collection.

Comparing the Minneapolis Public Library to libraries in similar cities may add insight. LWV Minneapolis gathered data for fiscal year 2003 from the National Center for Education Statistics Web site. (Note: Significant cuts to the MPL LGA funding happened after these data were reported.) Data were downloaded for all 95 libraries in Minneapolis's population category (250,000-499,000 residents). The Minneapolis Public Library system ranked third for amount of local revenue per

capita (98th percentile), making it appear to be well-funded; however, while MPL's revenue per capita has been healthy in the past, revenue per square foot of library space was the second lowest in the metropolitan area even before the LGA cuts. Factors measuring public use of the libraries such as visits per capita and circulation per visit were in the average range (51st and 65th percentiles respectively).

In 2003 the Minneapolis Public Library ranked 41st among 97 libraries in its size range (250,000 - 500,000 population) on the HAPLR (Hennen's American Public Library Ratings) index, a frequently cited measure of public library performance. Some factors that contribute to the overall HAPLR rating for which MPL ranked very high were for full-time staff per 1,000 residents (99th percentile), volumes per capita (98th percentile), expenditures per capita (95th percentile) and periodicals per 1,000 residents (97th percentile). It ranked low in collection turnover [a measure of discarded materials] (4th percentile), circulation per full-time staff hour (10th percentile) and cost per circulation (12th percentile). Averaged across all Minnesota libraries, the state was ranked 12th in both 2004 and 2005, despite a small decrease in overall HAPLR score from 582 to 573. A perfect score would be 1,000. (Ohio libraries consistently score high—some at 950+—and the state is ranked first primarily due to a high level of state funding, although Ohio's average HAPLR score was only 717 in 2005.)

In 2003 MPL provided 145 computer terminals for in-library use at 15 sites, while Hennepin County Library (HCL) provided 684 over 26 sites. Minneapolis will see a significant jump in the number of Internet terminals with the opening of the new central library. (In general, rates for computer ownership are lower in poorer, central ur-

ban neighborhoods and highest in more affluent urban and suburban areas. Thus, it may be even more critical for the MPL to provide adequate computer access in the inner city. But, although technology is critical, the library cannot rely only on electronic resources—databases and publications—if it is going to serve all of the city's residents effectively.

Although it is difficult to compare the Minneapolis Library to those of other jurisdictions without taking into account their varying missions and situations, it's still worthwhile to see how other locales structure their library systems. (See Appendix B for Public Library Comparisons.)

It is important to note that many library experts criticize HAPLR and other library rankings for being overly dependent on and influenced by circulation statistics. The inherent biases of the HAPLR rankings tend to favor newer, suburban libraries and do not reflect measures such as size of facilities that characterize older, urban libraries. Also, libraries serve many important functions that do not result in the circulation of materials. Homework assistance, computer classes and business use of electronic resources are just three examples. Particularly in a broad, deep, collection-rich library like MPL, many materials are non-circulating. Thus, the Minneapolis Library is almost certainly unfairly penalized by circulation-dependent measures as are most other older, urban, public libraries.

Table 1: Structure Type for 96 Large U.S. and Canadian Public Libraries

City Department	23
County Department	17 (Hennepin County Library included)
Independent Unit	
City	9 (Mpls and St. Paul included)
County	9
Multi-jurisdiction	4
Special Purpose District	
State	16
County	4
City	1
Other	1
501c3 Organization	12

Source: the Urban Libraries Council (<http://www.urbanlibraries.org/>)

Governance Options

Through this study the LWV Mpls seeks to establish a position on whether and what changes should be made to the Minneapolis Public Library Board. Suggestions we heard included these four options, or a combination thereof:

- Merge with the Hennepin County Library system.
- Make the library system a city department.
- Have the Mayor and/or City Council appoint all Library Board members.
- Assign the board advisory power only.

Elected Authority Board

Minneapolis’s Library Board is an elected authority board; it can adopt its own budget and create policy, but has no other authority. Most large, urban public libraries are governed by authority boards; according to the Urban Library Council fewer than 25 percent of its members have ad-

visory boards. Only a small percentage of authority boards are elected.

Of the 96 largest public libraries, 69 percent adopt their own budgets, but fewer than 20 percent have the power to call tax or bond elections and to authorize tax or bond levies. St. Paul’s Library Board is the St. Paul City Council, an authority board subject to mayoral veto.

Appointed Authority Board

The Library Board could be maintained as the authority board for an autonomous library agency, but with appointed, rather than elected, members. This could continue to provide transparency and accountability while still offering an opportunity for strong advocacy for the library system.

The vast majority of urban public library authority boards are appointed. Appointments are made by mayors, city councils, county executives or county commissioners, depending upon the jurisdiction. Boards range in size from one to more than 40 members, but most have fewer than 10 members.

Proponents of appointed boards note that the appointing authority or authorities may be more inclined to accept the recommendations and decisions of “their” boards.

Advisory Board

One option for MPL is to become an advisory rather than an authority board. Hennepin County Library and Ramsey County Library both have appointed advisory boards reporting to their respective county commissions. Several interviewees noted that the quality of applicants for the Hennepin County Library Board is “extraordinary,” and one told us that

there were more than 40 applicants for a recent vacancy on that board. Advisory boards can be quite effective, according to study sources. For example, the Minneapolis Capital Long-Range Improvement Committee (CLIC) is an effective advisory board with strong citizen input. CLIC's recommendations are rarely overturned.

City, County, or Other Unit

Public libraries also may be departments of city or county government; they may be independent units authorized by a city, county, or multi-jurisdictional (i.e., joint powers) or other body (i.e., state). They also may be special purpose districts authorized by some other unit of government. Making MPL a city department may result in some cost efficiencies and greater transparency, but would not dramatically improve the library's financial picture due to limited city resources overall unless funding was reduced in other departments.

There are key differences between MPL and the Hennepin County Library (HCL), but these differences are not a *de facto* reason not to consider merger. County officials, as well as some in Minneapolis, pointed out that merger should not be viewed as a money saving tactic, but rather as a way to improve services to residents of Minneapolis and Hennepin County. As noted earlier, the MPL budget is about two percent of the city's overall budget, while HCL receives about three percent of the county's total budget. One person told us it makes sense to merge with the county system because it [HCL] is strong, viable and provides for coordinated borrowing.

Some proponents of merger think that Hennepin County Library is both more "modern" and more committed to electronic services; however, the Minneapolis

Public Library spends \$231,960 on electronic resources, while Hennepin County Library, with more than two times the number of residents, spends \$315,107. (Electronic resources include databases and full-text publications.)

MPL provides far fewer copies per title of popular materials, such as best sellers than HCL, which buys more copies and also provides a best seller rental service charging \$3 for a 10-day period. HCL spending on collections has increased in recent years as a percent of the total budget, from 14 percent toward a target of 18 percent, while MPL spending on collections has decreased from 11 percent to eight percent of the total budget.

In part because of long-past decisions about types of operating MPL facilities, primarily buildings, the square footage that must be maintained by MPL is extremely high. This accounts for increased operating and capital improvement costs. By using county departments to manage certain functions, such as human resources to negotiate contracts and benefits, and property services to handle property leases and acquisitions, Hennepin County Library may realize some efficiencies that are not available to MPL as an independent agency.

Other broader, long-term options to improve MPL included seeking some regional or state funding to support activities that provide benefit beyond Minneapolis.

MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

History

In 1857 Edward Murphy donated the land for Minneapolis's first park. In 1883, the Legislature authorized an independent Board of Park Commissioners for the City of Minneapolis (referred to now as the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, or commonly, the Park Board). Soon after, city voters elected the first Park Commissioners. In the early 1900s recreation in the parks was promoted and soon became the main use of parks. Progressive era philosophies espoused combining active recreation with lifelong learning to enhance individual development and the board created a division of recreation within its administrative structure.

The Current Situation

Today Minneapolis parks are governed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). The board comprises nine commissioners, six elected by park district and three elected at-large, all serving four-year terms. Commissioners are responsible for developing park policies; approving the budget; and operating the park system including enacting ordinances governing the use of neighborhood and regional parks, parkways, beaches and lakes, and special use facilities such as pools, ice arenas and municipal golf courses. The Park Board hires the superintendent who is responsible for the supervision of all park employees, approximately 600 permanent and 1,500 part-time staff.

The Park Board's mission is to preserve, protect, maintain, improve and enhance the city's parkland and recreational opportunities. The Minneapolis Park System comprises more than 170 properties including local and regional parks, play-

grounds, tot lots, triangles, golf courses, gardens, picnic areas, biking and walking paths, nature sanctuaries and a 55-mile parkway system. MPRB operates 49 year-round, neighborhood-based recreation centers. Every neighborhood has at least one park, which ensures that no Minneapolis resident is more than a few blocks from open space and its benefits. The recreation centers range from one room shelters to full service community centers, offering an array of programs and services.

Since the early 1980's, the MPRB has provided tax-supported recreation programs to meet the recreational needs of community residents of all ages and abilities. Each neighborhood helps to decide which recreation programs will best meet the needs and those services are offered using Minneapolis tax dollars. More than 7,500 programs are offered for approximately 1.5 million people.

Some Comparisons

According to the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit that conserves land for parks and conducts research on related topics, in 2002 there were 5,359 acres of parkland within the City of Minneapolis. This equals 14.3 acres per 1,000 residents, the most of any comparable U.S. city. Minneapolis ranks 5th in terms of percent of city land devoted to parks (15.3 percent; the highest is Washington D.C. at 19.3 percent). Minneapolis spends more than twice the national average per resident on parks; \$164 in 2001 compared to an average expenditure of \$80. The overall budget is \$65.8 million. It is important to note that some park systems focus primarily on parkland and offer few, if any, recreation programs.

The Trust for Public Land has identified seven measures that make the greatest difference in defining a successful urban park

system. Since 2001, when the measures were developed by a group of 25 urban park experts representing various aspects of park operations, the Trust has surveyed park and recreation systems to create benchmarks for city park systems. (Harnik)

The seven measures are:

- A clear expression of purpose.
- Ongoing planning and community development.
- Sufficient assets in land, staffing and equipment to meet goals.
- Equitable access.
- User satisfaction.
- Safety from physical hazards and crime.
- Benefits for the city beyond the boundaries of the parks.

Minneapolis ranks near the top on almost all of these measures. The Minneapolis Park Board was awarded the National Gold Medal for excellence in park and recreation administration in 1989. The Minneapolis Park System has received a four-star rating (highest possible value) from the Trust for Public Land and in 2000 was described in an article in USA Today as the “closest thing to park nirvana.” One weakness in the park system identified by the Trust is lack of an up-to-date master plan; the current one dates from the 1960s.

Lack of a current master plan may be the most significant weakness in Minneapolis's system. The last master plan is referred to as the Brightbill Study, after the person who developed it. It was prepared in 1963 and used demographic information from the 1950s. The age demographic of the city, as well as its racial and ethnic makeup, has changed significantly since then. These factors have a tremendous influence on how people use parks and what recreational opportunities they expect. With increasing numbers of new immigrant residents and an aging popu-

Table 2 City Park Governance Comparisons (2002 data)

City	Population	Structure	Board	Size	Appointed/Elected	(2002 data)				# Permanent Staff	
						Acres of Park Land	Acres/1000 Residents	% Land as Parks	Total/Capita		Total Expenditures
Minneapolis	382,618	independent municipal unit	authority	9	elected (6 by district, 3 at large)	5,359	14.3	15.3%	\$176	\$66,225,757	600
Saint Paul	287,151	city dept.	advisory	9	appointed (mayor)	4,000*	13.9	1.0%	\$129	\$37,027,546	518
Chicago	2,896,016	city dept.	authority	7	appointed (mayor)	11,729	4.1	8.1%	\$136*	\$391,641,000*	*
Denver	560,882	city dept.	advisory	19	appointed (5 mayor, 13 city council, 1 school board)	6,447	11.5	6.6%	\$145	\$80,965,277	600
San Francisco	791,600	city dept.	authority	7	appointed (mayor)	5,143	6.7	7.2%	\$203	\$155,086,597	*
Seattle	571,900	city dept.	advisory	6	appointed (mayor)	6,029	10.6	1.2%	\$239	\$136,007,516	943
Washington D.C.	571,000	city dept.			No board; Park Director appointed	7,576	13.3	9.3%	\$185*	\$105,902,000	*
Cleveland	468,000	political subdivision of the state of Ohio	authority	3	appointed (Judge of the Probate Court of Cuyahoga County, OH)	2,553	5.5	5.1%	\$88	\$41,038,397	560
Sacramento	435,000	city dept.	advisory	11	appointed (city council)	4,397	10.1	7.1%	\$102*	\$44,360,000*	*
Pittsburgh	328,000	city dept.	No Board; Park Director appointed by mayor			2,735	8.3	7.7%		no data	450

* Not available

lation, suitable recreational resources must continue to evolve. The Park Board is developing a new comprehensive plan; phase one is expected to be complete in late 2006.

Other aspects of Minneapolis's park operation that may bear closer scrutiny according to The Trust include:

- Complementary fundraising (i.e., non-governmental funds). Minneapolis raises only slightly more than the national average in private funds.
- The presence of uniformed employees. According to the Trust, "the perception of order and agency responsibility can be extended simply by dressing all park workers and outdoor maintenance staff in uniform" even if the number of actual police is quite small.
- Advisory committees. Minneapolis was noted as lacking a disability advisory committee which could ensure that park programs and facilities are best serving the needs of all potential users.

Governance Options

In general, options for the Park Board and for park and recreation functions are similar to those presented for libraries.

Elected Authority Board

Currently, the Park and Recreation Board is an elected authority board with responsibility for policy, budget and operations.

Appointed Authority Board

Paralleling what was discussed earlier for the library system, it might be possible to maintain the park and recreation system as an autonomous agency, but under the guidance of an appointed rather than

elected board, which would provide greater linkage and accountability through the Mayor and City Council.

Interestingly, the Trust for Public Land does not collect or publish information on park governance. However, it is clear that many excellent park systems are run without elected boards, although they usually have strong mechanisms for citizen input. Among the best funded (Seattle, Denver) and largest (Oakland, Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, Philadelphia) urban park systems, none has an elected board; most have appointed boards or commissions with appointments made by mayor, council or a combination of the two. Most of these systems contain both park and recreation functions in a municipal department rather than an independent municipal unit.

Advisory Board

If the Park Board were to take on a different structure, such as becoming a city department or merge with another entity, an advisory board could serve as a means for citizen input.

City, County or Other Unit

One option for change to the park and recreation system suggested by our resource interviews is to turn it into a city department.

Overlapping and duplicated services of the Park Board and other city departments is one area the LWV Mpls discussed in its 2005 study in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. In 2000 the City of Minneapolis released a study on gaps, overlaps and possible changes to organization, policy or operations in how the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and the Minneapolis Park Police Department (MPPD) deliver services. The respective police forces differ greatly in scale.

Two general findings of the study were that the focuses of the two police units are different and that there is a high level of interaction between the two units. When discussing specific areas such as 911 responses, case investigations and handling special events, the study concluded that issues like chain of command, authority and responsibilities of the two departments are not formally documented or clear. Concerns about these issues are reflected in one example regarding the handling of criminal case investigations. The study found that despite the acknowledged good informal communication ties, having dual investigative functions results in some instances where Park Police and Minneapolis Police conduct separate investigations of cases that have the same or related suspects or patterns.

Although at least one of our resources believed that the Park Police have such a special relationship with park users that any efficiency gains from consolidation of the two forces would be offset by resident dissatisfaction, others indicated that a merger of the two forces should be considered. The Minneapolis Police Department could follow the example of some highly-ranked park systems in other cities, such as Chicago, Cincinnati and San Diego by dedicating a special unit to police the parks. (See chart on next page)

Additional issues related to service duplication or overlap involve MPRB and the Minneapolis Public Works Department functions such as street maintenance, lighting and tree trimming. For example, in 2004, the Public Works Department took over responsibility for park lighting. One park employee the LWV Mpls interviewed opined that since then park lighting maintenance has suffered because Public Works does not make repairs quickly enough. A related issue has to do with the type of lighting used in the parks because MPRB

employees and many park users seem to prefer “warm amber” lighting, while Public Works staff prefer much longer-lasting but “cold white” lights.

Some think becoming a city department would work as long as there was a strong citizen advisory board. One proponent argued that Minneapolis parkland could be put into trust before park services were turned over to the city to ensure it remains as parkland, while another felt turning parks over to the city was a risk to Minneapolis’s excellent system and one not worth taking to save a few dollars.

Another option put forward would turn Minneapolis parks over to a regional system like The Three Rivers Park District (comprising Hennepin, Scott and Carver Counties). One person said merging the city park system with Three Rivers Regional Parks would make more sense than making it a city department. Another argued that while Three Rivers might be a better steward of the land, it offers very little recreational programming and is unfamiliar with urban cultures.

BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION

The Board of Estimate and Taxation consists of the Mayor, the President of the City Council, the Chair of Ways and Means, Budget Committee of the City Council, an elected member of the Library Board, the President of the Park Board or another member and two additional members representing the general public and elected at large for terms of four years.

The Board of Estimate and Taxation:

- 1) Sets maximum tax levy rates.
- 2) Sells bonds (the board acts as a public referendum on bonding and capital projects).

Summary of Park Police Structures of Other Jurisdictions*

City	TPL** Rating	Primary Law Enforcement Authority in Parks			Notes
		Police Department		Parks Department	
		Regular † Patrol	Dedicated Unit†		
Minneapolis	Four-stars			x	
Boston		x			Park rangers patrol parks; no enforcement authority.
Cincinnati			x		
Chicago	Three-stars	x	x	x	Park district hires off-duty police officers to patrol their park system; however, the Chicago PD supplements this via regular patrol and by assigning at least one beat to the parks in each of the individual districts; also utilize a CPD bike and mounted unit that assists in patrolling the parks.
Denver		x			
New York				x	
Phoenix		x			Rangers serve public information role primarily, providing desert awareness, education and other information/public relations.
Portland, OR		x			Rangers/ agents with no powers of arrest, serve in public information role primarily, “eyes and ears” for Portland Police Department.
San Diego		x	x	x	
San Francisco					Information Not Available
Seattle		x			
Atlanta		Two-stars	x		
Baltimore	x				
Dallas	x				
Houston	x				Police patrol primarily via a regular patrol; however there are some officers assigned to the largest parks. Parks dept. contracts private security and rangers as well.
Kansas City	x				
Los Angeles	x			x	
Pittsburgh	x				
Detroit	One-star	x			
Miami		x			

Source: Minneapolis Police & Minneapolis Park Police Study Committee Report November 17, 2000

*Data for this table was taken from the Urban Land Institute & Trust for Public Land Cities Management Analysis Division.

**Trust for Public Land rating of city park system. Four-stars is the best rating given.

† A “dedicated unit” within a police department is dedicated to park law enforcement and employs dedicated officers for that function. “Regular patrol” means that park law enforcement is handled by the police department in general.

3) Handles the internal audit function (for compliance and abuse, not performance).

As required by the City Charter, the board of Estimate & Taxation holds public hearings to obtain citizen input relating to setting the maximum tax levies for certain tax funds in the city. The board reviews selected city department budgets and after receiving recommendations from the Mayor and City Council, sets the maximum tax levies for the following funds:

- City Council: General Fund, Permanent Improvement Fund, Police Personnel Expansion Fund.
- Park and Recreation Board: Park and Recreation Fund, Tree Preservation and Reforestation Fund, Park Rehabilitation and Parkway Maintenance Fund, Shade Tree Disease Control Fund, Lake Pollution Control Fund.
- Library Board: Library General Fund.
- Public Housing Authority: Public Housing Fund.
- Board of Estimate & Taxation: Estimate and Taxation Fund.

NOTE: The Board of Estimate and Taxation does not regulate the Fire Department Relief Association, Police Relief Association, Municipal Employees Retirement Fund, and Building Commission Funds.)

The board is responsible for the internal audit, which covers city departments, boards and commissions and provides audit programs to establish guidelines, policies and procedures for the conduct of periodic internal audits. It initiates investigations of alleged or suspected impropriety, misappropriation and other misuse of city funds.

While the board is established by charter, it is an unusual entity. No other cities of this size in Minnesota or elsewhere have one. According to one of the people we interviewed the board is an anachronistic way of carrying out the work assigned to it. Other cities that once had similar boards have replaced them with more streamlined mechanisms.

Options

We were offered no compelling reason why the Board of Estimate and Taxation should continue to function as currently constituted in Minneapolis. Fewer than half of all voters in recent elections have known or cared enough to vote for the two elected members of this board. The functions of the board can be carried out by the Mayor, City Council and representatives of the Library Board and Park and Recreation Boards. If citizen participation is needed in the budget process, this might be done through appointments to a review body or expanded budget hearings rather than by elections.

Certainly, based on what we heard from experts, the internal audit function could be performed by transferring current staff to another department such as Finance. The Truth in Taxation hearing function also does not require an elected board, especially since the meetings are primarily designed to share information and have little influence on budget decisions. In the interests of transparency and accountability, the transfer of board responsibilities to the Mayor and/or City Council would be more straightforward and easier for citizens to understand.

Eliminating the board would seem to provide a more direct means of citizen input as well as a more direct requirement for the other two boards to work effectively with the Mayor and City Council by elimi-

nating the intermediary role now often played by the elected members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

To summarize the major reasons to eliminate the Board of Estimate and Taxation suggested to us by those who support this option:

- The board diminishes accountability by putting an unnecessary layer between other elected officials and citizens.
- Voters do not have the necessary background to assess the capability of candidates for the board who need to have highly specialized expertise to be effective.

We heard two reasons to continue to elect the board:

- The board provides some citizen input, albeit at a distance, to the budget process.
- The board forces all players in the budget process to cooperate.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

One interviewee told us quite forcefully what many of our resources suggested in less direct terms: “Boards don’t preserve strength; the funding sources do. You can have citizen participation without independent boards.” Others said the effectiveness of the boards isn’t dependent on whether members are elected or appointed.

If the issue is that the Mayor and City Council are not aware of the impact their decisions have on the maintenance of parks and libraries, then perhaps the problem is one that can be addressed through better communication. However, if the current structure makes it possible for the Mayor and City Council to mislead residents, whether deliberately or unin-

tionally, about the key roles they play in funding parks and libraries, then the solution needs to be a structural one.

One of the criteria for good government that we noted in our 2005 study was diversity. As currently constituted, most board positions are elected at-large or from relatively large districts and, therefore, the boards do not adequately reflect the economic, social, racial, geographic or political diversity of the city. A fair and open appointment process could address this weakness. Many large urban school districts, for example, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, have moved to appointed boards in the last decade in order to increase diversity and to attract members who bring a necessary expertise rather than greater political ambitions. (American School Board Journal, December 2003)

Some proponents of change to the elected boards noted that the boards have sometimes been used as springboards by members who want to run for other political offices. While there is certainly nothing wrong with this, it hardly provides a reason to retain the boards as elected bodies.

Over the years many efforts have been undertaken by the League and other organizations to encourage higher voter turnout overall and greater attention specifically to the “bottom of the ballot.” Yet, as noted earlier, less than half of the voting population votes for independent board positions and this number appears to be decreasing. Perhaps the disadvantages of a long ballot should be acknowledged. The current system, which has all board members run for election/re-election at the same time, for terms of equal length, results in discontinuity. After each election, the boards require time to adjust to new members, especially if there is a significant number of them and they need to hurriedly get

“up to speed.” It takes time and energy for members and boards to develop and commit to a shared vision for the city. In terms of efficiency and flexibility, criteria that we discussed in the 2005 report, this situation is undesirable. A fair and open appointment process could facilitate the use of staggered terms without unnecessarily increasing election costs.

Also as noted in our 2005 study, city-county and metropolitan governments are increasing in popularity because they offer efficiencies of scale, but more importantly, because they are in a better position to address the kinds of challenges—transportation, security, economic development, fiscal disparities, etc.—that now face urban areas. Perhaps advocates for changes in Minneapolis’s government structures should look seriously at the potential benefits of greater regionalism. Current formal, informal, and quasi-official collaborations among city and county park and library systems across the metropolitan region should be encouraged. While merger may be a goal sometime in the future, in the interim willing cooperation could facilitate a smooth transition if that future arrives.

Finally, if the structures change, or even if they don’t, there should be adequate avenues for broad and diverse citizen participation.

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APPENDIX A

Election Data Relating to Elected Boards

*Elected

AMOUNT SPENT BY CANDIDATES FOR INDEPENDENT BOARDS

Board of Estimate & Taxation	\$7,856
Park Board - At Large	\$61,629
Park Board - Districts	\$86,688
Library Board - At Large	\$67,883
TOTAL	\$26,253

AMOUNT SPENT BY INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES

Board of Estimate & Taxation

\$ 3,340	Becker*
\$ 1,071	Berger
\$ 0	Nelson
\$ 3,445	Schwimmer*

Park Board - At Large

\$ 2,102	Anderson*
\$ 11,102	Forney
\$ 8,360	Froehlich
\$ 7,353	Graves
\$ 25,281	Nordyke*
\$ 7,431	Young*

Park Board – Districts

First District

\$17,282	Dziedzic*
\$ 6,574	Wilcox

Sixth District

\$3,895	Bernstein
\$3,303	Fine*

Second District

\$ 267	Hodges
\$5,572	Olson *

Library Board - At Large

\$ 23,895	Duckor*
\$ 434	Hinsdale
\$ 3,083	Holte
\$10,690	Hooker*
\$ 0	Iverson
\$ 0	Kjellander
\$ 6,810	Krueger*
\$ 5,619	Mains*
\$ 2,153	Savran*
\$ 5,235	Smart
\$ 7,811	Thaden
\$ 2,968	Wittstock*

Third District

\$ 0	Donnelly
\$3,889	Vreeland*

Fourth District

\$17,970	Hansen
\$11,402	Nordstrom*

Fifth District

\$6,642	Kummer*
\$9,892	Stone

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC LIBRARY COMPARISONS																
(2003 data reported in 2004)																
Governance					Features			Revenues / capita		Expenditures / capita			Services			
Library	Population	Structure	Board	Size	Appointed/Elected	# of Branches	Total Staff	Libn/1000	Local	Total	Total/ Cap.	Coll/ Cap	Staff as % of Total	Circ/ cap	Ref/ cap	Public Computers
Minneapolis	382,618	independent municipal unit	authority	8	6 elected, 2 apprd (1-mayor, 1-city council)	14	369	0.22	\$53.29	\$56.43	\$57.89	\$5.35	75.90%	7.76	1.42	145
MN Comparables																
Hennepin County	748,180	county dept.	advisory	7	apprd (nty, com-missioners)	27	476	0.17	\$49.02	\$52.19	\$52.39	\$6.89	69.90%	16.76	1.42	684
St. Paul	287,151	independent municipal unit	authority	7	elected / dual role ¹	13	173	0.17	\$43.83	\$48.11	\$42.57	\$5.53	77.00%	10.60	1.60	100
Dakota County	353,180	county dept.	authority	7	apprd (nty, com-missioners)	9	149	0.15	\$28.11	\$29.74	\$28.93	\$3.67	80.90%	10.20	0.90	153
Great River Regional	377,933	multi-county agency	authority	15 (nty reps based on popn)	apprd (nty, com-missioners, % basis)	32	120	0.04	\$14.43	\$18.12	\$16.70	\$3.28	74.50%	7.20	0.80	79
MPL Defined Peers																
Cleveland	556,806	special pur- pose district ²	authority	7	apprd	28	599	0.22	\$34.27	\$92.97	\$94.72	\$17.85	61.80%	9.57	1.85	300
Denver	560,882	city dept.	authority	8	apprd (mayor)	22	430	0.2	\$54.36	\$59.34	\$57.57	\$10.32	70.40%	16.54	2.15	466
Pittsburgh	458,597	501c3	authority	25+	N/A	19	486	0.3	\$37.65	\$67.79	\$59.38	\$7.05	54.30%	5.34	2.32	400
San Francisco	791,600	city dept.	authority	7	apprd (mayor)	26	637	0.26	\$64.56	\$66.94	\$65.08	\$8.46	81.90%	8.58	1.53	345
Seattle	571,900	city dept.	authority	5	apprd (mayor & city council)	23	478	0.24	\$56.09	\$59.67	\$59.55	\$5.72	74.70%	10.98	1.80	353
IAPLR Municipal Peers																
Arlington (TX)	349,944	city dept.	advisory	10	apprd (city council)	5	88	0.07	\$14.80	\$15.34	\$14.80	\$2.59	71.60%	4.30	2.70	162
Birmingham (AL)	403,327	city dept.	advisory (?)	11 (inc. 1 mayoral rep)	council	21	243	0.16	\$34.63	\$36.79	\$36.61	\$4.11	69.80%	4.23	2.23	442
Omaha (NE)	425,386	city dept.	authority	9	apprd (mayor, city council confirms)	10	149	0.09	\$22.10	\$22.69	\$21.91	\$3.88	69.00%	5.70	0.76	255
Santa Ana (Orange Cnty, CA)	347,200	city dept.	advisory	8 (inc. 1 student)	apprd (city council member by district, 1 by mayor)	5	61	0.04	\$12.86	\$14.35	\$13.23	\$1.32	71.20%	2.50	0.26	69
Wichita (KS)	355,126	city dept.	authority	14	apprd (mayor & city council)	9	122	0.08	\$15.94	\$20.38	\$19.32	\$2.38	66.70%	5.25	0.89	58

^{*} as suggested by MPL staff ^{**} libraries in municipalities closest in size to Minneapolis
¹ the city council sits separately as the library board ² school district

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The Independent Boards**