

March 19, 2024

RE: 2024-2031 Planning Board Recommendations to Mayor Simmons

Dear Members of the Board of Representatives Fiscal Committee,

The Parks & Recreation Commission would like to extend its thanks to the Planning Board & Mayor Simmons for prioritizing the city park capital requests by recommending in many cases full funding with a Tier 1 priority. We are hopeful that the Fiscal Committee can retain two requests we would like to highlight as priorities.

Because the City of Stamford's population has increased significantly over the past 10 years while green space is not keeping pace, the Commission would like the Fiscal Committee to keep the full proposed capital request submitted by the Land Use Bureau for the Overall Needs Assessment for City Fields (1254 001254). Current information compiled by the Commission indicates a pressing need for more park athletic field space, particularly soccer. A consultant will be able to compile the usage data from both the City Park and Board of Education fields informing the City and the Commission where more fields are needed, ways to achieve more field space and which sports we need to plan to accommodate in the future. Another area of concern is the tennis courts at Scalzi Park (451 CP6809).

The Parks & Recreation Department has programs that offer tennis lessons and there are sanctioned tennis leagues. The capital requests for the tennis court improvements have been requested for multiple years and it continually goes unfunded. It is vital that the City of Stamford continues to be equitable and inclusive to all families and children regardless of income brackets. We are striving to give everyone the opportunity to play tennis on the public courts since we are aware that many do not have the means to join private clubs. Additionally, the popularity in pickleball play has increased the usage of all the public courts. The tennis courts are used throughout the year, with many residents shoveling snow off them in the winter to play. At a certain point, the tennis courts will no longer be playable and become more of a liability than an amenity.

With the support from the current administration, the Parks Strategic Plan has confirmed many of the challenges our parks face, from lack of funding to limitations on size. That is why it is vital to keep park funding at the forefront as you review the 2024-2031 Capital Budget. As stated in the Strategic Park Plan from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), **Stamford's overall ParkScore was 44 out of 100**. The ParkScore Index is the most comprehensive rating system developed to measure how well the 100 largest U.S. cities are meeting the needs for parks.¹ TPL applied the ParkScore Index methodology to Stamford's Park system to identify its strengths and weaknesses relative to the 100 most populous U.S. cities, as well as peer city of New Haven.² The five categories scored were, Acreage, Access, Investment, Amenities, and Equity. **Stamford scored 22 out of 100 for Investment, an average of \$70 per person compared to the median of \$108 and 20 out of 100 for Acreage.** Acreage included the percentage of parkland in the City (4%) and the median park size in acres (median 3), both rated in the bottom quarter of cities reviewed.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please reach out to us.

Sincerely,

Melanie Hollas, Chair
Michael Tedder, Vice Chair
Angela Adetola, Commissioner
Paul Newman, Commissioner

¹ Trust for Public Land. *Stamford Citywide Parks Strategic Plan*, (p48) Fall 2023.

² Ibid.