

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

December 19, 2024

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Cincinnati Board of Park Commissioners was held on this day at 950 Eden Park Drive. Commissioners present: Vice President Kick Lee, Commissioner Susan F. Castellini, Commissioner Phyllis McCallum, and Commissioner John Neyer. President Molly North was not in attendance. Vice President Lee called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M.

Acknowledgement of Public Comments

Vice President Lee acknowledged seven in-person public comments about the skating rink at Sawyer Point, combined sewer overflow in Burnet Woods, and the Burnet Woods dog park.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Approval of the November 21 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner McCallum motioned to approve the November 21 meeting minutes. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

INFORMATION/ UPDATES

Explore Nature! Hiring Update

Parks Director Jason Barron introduced Andrew Bernier, who was recently selected as the new Director of Parks' Explore Nature! education program.

Skating Rink at Sawyer Point

Morgan Rigaud of Skate Downtown Cincy shared an overview of programming, attendance numbers, and accolades received since the reopening of the Sawyer Point skating rink three years ago. Ms. Rigaud highlighted how partnership with the Parks Foundation, the Park Board, and Cincinnati Children's Hospital has helped to grow the program. Jennifer Speiser, President & CEO of the Parks Foundation, shared potential plans to improve the rink including a projected project budget for the first phase of improvements. The Foundation has raised approximately \$300,000 to support the project, thanks in part to generous donations from P&G and Bank of America. The Commissioners, Staff, Skate Downtown Cincy, and the Parks Foundation discussed recent efforts to resurface the rink as well as the need for and probable timeline to complete more comprehensive, sustainable improvements. Commissioner Neyer motioned to provide partnership and support for the project with the understanding that funding will be provided via the Parks Foundation. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Urban Forestry Assessment Update

Division Manager Crystal Courtney shared a 2024 year in review of the Urban Forestry program, including the move to their new home at 1012 Ludlow Avenue and key staffing changes. Staff provided an overview of the program's purpose, goals, and day-to-day operations, including a detailed explanation of the Front Footage Assessment methodology and process, and efforts to adequately staff Parks' internal Tree Crew.

ACTION ITEMS

Urban Forestry Assessment (FY 2027)

Division Manager Courtney provided an overview of the annual Urban Forestry Assessment, defined by ORC Chapter 727, which results in a levy paid by property owners to help fund the Urban Forestry program. Staff requested the Board recommend that City Council maintain an Urban Forestry front footage assessment of \$0.31 per foot, to maintain current service levels through fiscal year 2027. Commissioner Neyer motioned to recommend the rate of \$0.31 per foot. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Hauck Botanic Gardens – Building Renovation and Repairs

Division Manager Joel Gross shared completed design work on upgrades to the Hauck Botanic Gardens House, which houses Parks' Planning & Design team. Renovations and additional office spaces are needed, as the P&D team has grown significantly over a short period of time. Staff requested the Board approve the work to Megen Construction in the amount of \$84,959, with an additional \$10,000 to be held in contingency. Commissioner McCallum approved award of the work to Megen in the specified amount and to approve the contingency. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Bellevue Rock Catchment Fence Repairs

Division Manager Gross updated the Board on the status of damage to the rock catchment fence at Bellevue Park, incurred when Emergency Medical Services cut the fence and anchoring cable to reach someone who had fallen from the rock ledge and required medical aid. Staff requested approval of emergency repairs to the fence, in an amount not yet specified but estimated to be less than \$60,000 including contingency. Commissioner Neyer motioned to approve the project in an amount up to \$60,000. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

INFORMATION/ UPDATES

Planning & Design Update

Division Manager Gross provided a status update on several projects, including the Mt. Echo Pavilion, the Ludlow DNR HQ service garage, Ault Park Valley Trail restoration, Art Museum Drive landslide repair, Smale Lot 23 enhancements, and the bike skills course, ADA pathway, and comfort station at Mt. Airy Area 23. Staff also shared updates on progress to move the Biochar Project forward at Parks' Sinton campus, planning for and progress at Inwood Park, efforts to mitigate sanitary sewer issues at Burnet Woods and Mt. Airy Forest, and next steps for replacement of the 1000 Hands Playground at Sawyer Point. Director Barron and Staff shared photos of the completed installation of the accessible spinner at Wilson Commons, paid for with funds secured by Councilmember Jeff Cramerding.

HR Update

Director Barron provided an overview of current staffing, vacancies, hiring, new appointments, and ongoing efforts to improve Parks Academy and the Safety Program.

ACTION ITEMS

FY26 Capital Budget Request

Director Barron presented Parks' proposed FY26 Capital Budget Request, including a breakdown of the \$2.7 million initial projection for major projects and the Facilities & Maintenance budget. Projects include repairing sinkholes, septic and sanitary issues, Sinton facility upgrades, stormwater issues, and several projects at Burnet Woods. A \$520,000

allocation to the Facilities & Maintenance division is included to improve their ability to manage preventative maintenance. Also included are five Modernization and Strategic Investment projects: Owl's Nest Park, Glenway Park, Gibson House, an adventure playground at McFarlan Woods, and removal of the rails in the bike trail through Sawyer Point and Yeatman's Cove. The Commissioners and Staff discussed the process and timeline for submitting the proposed budget to City Administration. Commissioner McCallum motioned to approve the FY26 Capital Budget Request. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Foundation Grant Grants Application / Acceptance

Director Barron requested approval to apply for and accept a grant for 2025 Nature Next Door bussing in the amount of \$9,500, and a grant for the purchase of Mt. Adams greenspace in the amount of \$107,835. Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve the application and acceptance of grant funds made to the Cincinnati Parks Foundation in an amount up to \$117,335. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Director Barron addressed research completed by University of Cincinnati students related to combined sewer overflows in Burnet Woods, and discussed Parks' efforts to work with MSD to manage these issues in a way that prioritizes public safety.

Director Barron presented the following updates:

- East District Crew Leader Steven Crooms was recognized as the 2024 Parks Employee of the Year, and was presented with an award by City Manager Long.
- Thank you to Parks' West District crew, who removed approximately 300 tires that were illegally dumped at Mt. Storm and Mt. Airy Forest.
- Explore Nature! Winter Camps are offering nature-themed fun over the holiday break.
- Upcoming events in Cincinnati Parks throughout December and into the New Year.
- Director Barron thanked the Commissioners and Foundation for their contributions to a great year at Parks and wished everyone happy holidays.

OPEN COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION & COMMENTS

Commissioner McCallum thanked Director Barron for his leadership and thanked the Parks team for working together so efficiently and effectively. Vice President Lee and Commissioner Castellini also shared how much they enjoy being on the Board of Park Commissioners. Commissioner McCallum shared her support of the skating rink project. Vice President Lee also shared his excitement about the project. Commissioner Neyer shared appreciation for the work happening and being planned at Cincinnati Parks.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice President Lee adjourned the meeting at 11:09am.

The next regular meeting date is Thursday, January 16, 2025, at 9:00am.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT



DIRECTOR



[External Email] Public Comment December 2024

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Sat 11/23/2024 8:51 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

Park Commissioners,

Is there any way you could change your lens and look at this beautiful vista through the eyes of the community who relies on this little pocket of natural beauty to stay connected with the natural world?

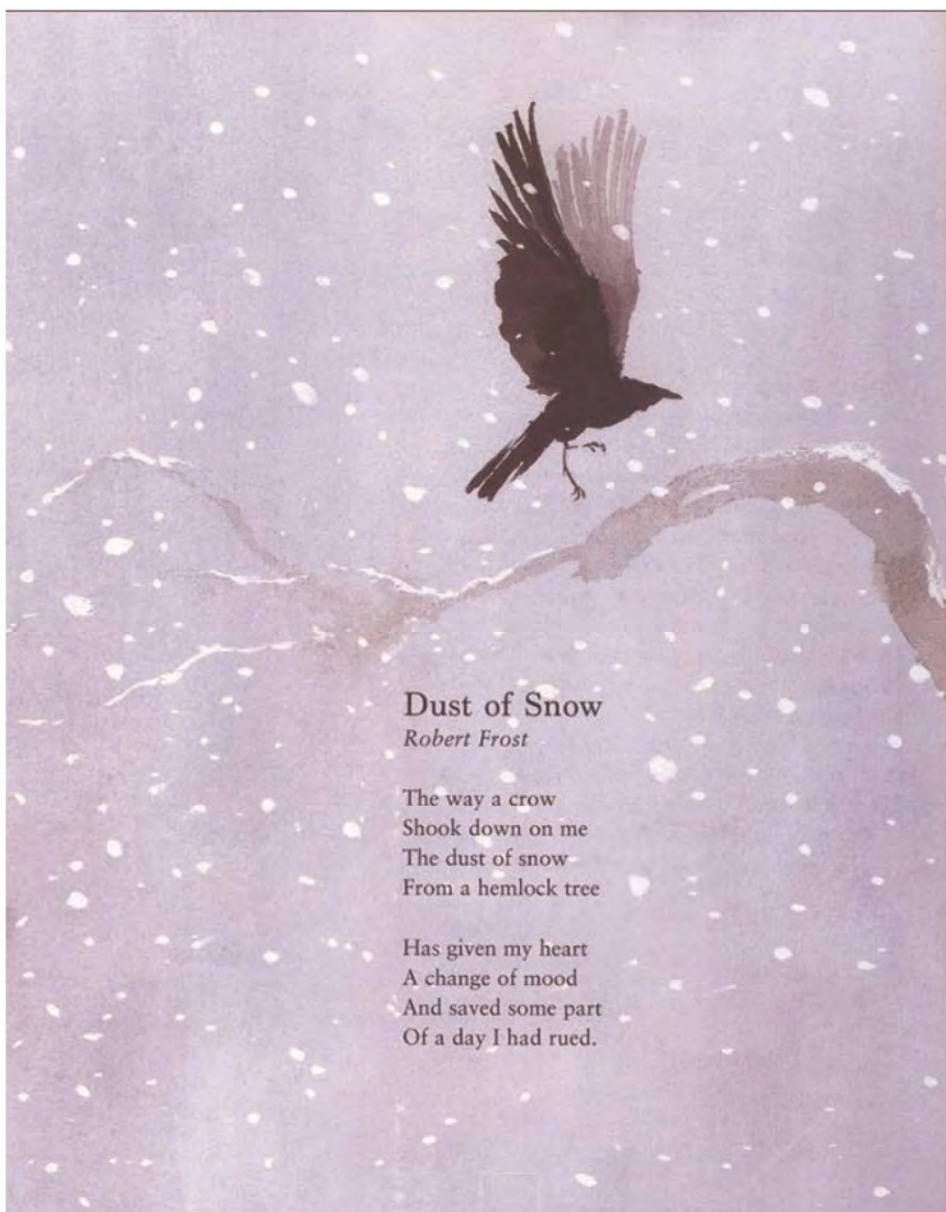
This is a place of peace.

Please move the proposed development in Burnet Woods to a previously developed location and protect this habitat for future generations to enjoy.

Sincerely,
Shari Frost

Photo credit Bob Hyland







Outlook

[External Email] Public comment

From betina Ebady <betinaeb@yahoo.com>

Date Tue 11/26/2024 9:31 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

You don't often get email from betinaeb@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

External Email Communication

Please protect the birds at Burnett woods.

Dogs can walk on the streets because they rely on humans for food and water. Wild birds need trees and wildland to survive .

Please protect bird habitat

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

[External Email] Public comment

From Cat <casandra.mcdowell2000@gmail.com>
Date Tue 11/26/2024 11:02 PM
To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

You don't often get email from casandra.mcdowell2000@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

External Email Communication

I believe the woods known as Burnet woods Is a very important park for the community both animlas and humans. I think it would be a devastation to just turn it into a dog park. Please reconsider many would be sad by this decision.

[External Email] Public comment

From Mindy Lee <mindylee909@gmail.com>

Date Sun 12/1/2024 12:24 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

You don't often get email from mindylee909@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

External Email Communication

Please find a new home for your dog park, do not bulldose that beautiful habitat!

[External Email] PUBLIC COMMENT

From Ricki Huff <rickihuff25@gmail.com>
Date Sun 12/1/2024 11:52 AM
To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

You don't often get email from rickihuff25@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

External Email Communication

RE: Burnet Woods

To the Members of the Park Board of Commissioners, Cincinnati,

Hundreds of letters of thousands of petition signatures have apparently not been heard. I adore dogs, but I also LOVE birds and being in Nature. Burnet Woods are special and SO IMPORTANT to saving habitat.

PLEASE RECONSIDER this wrong-headed decision. There are other locations for a dog park.

R.E. Huff

[External Email] PUBLIC COMMENT 12/24

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Mon 12/2/2024 3:43 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Aftab, Mayor <mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov>

 1 attachment (3 MB)

image_50400257.JPG;

External Email Communication

Protect it so it exists outside of a library. Literally.

Corryville deserves to have a rare natural site within a city protected for future generations.

Do you not realize how lucky we are to have this incredible place?

Bulldozing this location for unwanted development is unjust.

Protect this beauty.

Protect this vital habitat.

Protect Cincinnati greenspace.

Protect historic sites.

World renowned landscape architect, Adolph Strauch, designed this entryway to our park to draw the eye towards the lake.

Spending a half a million dollars to destroy it against the will of the people who collectively own it is not only irresponsible, it's morally wrong.

Pretending to have completed authentic community engagement when you have done so such thing, is deceitful.

Pouring concrete over the earth in Corryville to satisfy the desires of a few Clifton residents who already have the entirety of Burnet Woods to socialize and exercise their dogs is the height of entitlement.

Fundraising under the guise of creating an amenity that will be "universally accessible" and not delivering on the promise is unethical and morally bankrupt.

Ignoring the climate crisis and the expertise and collective voices of our UC professors and scientists is reprehensible.

Sincerely,

One of those "Burnet Woods People" proudly standing on the right side of history,

Shari Frost

Please include attachments in the public record



Pleasant Valley in Burnet Woods is a park unto itself



[External Email] PUBLIC COMMENT

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Mon 12/2/2024 5:52 PM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Aftab, Mayor <mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

I received a text message from Trust For Public Land soliciting for donations.
I'm sending you a screenshot of the message in hopes that THEY can reach your hearts.
Please include attachment in the public record

Shari Frost

Once lands are developed, they're gone forever, and the loss will ripple across generations.

 **Make your Giving Tuesday gift right now:**

[m.tpl.org/
kKZ4iSWjDWZq](https://m.tpl.org/kKZ4iSWjDWZq)

[External Email] Public Comment 12/24

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Sun 12/8/2024 8:21 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Aftab, Mayor <mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Kroner, Oliver <ollie.kroner@cincinnati-oh.gov>

 3 attachments (14 MB)

IMG_5169.jpeg; IMG_5167.jpeg; IMG_5166.jpeg;

External Email Communication

Dear Park Commissioners,

I've been watching your actions towards Burnet Woods, and towards the people who are fully invested in the health of the park.

I am not convinced that you've given enough consideration to how much your proposed plan to add fencing, remove soil, pour concrete, and to add dog park noise will impact the well being of the community, park trees and park wildlife.

I've watched you treat Burnet Woods as private property as you have ignored public outcry. Are you trying to "teach someone a lesson"? As if the public has no right to defend public greenspace?

I listened as Commissioner Castellini stated that no one opposed to the location ever offers an alternative.

That is wholly untrue.

I know it's untrue, because I have been among those who HAVE reached out trying to encourage exploration of other sites.

Why isn't finding a site that will provide for people with a disability full access the priority?

If that site doesn't exist, why wasn't the answer, "NO", we don't have a suitable site in the area. There is no reason why a small off leash area for dogs should cost a half a million dollars, and many believe that it is because of the poor site choice.

Burnet Woods is a rare and magical place to exist in the heart of a busy city. We so wish you would take the time to learn about the importance of this precious resource.

We sure are trying to reach your hearts. No one who loves this woodland would ever harm its peace in the way you are planning.

I am asking you to nix the project, and fix the existing safety and accessibility concerns in Burnet Woods.

Sincerely,
Shari Frost

“And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.” ~ Roald Dahl









[External Email] Public Comment 12/24 including attachment

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Tue 12/10/2024 5:51 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Kroner, Oliver <ollie.kroner@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

Dear Public Park Stewards, Please change course and relocate your proposed plan for a dog park in Burnet Woods.

Trust the expertise of our UC professors and scientists who have voiced their concerns about your site choice.

Respect the historical significance of the park entrance that you are poised to permanently alter.

Make good on your promises to create a "universally accessible" amenity by moving the project to a suitable location.

It's never too late to do the right thing.

In my research about Adolph Strauch, the designer of our park entrance to Burnet Woods, I appreciated this quip

"According to notable landscape gardener O.C. Simonds, who later incorporated Strauch's principles in his own work at historic Graceland Cemetery in Chicago, "perhaps no man in the United States since A.J. Downing's time has done more for the correction and cultivation of public taste in landscape gardening than Adolph Strauch.""

Please allow the people who appreciate the breathtaking beauty of the natural landscape to retain what little bit they have left.

Ignoring the overwhelming majority of voices is unjust.

We have serious safety concerns and there is a lack of accessibility in our manmade structures within Burnet Woods.

Please pause the dog park idea and prioritize the concerns of the community, park stakeholders, UC students and faculty, your advisory council members, environmental groups, and dedicated volunteers.

Sincerely,
Shari Frost



[External Email] Public Comment 12/19

From Cynthia Duval <cynthia_lough@hotmail.com>

Date Wed 12/18/2024 3:52 PM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

You don't often get email from cynthia_lough@hotmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

External Email Communication

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Cynthia Duval <cynthia@preserveburnetwoods.org>

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 11:51 AM

To: Cynthia Duval <cynthia_lough@hotmail.com>; CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>; citymanager@cincinnati-oh.gov <citymanager@cincinnati-oh.gov>; mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov <mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov>; meeka.owens@cincinnati-oh.gov <meeka.owens@cincinnati-oh.gov>; mark.jeffreys@cincinnati-oh.gov <mark.jeffreys@cincinnati-oh.gov>; anna.albi@cincinnati-oh.gov <anna.albi@cincinnati-oh.gov>; victoria.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov <victoria.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; scotty.johnson@cincinnati-oh.gov <scotty.johnson@cincinnati-oh.gov>; jan-michele.kearney@cincinnati-oh.gov <jan-michele.kearney@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Cramerding, Jeff <jeff.cramerding@cincinnati-oh.gov>

Subject: Re: OBJECTION TO ORDINANCE 202502500 - SCHEDULED FOR VOTE 12/16

CORRECTION - ORDINANCE 202402500 is the Ordinance of reference.

On Mon, Dec 16, 2024 at 11:48 AM Cynthia Duval <cynthia_lough@hotmail.com> wrote:

To Mayor Aftab Pureval and elected members of Cincinnati City Council-

As part of the December 16, 2024 Budget & Finance Committee meeting and subsequent City Council meeting, you are being asked to approve funding and account transfers regarding the highly controversial Burnet Woods Dog Park. This project was marketed to City Council as being the first "universally accessible" dog park in the city at the cost of denigrating a 150-year-old greenspace. Overwhelming evidence already provided to council shows this project is not community supported.

Cincinnati Parks has failed to disclose what portion of total budget was transferred to taxpayers through cost-cutting measures intended to reduce the fundraising requirements of the Foundation and its partners. Cincinnati Parks funding was to be contingent on the donor partners raising \$150,000 of the project budget. When donors failed to prove that level of interest in the project through public fundraising attempts, Parks slashed details and amenities pertinent to accessibility, THEN PULLED OUT PROJECT PIECES THAT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH PARKS STAFF

EFFORTS AND PARKS SUPPLIES, transferring cost to the taxpayers for a project that we were told over and over again would not be publicly funded. Parks is playing a shell game with funding while not providing information on what portion of this project will now be publicly funded WITHOUT ORDINANCE DRIVEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT being completed. There is no estimate of ongoing maintenance cost for this plan with a \$70mil backlog of deferred maintenance.

By Cincinnati Park Board's own admission in the October Park Board meeting, not only will this project no longer be universally accessible, but it will also not be inclusive throughout to someone in a wheelchair. Additional emails obtained through public record requests show that the project will not have accessible parking or even curb cuts for access, and that the project should have gone out to rebid due to the substantial design changes. In fact, the slope of the site was NEVER suitable for accessible parking and should have been removed from consideration on that basis early on had due diligence been done. As we hear from Parks that curb cuts will be added "later", we note that Parks Director told this council in March 2023 that failing stone stairs in Burnet Woods would be repaired prior to the dog park installation. No action has been taken on that public hazard since that promise to council by Jason Barron. Signage for the disc golf course expansion from two years ago remains incomplete in the Director's oubliette of unfinished & poorly prioritized plans. Edging around the lake as well as lake "delamination" projects which were started remain incomplete or are again failing from temporary patches. One trail has been closed more than two years from an unrepaired SINKHOLE that was left filled in loosely with twigs and sticks as the caution tape around it faded, fell, and became plastic trash left behind by Parks. This was one of four sinkholes in the park pointing to a desperate need to consider what is happening below ground before bulldozers start tearing earth. Last week, a UC student project revealed shocking levels of E.coli bacteria from CSO flooding in the soils where Parks holds Summer Camp in Burnet Woods. THIS ISN'T A COMPLETE LIST!

Cincinnati Parks INTENSE focus on pushing this dog park through rather than expediting and addressing public health hazards or pending unfinished projects shows a skewed and politically bloated decay of morals, out of touch with regular park users, in Parks and Park Board leadership at the highest levels.

The fundraising by the Cincinnati Parks Foundation for this project was also on the basis that the project was "universally accessible". That Parks is blatantly failing to deliver what was promised in fundraising materials (on the assertion that one person has the right to speak for the entire donor pool though the fundraising was publicly canvassed) should be examined for liability in fraudulent fundraising prior to this council accepting any such funding. Ethics concerns have been filed relating to this aspect of the funding mechanism, as well as the position of a Cincinnati Park Board Foundation Board Member to profit from award of this contract from funds raised by the Cincinnati Parks Foundation.

Further, it is noted that the City Manager submitted the Ordinance as an Emergency Ordinance, with Parks citing timing concerns in their language. SINCE WHEN IS A DOG PARK AN EMERGENCY FOR CITY COUNCIL?

Please delay consideration of this matter until ACTUAL EMERGENCIES AND PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS in Burnet Woods have been addressed and Parks has a plan to stop creating its own financial messes.

Regards,

Cynthia Duval

Burnet Woods Park visitor and volunteer of 38yrs.

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