

Opinion



BLOG BIT

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce has decided to support the two questions on Kansas City's Aug. 7 ballot. That's a victory for Mayor Sly James. The decision signals that civic leaders will contribute lots of money to the campaigns that will be needed to pass a sales tax increase and \$500 million in sewer revenue bonds in a very tough economy.

Yael T. Abouhalkah, Kansas City Star editorial page columnist, on the Midwest Voices blog at voices.kansascity.com

THE STAR'S EDITORIAL

Parks department should work with more businesses, residents to improve public spaces

Public-private efforts build better parks in KC

Two young girls skipped down a Loose Park path on a sunny day last week, enjoying the benefits of a wonderful public space in Kansas City.

Or, to put it more technically, they are the beneficiaries of a public-private partnership that continues to invest in better amenities for area residents.

The spongy asphalt pathway used by the girls, for instance, was built with the help of a contribution from the Ward Family Foundation — the patron saint of Loose Park.

Soon, tennis players will be swinging their racquets on new courts that are under construction next to a sprayground heavily used by children on Loose Park's west side. These and other amenities are supported with private dollars from the foundation, connected to the family that runs Russell Stover Candies. Its funds also pay to mow grass, trim trees, collect trash and provide other services at the 75-acre park south of the Country Club Plaza.

The foundation's support helps ensure that Loose Park remains one of the jewels of Kansas City's parks system.

Meanwhile, private contributions from Frank and Ann Uryasz continue to make possible major improvements to Hyde Park in midtown, while the Ward Family Foundation helps support upgrades to nearby Gillham Park.

But in times of tight budgets at City Hall, the Parks and Recreation Department also is doing



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Visitors enjoy shade from mature trees, winding pathways, ponds and other amenities at Kansas City's Loose Park.

a better job working with residents to spruce up the city's public spaces.

█ Parks official Steve Lamponne marvels at how much sweat equity a large and dedicated

group of neighbors also developed their own master plan for upgrading parts of the park. A space that too often had become trashy now sparkles. And it's getting more visitors. On a recent weekend families enjoyed picnics in the park while a dozen or so youngsters nearby threw around flying discs.

█ Organizations such as the Armour Hills and Verona Hills neighborhood associations are contributing private dollars to plant more trees to be enjoyed by future generations. The latter group, for instance, will pay for dozens of trees that will take the place of dead or dying pines to be removed in south Kansas City.

█ The Penn Valley Park Conservancy, led by longtime parks activist Dona Boley, has helped guide improvements under way to improve that large downtown public space.

█ On the Plaza's east side, the Mill Creek Park Association is helping pay for repaired sidewalks around the iconic J.C. Nichols Fountain and for new black wrought iron benches nearby. It's about time, too; the sidewalks and concrete benches have been crumbling for years.

The parks department must be open to even more partnerships with businesses and residents. Giving them bigger stakes in a better parks system — a nationally recognized amenity — is a smart investment in the city's future.

group of neighbors poured into improving Roanoke Park in midtown. The residents have removed growths of wild honeysuckle to expose beautiful limestone outcroppings. The