

ENMAX Legacy Parks Fund

Mayor Bronconnier delivered the following address to the Downtown Rotary Club on Tuesday June 24, 2003.

Thank you Jack.

On behalf of Calgarians, thank you for your contribution to our community as President of the Downtown Rotary over the last year. Being in this room with the Downtown Rotarians has a very special meaning for me.

It was about a year and a half ago we met in very this room for my first State of the City speech. You might remember the speech had a long list of things Council needed to accomplish.

Here's a quick update on how we're doing:

We've dealt with the issue of ENMAX and we'll come back to that in a minute.

- We've hosted a peaceful G8 Summit.
- In the last two years, we've given the "go ahead" for over a half billion dollars in new transportation infrastructure.
- We're building new roads, expanding LRT, buying new LRT cars and new buses. Transportation remains Calgarians' number one issue, and we are addressing it.
- We've worked out a new deal with the development industry. Growth will now start paying more for roads - an additional \$80 Million for new roads over the next 7 years.
- We're building more affordable housing for Calgarians who are struggling.
- We're improving accountability at City Hall and addressing Calgarians' top priorities.

Those are just a few highlights of City Council's efforts over the first half of our term.

We have about 16 months left until the next municipal election. Actually, 482 days, but who's counting. My energy for the next 482 days will be directed in three key areas: Infrastructure, Accountability and the Environment.

And the environment is my focus today.

Our parks and pathways are precious. They contribute to our well being in so many different ways.

However, our last major park, Nose Hill, was completed 15 years ago. Since that time, we have a quarter million more people living here. Park use is way up. This year, we'll have 15 Million more visits to our parks than we did a decade ago.

As that trend continues, we run the risk of "loving our parks to death".

It's ironic that the success of our City actually poses a threat to something so vital to our quality of life. But make no mistake, growth does jeopardize the sustainability of our parks. Out of all the assets the City has buses, LRT, buildings, and all that.

Parks are the most valuable thing we own. And that doesn't mean what they are worth on paper. Parks are a really unusual asset - their REAL value has no monetary equivalent.

How do you put a value on a family picnic in the park? Or a walk along the river after a stressful day? Or a nice place to take your dog for a run? It's like trying to appraise the value of fresh air or green grass or sunshine.

You can't. You can't put a price tag on these. Their true value is measured in our hearts. And by the same token, in our hearts, we know the true cost of not having enough parks.

But those are the "intangibles". Let's look at their tangible costs of parks.

For example, Nose Hill. It cost \$40 Million to acquire and build that park in the mid-80s, but if we had to build it today, the land costs alone would be well over \$300 Million.

Smaller parks aren't inexpensive either. If we had to replace Prince's Island Park today, we'd be looking at price tag of over a \$100 Million.

The costs of building new regional parks in developed areas of the City are enormous the land costs alone are prohibitive.

As our City approaches a million people, we need to plan and act, for the future. We need to plan for a day when we will be approaching two million people. That milestone is only 40 years away. We need to make a commitment that in the future Calgary will continue to be a world leader when it comes to public parks.

To do that, we need to establish new parks on our borders. We need to do this while the land is still available and still affordable.

That's why today, I am announcing a proposal to establish a \$50 Million Parks Fund. I will be asking Council to discuss and endorse this plan the next time we meet.

You may be asking, how can the City afford that?

We can afford it because Council's leadership led to a new dividend policy for ENMAX last year.

Here's how it works. The City of Calgary now receives an annual dividend equal to one-third of ENMAX's net profits. Whatever the company makes, we get one-third. The first \$35 Million of ENMAX dividend goes to General Revenues, to help ease the tax burden for Calgarians. Anything over \$35 Million goes into capital projects. For example, this year we're expecting a \$50 Million dividend from ENMAX. So \$15 Million will be directed into a capital fund.

I am proposing that we dedicate these capital dividends from ENMAX for a period of five years. Based on conservative projections, these capital dividends will yield \$50 Million over that term, to create the ENMAX Legacy Parks Fund.

With this money, we will build three new major parks that together are the size of Nose Hill Park.

I've done some exploratory work on these.

First, the Shepard Wetlands on the eastern border of Calgary.

Imagine what we could do with nearly 600 acres of wetland and wildlife habitat. That's about the size of 14 Prince's Island Parks. We could build an interpretive education centre focused around the wetlands. We can build sports fields, a water park, interpretive boardwalks, and hiking trails. The possibilities are endless. And some day, this Park should extend all the way to Chestemere Lake and south to the Bow River. It will be a Park without equal in Canada.

Next, the Bearspaw located on the northwest border of our city.

We're talking about a park that could fit 9 Bowness Parks in it - almost 800 acres. It's got a spectacular view of the Bow Valley. More importantly though, this would protect the river valley from future development. And some day we can create a park that provides uninterrupted green space all the way from Prince's Island to Cochrane.

Finally, the Clearwater Beach located along the Elbow River on our western limits.

We're looking at almost a 1000 acres that's the size of 3 Edworthy Parks. It's part of the River Valley System. It preserves a rare forest ecosystem. We can link this park with pathways to nearby Griffith Woods Environment Park. The recreational activities in this park would compliment the natural theme of the area... things like hiking, camping, fishing and bird watching. It will be an amazing "people place".

Under this plan, the first of these three parks will be implemented within the next 24 months, and we're looking at a total cost of \$30 Million for all three. The remaining balance of the Legacy Fund, some \$20 Million, would be dedicated for upgrading existing park facilities.

That means money to expand our established parks, adding new hiking trails, adding new recreational facilities and sport fields, adding new conservation areas, and rehabilitating natural areas. It means re-development of older parks for the future needs of Calgarians.

By creating the Legacy Parks Fund, we will establish a critical mass of funding for parks projects. We can leverage it with funding from other levels of government, gifts of land from private landowners, donations from the private sector and partnerships with not-for-profit organizations.

Future projects should include working with groups like the Rotarians.

Over the past three years, Calgary's Rotarians have contributed thousands of volunteer hours, and raised almost \$12 million for Rotary Challenger Park. \$50,000 came from the Downtown Rotary just last week.

When the Park opens this year, it will be a unique, world-class facility for Calgarians with special needs. City Council needs to make sure we have the ability to contribute to important projects like that in the future.

The ENMAX Legacy Parks Fund will guarantee that as our City grows, future generations of Calgarians will be able to enjoy the same natural gifts that we do today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in only a century, Calgary has grown from a frontier prairie outpost into Canada's most dynamic City.

This didn't happen by accident.

Our city was built by optimism. It was built by dreams. And it was built by hard work.

As leaders, we need to keep faith with our City's character for the next century, and the century that follows that.

So today, let us make a promise to our children and grandchildren. Let us make Calgary a City known throughout the world for its outstanding public parks. Let us resolve that our decision to keep ENMAX will mean a better quality of life for generations.

In our remaining 16 months, City Council has many hard miles to travel.

We will not coast. We will not let ourselves be distracted.

We will continue to build our City's infrastructure. We will continue to improve accountability at City Hall.

And we must establish the ENMAX Legacy Parks Fund.

Thank you.