

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**PRESERVE OUR PARKS LAUNCHES “OUR TURN” PETITION DRIVE
DEMANDING MORE PARKS FUNDING FOR PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT**

Preserve Our Parks, a local non-profit watchdog advocacy group, announced today that it will launch a grassroots “Our Turn” petition drive to protest the loss of funding for Milwaukee County parks. The petition demands that County officials direct more funding to repair and maintain the County’s 140 parks and parkways.

“Our parks are in crisis,” said Jim Goulee, president of Preserve Our Parks. “We funded stadiums and arenas, and now it’s ‘our turn’ for parks funding. Our parks are a critical part of the quality of life in Milwaukee County. The parks and trails that make up our ‘emerald necklace’ must be preserved, enhanced and protected.”

Goulee pointed out that parks funding has drastically declined over the past three decades from about \$45 million to about \$34 million in the 2018 County budget. He added that while the County budget has nearly doubled since 1986, parks funding has dropped to a level where it is only 4.2 percent of the County tax levy, down from 29 percent in 1986.

“Elected representatives are allowing private firms to strip mine public taxes for private gain,” said Patricia Jursik, a board member of Preserve Our Parks. “This strip mining puts public parks in the ruts of devastation.”

Goulee said it was important to apply pressure to County policy-makers as the 2019 capital and operating budgets are drafted by the County Executive and reviewed by the County Board. But he added that state lawmakers have worsened the situation by cutting shared revenue to local governments, and they have also placed onerous limits on how counties can increase their tax levies. He said the state has strapped local government and is the “main cause of deterioration of County facilities.”

“We can’t let County and State officials cast a blind eye toward the continuing decay of our parks,” Goulee said. “So far the best the County Executive could do for increased parks funding was pitch a wrong-headed idea to place parking meters in the parks. That is simply unacceptable because it limits access. We must make our voices heard so that our free and public parks are thriving not only in the present but for future generations.”

The POP petition drive will begin in June and will run throughout the summer. Preserve Our Parks also announced that it will hold public “town hall” meetings to allow citizens to have their voices heard on the issue. The first meeting will be held at South Shore Park at 6:30 on June 7.

Preserve Our Parks is a non-profit citizen action and watchdog group passionately devoted to the preservation, maintenance and enhancement of Milwaukee County’s beautiful emerald necklace. Founded in 1999, Preserve Our Parks is committed to attaining dedicated funding for parks to reverse the course of decline and neglect that has taken place over several decades. Preserve Our Parks actively seeks to make our parks’ preservation a high priority for County policy-makers, and it strongly opposes the sale or any conveyance that restricts the use and enjoyment of our free public parks.

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