

VIEWPOINT

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The public parks system of the United States may face serious cutbacks if California's Proposition 13 and office-seeking politicians cause widespread reduction in public funds.

The success of local parks is evident in the two profiles in this issue (pages 35 and 42). Demand for convenient and inexpensive recreation increases steadily as more people realize the physical and emotional value of the park setting.

Nevertheless, two-thirds of park managers responding to our latest survey say park budgets are too low, by an average of 35 percent. Park managers are performing certain design, construction, and maintenance jobs on their own to save paying standard contractor rates.

If budgets are already at shoestring level, further cutbacks will seriously hinder maintenance of existing parks and eliminate construction of new ones. It appears that residential construction will continue at explosive rates and the pressure on parks will increase as more people live near them.

Meanwhile, politicians pretend there is fat in all government and promise tax cuts of 33 percent. Promising anything, hoping to fool a voting majority, many politicians ignore business facts of life which apply to government as well as the private sector.

Unfortunately, park directors have to bear the weight of bad performance, corruption, and incompetence of other government officials.

Up to now, park directors have been a relatively invisible group. In limited cases, park directors publicize what they can do. They act in response to public tastes in recreation, (such as hockey, bicycling, jogging, and handball), publicize the fact they are responsive, and consequently gain support for more park improvements. Image is vital to winning support for park bond issues.

The situation of parks simply cannot be combined with that of other areas of government. In the profile survey on page 31, we figure the cost per citizen per year for public parks is a mere \$16. Take two people to Disney World and you've spent more than that.

The California situation is based upon a weakness in the laws of California, not the laws of the entire country. Real estate prices are escalating at 15 percent or more per year. If no controls are placed upon the rate of property tax increase, taxes will increase at the same rate.

Fifteen percent is not a good figure for other cost increases. Government should not expect 15 percent annual budget increases when most businesses operate at five to eight percent annual cost increases. Government should expect no more than businesses expect and controls have to be placed upon property taxes to limit it to what is actually needed.

Proposition 13 was an overreaction caused by poor lawmaking in California. The proper move



would have been for the state legislators to react to public outcry by limiting property tax increase to the five to eight percent range.

For current politicians stumping for election or reelection to say more drastic control measures are necessary is also overreaction and should not be rewarded with votes.

Another factor plays a significant role in park budgets. As seen in the Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, profile on page 35, if a community can generate matching funds and apply for Federal programs they can double their budgets and do fantastic things for residents with their parks. Knowing how to obtain federal and state grants is essential for park managers to maintain a progressive park system.

Park managers are facing tremendous challenges now and greater ones in the future. Professionalism in park management is essential for a community to build and maintain a quality park system. Local governments especially need to sell their parks to residents, get support from park users, and publicize any new programs.

If a city doesn't have a park manager, it should hire one and make the needed investment to keep its parks alive. If that is not feasible, consultants should be hired periodically to review the city park program and to keep it up-to-date with regard to services and available grant sources.

Finally, now more than ever, park managers should support their professional associations and demand these associations to provide needed information.