

The Valley Needs Great Spaces

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By Jim Holway

Millennium Park
and the Lakefront
in Chicago.

Balboa Park and the beach
in San Diego. Chapultepec
Park in Mexico City.

Stanley Park in Vancouver.

Central Park in New York.

Great cities have great
parks and public spaces.

What are our great places?

Parks are a place for people to come together; to enjoy their family, neighbors and community; to celebrate their environment, heritage and culture; to help sustain a sense of place and community; to enjoy and appreciate nature; and to maintain their physical, emotional and spiritual well being.

We are blessed with extensive mountain preserves and the beautiful Sonoran Desert. Communities throughout the Valley each have active parks and recreation programs. We've recently added excellent arts centers to the venues throughout the Valley and several of our cities are actively engaged in creating vibrant and livable downtowns. But we have few, if any, parks that are recognized as truly great places.

Regionally, we are a collection of adjacent cities and towns that still need to learn how to function as an integrated urban area with a collective identity.

Local and national polls and elections consistently demonstrate strong support for public parks and open space. Furthermore, investments in open spaces and parks can increase property values up to 30 percent. However, we are far from creating great parks, we are struggling just to meet the challenge of maintaining public spaces and parks services for existing and new residents.



We must be willing to tax ourselves and invest in public spaces and parks for our quality of life. We should come together as a region to create a network of parks and civic spaces.

We can incorporate our mountain preserves, our natural and developed washes, lakes and canals, our neighborhood parks and our cultural, entertainment, sporting and retail centers to develop both the individual sites – our jewels – as well as the connecting networks, an open-space necklace.

Papago Park, because of its unique assets and location, represents a prime opportunity to create one of these jewels and to draw our region together with a truly great park and civic space. We need to protect and restore the asset we have currently, and help Papago become a shining gem at the center of our region.

We need to broadly engage our community – from neighbors, to park users, to business interests. We need to invest in creating and implementing a vision, securing new parks and mountain preserves, maintaining and improving what we already have. And we need to create genuine jewels out of spaces such as Papago Park, regional parks, the future downtown civic space and our preserves.

For Phoenix residents, extending the Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative is a critical step we can take toward achieving our potential for a truly great parks and open space system.

Voting "yes" on Proposition A in the May 20th special election (and by earlier mail-in voting) will not create any new taxes. Voting "yes" will continue for 30 more years the dedicated investment in our parks that Phoenix voters overwhelmingly supported 10 years ago.

Jim Holway, served on the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Board from 1999 through this month, was also a guest on Live Talk Wednesday, April 30, 2008, 11 a.m., at www.aztalk.azcentral.com. Holway also chairs the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Papago Park and is Professor of Practice at the Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University where he teaches and works on issues of growth, land use and water management.