

Minneapolis Park Board

MRLF puts new focus on 2017 Minneapolis Park Board races

By Steve Share, Labor Review editor

MINNEAPOLIS — All nine seats on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board will be up for election in November 2017, including three At Large positions as well as all six district seats.

The election will bring a dramatic turnover on the board: only three of the current nine incumbents are running for re-election.

Park board members have been in the hot seat in recent years — facing budget woes, charges of racial inequities within the park system, and contentious decisions about outsourcing public employee jobs through public-private partnerships.

The departure of so many incumbents has attracted a field of many first-time candidates as well as two former commissioners seeking a return to the board.

Candidate filing closed August 15.

In the weeks and days before that deadline, more than one candidate has jumped from an At Large race to a district race or vice versa. In two instances, that switch means those candidates lost their endorsement from the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.

(Note: Bob Fine and Mike Tate switched races and no longer carry the MRLF's AFL-CIO endorsement).

The MRLF's current list of endorsements for Minneapolis Park Board may be found on this page. Updates will be posted at minneapolisunions.org.

The stakes in the 2017 Minneapolis Park Board election are high, not just for residents, but also for the park system's employees.

"At the rank and file, the morale is probably at an all-time low," reported Kevin Moody, business manager for City Employees Local 363, which represents the workers who maintain park grounds and facilities and care for boulevard trees.

In the early 2000s, the system employed 152 park-keepers, a number which has dropped to 102, Moody noted, and even was down to 80 at one time. The number of arborists has dropped from about 50 to 35.

"I think the people of Minneapolis have noticed a difference in the parks," Moody said.

At the same time as cuts to frontline staff, the park board has added new levels of management.

Lately, "the number of frontline staff is moving in the right direction, but it's years behind the curve," said Tony Kelly, Local 363 field representative.

Local 363 vigorously opposed a plan that put the nonprofit Loppet Foundation in charge of ski and bike trails at Wirth Park. Commissioners voted 5-3 in favor of the plan (*Labor Review*, December 16, 2016), which the union decried as outsourcing.

"That was a watershed vote for us," Moody said.

"Our issue with the park commissioners — a total disconnect with the rank and file," Kelly said.

Londel French: Longtime union member

MINNEAPOLIS — "Our parks are the backyards of our neighborhoods," says Londel French.

Union member Londel French is running for an At Large seat on the Minneapolis Park Board with the endorsement of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.

He also has been endorsed by the Minneapolis DFL Party.

French has worked for the Minneapolis park system over the years but for the past 18 years he has worked in special education for the Minneapolis Public Schools, previously at South High School and currently at Harrison Education Center.

Most of the kids he works with have emotional behavior disorders, he says, but "I just think they need a lot of love."

French is a member of Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals Local 59 and a former longtime union steward.

French currently is also working part-time for MFT Local 59 as an organizer for the ESP branch.



Londel French

At Large

French moved to Minneapolis 19 years ago from Milwaukee, coming to attend Brown Institute and build a new life. "Minneapolis saved my life," he says.

A park director saw the way French was working with kids at Green Central School and offered him a job. That led to years working on and off for the parks, staffing the desk at neighborhood rec centers — and being that adult

who kids could approach to talk.

"I've always been interested in politics," French notes. "I've always been in tune with what's going on in the world."

Now, in running for Park Board, French offers nearly 20 years of experience working with Minneapolis youth in the park system and the school system.

"We've got to have people who look like me in jobs of power," French says.

"It's time to start putting actual union members in office. It's time for us to start leading," he says.

"I am a union member and that's what I will take to this job," French says.

Contact: londelfrenchforparks.com

BTCU's BRAD
PRESENTS

**GREAT HOME
MORTGAGES!**

HELLO, I'M BRAD—THE
MORTGAGE LENDING
MANAGER AT BTCU.

YES, INTEREST RATES ARE
CHANGING. BUT I'M HERE
TO HELP YOU FIND THE BEST
MORTGAGE OPTION.

C'MON! LET'S GET YOU
A NICE, NEW HOME.

STOP BY! WE'LL TALK!



YOUR
**Building Trades
Credit Union**

buildingtradesCU.com | 763.315.3888



Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation Committee On Political Education: 2017 Endorsements

Minneapolis City Council

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ward 1
Kevin Reich | Ward 5
Blong Yang | Ward 10
Lisa Bender |
| Ward 2
Cam Gordon | Ward 6
Abdi Warsame | Ward 11
John Quincy |
| Ward 3
Steve Fletcher | Ward 7
Lisa Goodman | Ward 12
Andrew Johnson |
| Ward 4
Barb Johnson | Ward 8
Andrea Jenkins | Ward 13
Linea Palmisano |
| | Ward 9
Alondra Cano | |

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

- District 2**
Kale Severson
- District 3**
A.K. Hassan
- District 4**
Jono Cowgill



- District 6**
Brad Bourn
- At Large**
Londel French

St. Louis Park City Council

- Ward 1**
Brian Shekleton
- Ward 3**
Jim Leuthner

This list current as of August 18, 2017. For updates: minneapolisunions.org.