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Minnesota Cities' Wish List for Stimulus Money Raises Questions

Golf Clubhouse, Skateboard Park, and Tennis Courts Among 10 Worst Requests

St. Paul, MN—As the federal stimulus package continues to balloon closer to \$1 trillion on the fast track to passage, the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota released a top ten list of the worst funding requests submitted by Minnesota cities as part of the process.

The list includes a \$1.5 million clubhouse and maintenance facility for a Roseville golf course, \$300,000 to upgrade tennis courts in suburban Shorewood, and \$750,000 for a state-of-the-art skateboarding park in St. Cloud.

“We were surprised to find that some communities evidently consider golf, skateboarding and tennis facilities to be critical infrastructure needs,” said Tom Steward, Investigative Director for the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota. “It begs the question: Are these public works, or public play, projects?”

Proposals from 26 Minnesota cities are among 18,750 so-called “ready-to-go” infrastructure projects totaling \$149.8 billion in the *MainStreet Economic Recovery Plan*, released at the January 17, 2009 Winter Meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. The plan pitches projects from 779 cities across the country, billed as “lasting infrastructure improvements for Main Street America.” All senators and congressmen have received the report and the mayors group has met with President Obama and Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett.

While many requests focus on basic infrastructure projects like bridges, roads, schools, and government buildings, a FFM analysis also revealed proposals for taxpayer-supported “traffic calming” elements and public art in St. Paul, a greenhouse gas tracking program in Burnsville, and nearly 13,000 new water meters for St. Louis Park residents.

“This only scratches the surface when it comes to all the proposals pouring in from cities, counties, and states for stimulus funding,” Steward said. “There’s a frenzy to submit so-called ‘ready-to-go’ projects for stimulus funding. Unfortunately, some projects on this list are ready to go no further than back to the drawing board, if not the recycle bin. These dubious requests underscore the urgent need for greater scrutiny and absolute transparency in this process across the board.”

[Click here to read the U.S. Conference of Mayors MainStreet Economic Recovery Report.](#)

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The Freedom Foundation of Minnesota is an independent, non-profit 501(c)3 educational and research organization that advocates the principles of individual freedom, personal responsibility, economic freedom, and limited government. Founded in 2006, we hope to create a better and more vibrant future for every Minnesotan by helping shape sound public policy. We tackle issues important to every Minnesotan and provide real-time, proven research and policy alternatives to help further the debate among leaders in government, the media, and the citizenry.



10 WORST ECONOMIC STIMULUS REQUESTS MADE BY MINNESOTA CITIES

10	Shorewood	\$300,000	Tennis court improvement and rehab – A backhand shot from a prosperous southwestern suburb that should be vigorously returned by taxpayers. ¹
9	St. Paul	\$2.1 million	Western Avenue reconstruction “including bike facilities, traffic calming elements” and “public art” – An artful attempt to have patrons, a.k.a. taxpayers, underwrite the collaboration of St. Paul public works engineers and artists in creating fun sculptures, playful signs, “traffic calming elements” and bike facilities. ²
8	Burnsville	\$50,000	Greenhouse gas tracking program – How exactly does a city-run greenhouse gas tracking program stimulate the economy?
7	St. Cloud	\$150,000	Street sign upgrade program – The state has mandated that street sign lettering be 150 millimeters for capital letters and 113 millimeters for lower-case letters. ³ A case of a city government asking the federal government for funds to comply with a state government mandate to replace signs that were already pointing the right way and doing the job.
6	Hanover	\$750,000	LED streetlight conversion – How many years worth of city electric bills will it take to pay off the \$750,000 cost of changing the bulbs in this city with an estimated population of about 2,500?
5	St. Louis Park	\$3.5 million	New water meters for St. Louis Park residents – The city wants to open the federal tap to give 12,800 water customers new water meters and install remote meter monitoring equipment.
4	Roseville	\$1.5 million	New clubhouse and maintenance shop for city golf course – Roseville’s city-run Cedarholm Golf Course, a 9-hole par 3 course, lost over \$800,000 between 2000 and 2007 (years inclusive). ⁴ Why should all taxpayers be asked to “chip in” even more money at this losing enterprise?
3	Burnsville	\$550,000	Nicollet Commons water feature rehab – Less than five years after a splashy opening for Nicollet Commons Park, Burnsville expects taxpayers to open the federal floodgates for a \$550,000 upgrade for the water fountains and sculptures in its highly touted town square style park.
2	Duluth	\$6 million	Spirit Mountain snowmaking and maintenance facility – This multi-million dollar snow job attracted national media attention to Duluth.
1	St. Cloud	\$750,000	Skateboarding Park – Ever since a local entrepreneur closed the doors of his skate park in 2006, enthusiasts in St. Cloud have tried to raise a quarter of a million dollars to start building a huge state-of-the-art skate park “plaza.” The city even agreed to carry donors’ debt for four years, but donations—to use skateboarding terminology—continue to “grind” along well short of their goal. So the city has done a “kick turn” and asked taxpayers to foot the bill for the entire project. Taxpayers need to become familiar with another skateboard term and “grab” their wallets.

¹ City of Shorewood, Park Commission Meeting Minutes. July 8, 2008.

² http://www.publicartstpaul.org/western_wa.html

³ 2008 Minnesota Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Chapter 2D.38.

⁴ Office of the State Auditor data on City Enterprise Funds, 2000-2007.