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Letter to the Editor: Economic loss, health cost of cutting park access - $700k annually

East Bay Recreational Park District (EBRPD) released an economic report in 2017 drafted by a team of independent economic analysts. The report indicated that the average recreational value of each park visit is $8. (page 35, http://www.ebparks.org/Assets/Features/Econ_Dev/Economic+Analysis+Impact+Report_3-2017.pdf). The experts report that the number of visits to EBRPD parks rose by an astonishing 78% from 2000 to 2016.

However, EBRPD indicated during a recent city of Fremont/EBRPD Liaison meeting that the average visitor count at the Stanford Avenue entrance of Mission Peak Regional Preserve dropped over the last three years. Data from the park district shows a 29% drop from 19,041 per month to 13,528 or 66,000 fewer per year. EBRPD Assistant General Manager for Operations, Jim O'Connor, is on record as stating that it "just may be that we're reaching a saturation... maybe this was a trend and we're seeing a downward cycle in that trend." This comment is in line with an earlier statement EBRPD Assistant General Manager O'Connor made at a private meeting with neighbors on November 18, 2015. There he announced the intention to "break the trend" of more visitors at Mission Peak.

He has succeeded. While visits to other parks are rising rapidly, up by 78% since 2000, visits to Mission Peak are dropping. This should raise eyebrows; but the drop should come as no surprise to the management of the park district nor our city politicians. That's because EBRPD cut park hours by 30% on September 29, 2014, and then both EBRPD and the city supported the reduction in curb parking from over 2,000 spaces to less than 200 spaces on weekends.

With each visit valued at $8, this decline represents a loss in recreational services of $530,000 per year. The losses are borne by the public and local businesses. Moreover, the spike in parking citations at Mission Peak during the last six months has already taken nearly $100,000 out of the pockets of visitors. That's for just six months; so, the jump in fines is costing $200,000 per year.

Parking citations in the rest of the city of Fremont amounted to $370,000 in fiscal year 2013, and $340,000 in 2014, according to Staff Report 2755 issued by the city in June

2016. By ramping up ticketing that targets visitors at Mission Peak, citywide revenue from parking citations is boosted by 54% to 59%.; revenue is offset by the cost of enforcement.

Ticket revenue is earmarked for the city coffers, but consider that the average compensation for a police officer in Fremont has climbed to nearly $175,000 per year. The city's Community Services, Police and Transportation Departments have each worked hand in glove with the local neighborhood, to target visitors. They did so, against the interests of residents elsewhere in the city. This is costing the public around $730,000 per year, $200,000 in direct costs for parking fines and another $530,000 for the value of lost recreational services.

Let's keep in mind that tyranny has a tangible cost, more than just a loss of liberty. Bad laws and bad governance by EBRPD and the City of Fremont are costing the citizens of Fremont money. We pay property taxes to EBRPD and to the city that are being wasted; we vote for bond measures that are misdirected; we pay costly parking fines that keep us out of our public parks and deprive us of recreational services. Worst of all, as a result of bad policies and illegitimate ordinances, our health is being harmed. "Healthy Parks Healthy People" is a wonderful catch phrase however grossly misused when our city and EBRPD block access using our money to restrict parking at our public parks.

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