

# Detroit to close 51 parks

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Detroit's Democratic Party Mayor David Bing announced Friday that his administration will close 51 city parks and sharply cut back operations at recreation centers by the spring. The cuts mean that only 57 of the city's more than 300 parks will be in operation this year. Those that remain open will see reduced staffing and maintenance.

The park closures are in line with the plans of the Bing administration to deny services to so-called unviable neighborhoods, forcing residents to move out.

One life-long Detroit resident told the WSW, "Recreation is an important part of a child's development. When you close down recreation centers and don't allow children to play it is a detriment to future generations. People still use the parks even though they are not in the same shape they were in previously."

"I believe the closing of these parks is part of a plan to turn the land over to private developers at a cut-rate cost."

Brushing aside the anger of city residents over the park closures, the Bing administration proposed that community groups adopt parks and carry out maintenance such as lawn mowing.

The Bing administration blamed the park closures on the City Council, which voted last week not to take up a plan proposed by the administration of Republican Governor Rick Snyder to have the state take over and run Belle Isle Park. The deal would have required visitors to the park to pay an annual \$10 fee for a vehicle pass. The state would have resulted in about \$6 million a year in revenue.

The cuts to parks are just the latest in a series of attacks on jobs and basic services like firefighting, lighting and bus transportation.

The announcement comes in the wake of several tragic fires in Detroit made worse by cuts to fire and emergency services. In one recent house fire, first responders had to travel 18 miles because of closures and "brownouts" of fire stations. The house burned to the ground, destroying all the possessions of the homeowner. (See, "Closed fire station costs Detroit resident her home")

Cuts in ambulance services may have also contributed to the death of six-year-old Miguel Chavez in a house fire in southwest Detroit last Tuesday. (See, "EMS cuts delayed ambulance in fatal Detroit fire")

The Detroit City Council approved a 10 percent pay cut last week for nonunion city employees, to be carried out through the implementation of unpaid furlough days. This follows a one-year pension freeze and an increase in health care costs for about 1,250 nonunion staff members.

Meanwhile, the Bing administration has opened negotiations with city worker unions over demands for more pay cuts, a pension freeze and cuts to medical benefits. These demands come on top of thousands of layoffs and a 10 percent pay cut for city workers, including fire personnel. The pension freeze would allow the city to defer a \$25 million payment to the pension system, and it would take away workers' right to accrue pensions between Feb 1, 2013 and Jan 31, 2014.

Round after round of cuts has failed to significantly reduce Detroit's budget deficit, which now stands at over \$327 million. The banks and the city's wealthy bondholders are leading the demand for cuts, using the financial crisis as a wedge to strip the working class of all past gains.

The city is also moving ahead with plans for a restructuring and downsizing at the wastewater treatment plant, the largest single-site treatment plant in the US. The water department plans to start combining job classifications at the facility in March, as part of a five-year plan to eliminate 81 percent of all jobs. Sewerage workers carried out a strike last fall that was isolated by the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees. As a consequence, 34 workers were handed 30-day suspensions, one step short of termination.

A Detroit sewerage worker with 10 years seniority spoke to the WSW about the cuts. "I can't take another cut, personally. That's the bottom line. We don't need that. Morale is very low. We give 100 percent of our ability every day, and they want to take more and more."

"They are trying to get rid of people by combining the

job classifications. If people are doing more than one job, you won't need that many people working there."

He opposed the plans to close more parks. "This is a way of getting back at the kids because the mayor and the council can't agree. There has to be some kind of movement developed or people will lose everything."

Despite the draconian attacks implemented by the Bing administration and the City Council, Michigan Governor Snyder has indicated that he is dissatisfied with their pace and the scale. He will likely soon appoint a state overseer to take control of the city's finances.

Under provisions of a new law just passed by the state legislature, which takes effect March 28, emergency managers will have the power to terminate or amend collective bargaining agreements, alter pension boards and sell public assets. Emergency managers can also force cities into bankruptcy, an outcome that would allow the city to override employee pension obligations. In enacting the new law, the legislature reversed a referendum vote in November to repeal the previous emergency manager law, Public Act 4.

The Detroit Public Schools are already under the control of an emergency manager, as are seven other cities and school districts across the state. Over the past four years, a series of emergency managers have worked to dismantle the Detroit Public Schools, the largest school district in Michigan, laying off thousands of teachers and slashing their pay, closing scores of schools and turning many more over to for-profit charter operators.



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