

From: [Kent Peterson](#)
To: [General Information](#)
Subject: To be included in the City Council Materials
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Attachments: [Three Case Statements - Cities^J SMSD and County.pdf](#)

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I urge the City Council to vote to extend the purchase agreement with SMSD and assign a task group to develop a multi-city, SMSD and Johnson County partnership for the nearly 8-acres that includes Joe D Dennis Park and 5050 Rainbow.

The attachments here, to be included in the formal record and made available to all Council Members, provide a starting point.

Thank you

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CASE STATEMENT 1 – FOR FIVE CITIES AND PUBLIC

A Legacy of Learning: Outdoor Learning Labs for SMSD Elementary Students

Creating a Model for Regional, Real-World Learning Rooted in Community Partnership

Honoring a Legacy of Educational Leadership in Westwood

For nearly a century, the Westwood community has shown what it means to invest in children, families, and education. From building the original Hudson School to transferring a new Westwood View school facility to the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) in 1969 debt-free, Westwood has consistently stepped forward. Over the last several decades we have rallied neighbors, organized funding, and forged civic partnerships to support student learning.

Most recently, the community overwhelmingly supported the SMSD bond package and partnered to create a modern elementary school that reflects the values of educational excellence and neighborhood vitality. At every turn, Westwood and its surrounding cities have proven that when families and schools work together, great things happen.

Now, we have a new opportunity to extend this legacy—through the creation of **Outdoor Learning Labs** embedded in shared parks and greenspaces that actively support and enrich the full SMSD elementary curriculum.

The Vision: Outdoor Learning Labs as a Regional Educational Model

Imagine a series of thoughtfully designed outdoor classrooms nestled in an 8-acre park. These labs would serve as hubs of discovery for thousands of elementary students, giving them access to curriculum-aligned learning experiences in science, math, language arts, social studies, physical education, and the arts.

Supported by a partnership among municipalities, Johnson County Parks and Recreation, and SMSD, these spaces would:

- **Integrate directly with grade-level standards** across all subjects (see examples from [SMSD curriculum-aligned activities]),
- **Expand access to hands-on, nature-based education**, especially in areas lacking green space,
- **Serve as a regional model** for city–county–school district collaboration,
- **Strengthen community bonds** through shared use and stewardship.

This is not just an enhancement—it is a **new infrastructure for learning**, grounded in equity, wellness, and environmental literacy.

Why Northeast Johnson County, and Why Now?

While the cities of Westwood, Westwood Hills, Mission Woods, Fairway, and Mission Hills contribute over **\$24 million annually in county property taxes**, they receive **no direct county park investment**. At the same time, land available for public use is vanishing fast.

We have a unique window to preserve and transform an **8-acre site**—currently taxpayer-owned—into a shared park and outdoor learning campus adjacent to a school. With leadership from SMSD, Johnson County, and the five cities, this space can become the flagship site for curriculum-aligned outdoor education, including:

- Nature trails for science investigations
 - Weather and water cycle stations
 - Community gardens and soil testing labs
 - Art, storytelling, and music circles
 - Civic engagement and stewardship projects
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Building the Model: A Replicable City–County–School Framework

This effort proposes a **governance and funding partnership** among:

- **SMSD** – for curriculum integration, teacher engagement, and learning design
- **City governments** – for site planning, park zoning, and local stewardship
- **Johnson County Parks & Recreation** – for project development and a time-limited investment (2% of annual budget over 7 years)
- **Regional collaboration** – to formalize ownership and long-term maintenance agreements across jurisdictions

This framework provides a replicable model that could be extended across SMSD, benefiting all feeder elementary schools in the SM North and SM East attendance areas.

The Call to Action

We invite civic leaders, funders, and community members to join us in launching a new generation of outdoor learning—one rooted in academic excellence, environmental responsibility, and intergovernmental collaboration.

Let us honor the legacy of Westwood’s educational leadership not only by preserving green space, but by transforming it into a dynamic learning landscape for the future.

Let’s build the first Outdoor Learning Lab here—and show the region what’s possible when cities, counties, and schools dream together.

CASE STATEMENT 2 – FOR SMSD LEADERSHIP

A Unique Opportunity to Advance SMSD's Mission Through Civic Partnership

Supporting Students Today. Preserving Our Legacy. Modeling the Future.

A Property with Purpose — and a Partnership Worth Pursuing

Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) is entrusted with delivering academic excellence and promoting student success. Now, the district has a rare opportunity to fulfill that mission beyond the classroom—by turning a surplus property into a legacy-defining partnership.

We respectfully urge the SMSD Board of Education and Administration to sell the former Westwood View Elementary School site to a consortium of local civic stewards for \$1 million. This public-to-public transfer would preserve the 8-acre green campus as a shared educational and recreational space, and directly support the district's core mission:

- **Outdoor Learning Labs aligned with SMSD curriculum**
- **Community-wide access for all SMSD feeder schools**
- **A living, breathing classroom for hands-on learning and real-world exploration**

Selling to this coalition of civic partners—anchored by the City of Westwood, with support from Westwood Hills, Mission Woods, Fairway, Mission Hills, and Johnson County—honors the legacy of how the property was first entrusted to the district and ensures it continues to serve SMSD students for generations to come.

Why Sell for \$1 Million to Civic Stewards?

Yes, SMSD could likely receive a higher offer from a private developer. But no private sale offers:

- **An education-aligned outcome** that directly complements SMSD's curriculum and goals
- **Public access and equity** for students across the SM North and SM East attendance areas
- **Outdoor learning infrastructure** that would cost SMSD far more to build independently
- **A community legacy** built on shared investment in families, students, and public good

A \$1 million civic purchase represents **full value**—not just in financial terms, but in **strategic alignment** with SMSD's mission and vision. It is an asset sale that **leverages the land to serve learning**.

A Legacy Rooted in Children, Families, and Education

The Westwood community has shown its commitment to education for nearly 100 years:

- Constructing the original **Hudson School** as a local investment in public education
- Transferring the land and a brand new **Westwood View to SMSD in 1969**—fully funded by local residents
- Rallying repeatedly to **keep the school open**, vibrant, and supported through local organizing and philanthropy
- Partnering again in 2023 to **open a new SMSD elementary school**, modern and community-centered

This next chapter—preserving much of the original Westwood View campus as a regional Outdoor Learning Lab—continues that proud tradition, led again by families and public leaders working side by side.

A Model for the District's Future

What's being proposed is not a one-off gesture. It is the **first prototype of a larger idea**: That SMSD can partner with cities and counties to co-develop Outdoor Learning Labs on public land across the district—connecting parks, schools, and curriculum into a seamless network of real-world learning.

This pilot at Westwood View offers a powerful model for **replication across other school properties and adjacent or nearby parks**. It is a way to **maximize public land** for public learning, without shifting funds away from classrooms.

The Ask

We respectfully ask the Shawnee Mission Board of Education to:

- **Approve the sale of the former Westwood View property** to a public partnership of local governments and civic stewards for \$1 million.
- **Recognize this sale as mission-aligned**, providing long-term educational value that exceeds what a private sale could offer.
- **Position this partnership as a pilot** for outdoor learning infrastructure throughout the district.

Let this be the sale that brings *more* to education—not just a check, but a lasting resource for students and a powerful example of civic alignment.

Together, we can honor the past, serve the present, and shape the future.

CASE STATEMENT 3 - FOR JOHNSON COUNTY LEADERS

A Measured Commitment. A Lasting Legacy.

Preserving Northeast Johnson County's Only Public Green Space for Families, Education, and Equity.

A Simple, Time-Limited Request: 2% for 7 Years

We respectfully ask the Johnson County Commission and the Johnson County Board of Parks and Recreation (JCPRD) to adopt a minor yet meaningful adjustment to existing parks investment policy:

Dedicate 2% of the JCPRD annual budget for a period of 7 years (FY2025–FY2031) to support the purchase, design, and development of an 8-acre community park and outdoor learning campus in Northeast Johnson County.

This time-limited investment—approximately \$800,000 annually or \$5.6 million total—would ensure that one of the most densely developed and park-poor regions of the County finally receives equitable access to greenspace and family-focused amenities. It is a **measured commitment with a major return**: preserving the last remaining public open space in the northeast quadrant of Johnson County.

Why It Matters Now

Northeast Johnson County, home to the cities of **Westwood, Westwood Hills, Mission Woods, Fairway, and Mission Hills**, contributes more than **\$24 million annually in county property taxes**—yet has **no county-owned park or greenspace** in its boundaries.

Families here are not asking for a permanent shift in county priorities. They are simply asking for a **small correction to a decades-long geographic imbalance**, one that currently allocates roughly **100% of JCPRD investments to the southern and western regions** of the county.

This is the last remaining 8-acre site in the northeast suitable for a community park. If the County does not act now, this opportunity will be lost to commercial development—and with it, the chance to deliver lasting public value.

What This Park Will Deliver

The proposed site—jointly owned by the City of Westwood and the Shawnee Mission School District—would be developed as a regional asset featuring:

- **An Outdoor Learning Lab aligned to SMSD's elementary curriculum**, serving all SM North and SM East feeder schools
- **Nature trails, shaded play spaces, fitness zones, and gathering areas** for residents of all ages

- **Environmental resilience features**, including native landscaping and stormwater management
- **Shared governance and maintenance**, with cities, SMSD, and JCPRD contributing under a negotiated agreement

This project reflects **the highest and best use of public land**: for the health, education, and connectivity of families and neighborhoods.

Why JCPRD Is the Right Partner

JCPRD has long been recognized for innovation, stewardship, and regional leadership in parks and open space. By embracing this partnership, the Board and Commission will:

- **Demonstrate commitment to equity in park access**
- **Honor the contributions of high-tax, under-served cities** in the northeast
- **Show responsiveness to public calls for walkable, multi-use green infrastructure**
- **Model a collaborative, intergovernmental approach** that can be replicated across the County

Moreover, the proposal includes a **clear exit strategy**: after seven years of support and site development, ownership and maintenance will transition fully to a consortium of city governments and SMSD, ensuring **no long-term liability or budget obligation to the County** beyond FY2031.

A Modest Tweak. A Monumental Impact.

This request does not require a shift in JCPRD's mission—only a **slight rebalancing of its footprint**.

A 2% allocation for 7 years is a **smart, strategic, and time-limited action** that reflects the County's values of fairness, community health, and family-first planning.

Let's act now to preserve this land *as parkland*—not asphalt.

Let's honor the families, children, and cities who have long supported the County with their tax dollars—and now simply ask for a fair share in return.

Let's show how public land, when managed wisely and collaboratively, can become a **living classroom, a family gathering space, and a symbol of regional equity**.

Now is the moment. This is the place. Let's build it—together.