

## Park it at Elitch's?

### Activist: Don't have fee-based events in existing city parks

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A neighborhood community activist wants the city to consider creating a full-time festival park at the Elitch Gardens site, or some other Denver location, to host fee-based events.

Larry Ambrose, the co-chair of the Inter-Neighborhood Cooperative Parks Committee and City Council candidate for District 1, believes the creation of such a full-time festival park would prevent the city from staging ticketed events in existing parks. He worries that hosting fee-based events at existing Denver parks — as the city is proposing— could be detrimental for the parks and surrounding neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, Denver Parks and Recreation Spokeswoman Jill McGranahan said the city has considered the idea of a festival park along the Platte River for years. But she added that Elitch Gardens nor any other piece of property in the area is up for sale, and that the city doesn't have any extra money to spend.

"The issue that remains is that there are people who want to do admission-based events in our parks, there is a demand for this," she said. "But until the resources become available to buy the land or build a new festival park, we're trying to meet the needs with the existing parks."

Ambrose believes the city should be proactive with coming up with a plan to turn Elitch Gardens into a festival park because the amusement park has fought for years to stay profitable. He pointed to the benefits — permanent restrooms and infrastructure that would already be in place — of transforming Elitch Gardens into a festival park.

Meanwhile, Elitch Gardens General Manager John Riggleman said the amusement park isn't going anywhere.

"Elitch Gardens has been operating for 120 years and we are committed to the growth and development of our park," he said in a statement. "We plan to be here for another 120 years."

In lieu of creating a new festival park, Denver Parks and Recreation is considering a proposal that would allow multiple existing parks to host ticketed events. McGranahan believes the plan would "address those that want admission based events or those that don't in a responsible way that protects the park and allows everyone who wants to do that."

Ambrose, however, believes that fee-based events would take an upper hand over free events because of the profits they would generate. He worries that lower income groups would then be phased out of the events.

The city has maintained that events currently taking place would have priority over fee-based events.

The brouhaha over ticketed events at parks started in 2007 after local AEG Live concert promoter Chuck Morris attempted to hold his two-day Mile High Music Festival in City Park.

Concerns were immediately raised over noise disturbing nearby zoo animals, traffic interfering with neighbors and residents being unable to access their free and open public park. The festival was soon moved to Dick's Sporting Goods Park in Commerce City.

A task force was then convened — including citizens — which examined fees, site plans, locations and policies.