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Seattle Parks: Pay as you grow

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Seattle parks need the help that Mayor Greg Nickels is proposing. Indeed, Seattle residents will probably want more of the same if the mayor and City Council go ahead with his rather limited idea for making developers help finance parks and open space.

Although it has significant need for sports fields, open space and bike trails reaching every neighborhood, Seattle has made progress. Pocket parks dot more of the city. The mayor has been an advocate for completing the Burke-Gilman Trail. The Parks and Recreation Department is working hard on playfields, all-weather surfaces and better lighting to accommodate sports participants.

So, it is encouraging to hear Nickels propose so far unspecified impact fees for developers in the densest and fastest-growing parts of the city. With a mayoral election ahead, Nickels has political motivation. His proposal should win support in areas leery of his push for greater density.

Any blow-back from developers should be in context. Open space fees already are used in many nearby cities. And Nickels is talking about imposing and using the fees only in the hottest areas: the city center, Northgate and the University District.

Beyond politics, Nickels surely has good public-policy motivations because the impact-fees proposal has been under development for 18 months. It fits with his ideas about development, open space and opportunities for active lives.

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