



**PROPOSAL FOR:**

# **Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

MZA+Co | 525 Park Street, Suite 210, St. Paul, MN 55103

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## BACKGROUND

MZA+Co is a full-service public relations and government affairs company based in St. Paul. The bipartisan team at MZA+Co brings together decades of high-level experience in crafting, implementing and managing strategic public affairs initiatives for businesses, trade associations, non-profits and government agencies. The company offers clients the following services:

- **Strategic Consulting & Government Affairs:** We help organizations develop and activate a strategic plan that does more than just get you from point A to point B – we'll help your organization realize your vision, impact outcomes and achieve long-term success. Our partners have extensive public affairs experience and offer lobbying services to complement our work in public relations and earned media.
- **Public Relations, Media Training and Branding:** To captivate your audience and compel them to take action, we help organizations:
  - Identify target demographics
  - Craft a communications plan
  - Develop a messaging strategy
  - Leverage the right combination of tactics
- **Media Relations:** We have extensive experience working in digital and social media, paid media and earned media. No one has more direct media relations experience in Minnesota over the past decade than MZA+Co's team members.
- **Coalition, Grassroots Development and Management:** With decades of experience in both the public and private sectors, the team at MZA+Co knows how to create, grow and deploy an effective grassroots solution to support your goals.
- **Reputation and Crisis Communications:** We help organizations respond to crisis situations quickly and effectively. MZA+Co brings unparalleled experience, guidance, preparation and sound judgment that are critical to successfully navigating the unexpected.

Above all, the following principles guide our company:

- **We deliver on commitments**
- **We help organizations discover and think about ideas & solutions in new ways**
- **We're respectful of diverse points of view**
- **We work only for clients we believe in**

## PROFILE OF PROPOSED TEAM

**Sarah C. Walker** is a Principal at MZA+Co and has extensive government relations, lobbying, and policy experience. Prior to her current government affairs work, Sarah spent five years as the Chief Operating Officer at 180 Degrees, Inc. During her time at 180 Degrees, Inc., Sarah founded the Second Chance Coalition. Previous positions include Research Consultant at the Council on Crime and Justice, Director of Workforce Development at the Center for Court Innovation, and Executive Director of the Youth Justice Funding Collaborative.

Sarah serves as a board member of the William Mitchell Reentry Clinic Advisory Board, St. Paul African-American Leadership Council and Twin Cities Rise. She has also served on the Council on Black Minnesotans and the Sentencing Guidelines Commission. Sarah's public policy has received many accolades. She was the recipient of the 2010 Minnesota Council of Non-Profits Statewide Advocacy Award, 2010 Hennepin County Bar Association Advancing Justice Award, 2010 and 2011 winner of the Politics in Minnesota's Leaders in Public Policy and was named to the *Minneapolis St. Paul Business Journal's* 40 Under Forty. Sarah is a graduate of Carleton College and is completing her doctorate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota.

**Kurt Zellers** is a Partner/Co-Founder of MZA+Co. Kurt served six terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 2003 to 2015, including as the state's 57th Speaker of the House. Kurt's extensive national network includes Speakers and Majority Leaders in legislatures across the United States. In Minnesota, Kurt authored legislation on many key initiatives including public safety issues, mental health treatment for adolescents, and building a new hospital for his local community in Maple Grove. Kurt has also worked as an executive for public relations firms, private sector businesses, as a spokesman for two United States Senators and three statewide campaigns during the past 20 years. His PR experience includes working with the world's leading chemical company, BASF, on advocacy issues, crisis communications, media training and coaching. Kurt has a B.S. in political science from the University of North Dakota.

**Mary Gilbert Dougherty** is a Senior Government Affairs Consultant at MZA+Co. Mary has 32 years of government relations experience at the Capitol, specializing in public education, taxes and health care representing the largest urban public school in the state as well as two large metro hospital systems among other clients. In her 32 years, she has been successful worked with multiple administrations and legislative leadership, as well as a history of collaboration with local governments and other key community stakeholders. Most recently, Mary has worked to expand MTC service to St. Paul high school students.

**Leah Koch** is a Public Affairs Specialist at MZA+Co. Leah is a graduate of the University of St. Thomas, where she is currently pursuing a law degree. She has previous experience working in the Minnesota Senate, with the Institute for Justice, and in communications and grassroots outreach at Lockridge Grindal Nauen. Leah has a strong background in grassroots outreach, including social media and media relations.

## DETAILED WORKPLAN

### **Deliverable 1: Communicate with key entities regarding MPRB issues**

**Timeline:** Meet with representatives from key entities from June-August 2018. MZA+Co team will prepare a report for MPRB in September 2018 and make recommendations to improve intergovernmental relations. The report will serve as an audit highlighting strengths and weaknesses and provide solutions to improve intergovernmental relations.

The Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board coordinates efforts with several city and regional entities.

The team at MZA+Co has strong relationships with the Mayor of Minneapolis, City Council Members, Hennepin County Commissioners, Minneapolis School Board and their respective staff. We will work first to meet with elected officials, appointed officials and staff from the list identified in the list below to identify issues and establish a line of communications when issues arise and to keep all sides informed. We expect this will be the bulk of our work from June-August 2018, and we will issue a report and analysis for MPRB to review to improve intergovernmental relations.

As outlined in the RFP, key entities we propose to meet with include, but are not limited to:

- Office of the Mayor
- City Council
- Board of Estimate and Taxation and Staff
- Hennepin County Commissioners, County Officials and Staff
- Minneapolis School Board Members and Staff
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- Minnehaha Creek Watershed Organization
- Bassett Creek Watershed Organization
- Shingle Creek Watershed Management Organization

### **Deliverable 2: Communicate with other government and non-governmental organizations and MPRB and facilitate discussions around such issues and monitor relations between MPRB and other organizations**

**Timeline:** Identify organizations as part of the review in June-August 2018 and provide recommendations in the report in September 2018. Communicate with identified organizations as an ongoing activity throughout the contract.

MZA+Co will regularly communicate with other government and non-governmental organizations when identified and at the direction of MPRB. As part of our review noted above, we will work with MPRB to identify additional organizations MPRB needs to outreach with as part of this effort.

**Deliverable 3:** Coordinate with MPRB's state and federal lobbyists to understand MPRB's priorities and legislative and administrative agenda and provide assistance in those areas

**Timeline:** Meet with state and federal lobbyists June-July 2018 and identify any concerns or issues coming up for this year and 2019. Establish regular communications with the lobbyists throughout the contract.

One of the most important aspects of this project is making sure we are coordinating our efforts with MPRB's current state and federal lobbyists to understand priorities and alert them of issues that may come up at the State Legislature or in Congress. Lobbyists are most effective when they have the best and timely information to represent MPRB with state and federal officials.

MZA+Co representatives will meet with MPRB's current lobbyists, identify any issues with them, and establish a line of communications with them. We will include any recommendations in our report for review in September. We anticipate that regular communications with current lobbyists will be ongoing throughout the contract.

**Deliverable 4:** Provide assistance to individual Park Commissioners on matters related to intergovernmental relations issues or issues that arise where Park Commissioners seeks the assistance of MPRB Superintendent to resolve district or constituent issues

**Timeline:** MZA+Co will meet with MPRB Commissioners in June and July 2018 under the direction of the Superintendent. This deliverable will be ongoing throughout the contract and as directed by the MPRB Superintendent.

Upon the direction of the individual Park Commissioners, provide assistance to resolve district and constituent issues. MZA+Co will meet with individual Park Commissioners to get a sense of the assistance they may need during the course of the contract, the type of issues that arise from constituent, and how to best serve them in this capacity.

**Deliverable 5:** Report weekly or more frequently to the MPRB Superintendent or the MPRB Superintendent's staff if directed on matters related to the above deliverables

**Timeline:** Weekly reports and ongoing communications as needed and directed

MZA+Co will provide a weekly report in the format directed by the MPRB Superintendent or the MPRB Superintendent's staff. As needed and requested, our team will regularly communicate with the MPRB Superintendent and staff as directed.

**Deliverable 6:** Participate, if directed by MPRB Superintendent, in meetings of MPRB staff on issues related to above duties

**Timeline:** Ongoing

MZA+Co will participate in meetings on issues related to intergovernmental relations as outlined above and in the contract.

**Deliverable 7:** Coordinate with commissioners and MPRB staff to develop and implement a grassroots advocacy program to advance the MPRB's local, state and federal agendas

**Timeline:** Ongoing

We have extensive experience working to build effective grassroots advocacy efforts. We are closely connected with trade associations, non-profits and other organizations working on policy issues in Minnesota.

We work with organizations to develop culturally specific communications. Communications materials should be culturally relevant, in order to maximize authentic community engagement opportunities.

Prominent community leaders may also be effective grassroots advocates. As outreach progresses, it will be essential to assess the list of leaders we are working with, identifying opportunities for continued outreach to various leaders and community groups.

Our approach to developing relationships includes:

- Be seen, be consistent, be open, and deliver on promises.
- Approach community members with the attitude that they are the experts of their own situations. Outreach works best when guided by the community.
- Interact with diverse community members in a sensitive, dignified, and sustainable manner.
- Listen with an open mind to the people you are engaging, including their personal stories, to learn what they need and demonstrate you care. This increases the likelihood we'll understand their needs in relation to the project's goals, activities and services.
- Identify and attend meetings, events and activities that are being held by community organizations (after checking to see that attendance is open). Do this prior to seeking their participation in order to educate, build connections, demonstrate commitment, and show why engagement is in their interest.
- Be consistent and responsive to people and organizations within diverse communities when building relationships and conducting activities and services.
- Tailor interactions by determining what will increase community members' interest and ability to hear you. This could include:
  - Clearing the air concerning issues to which your organization is connected in order to reduce negative feelings and viewpoints;

- Actively listening to community members. This should include asking them questions, even about things off-topic that are important to them.
- Exercise patience with community members given they may have fear and distrust of institutional organizations. Be prepared to address fears and distrust.
- Emphasize the importance of building relationships with community members with your organization's staff and stakeholders.
- Use the expertise and relationships that project staff and existing participants already have as a referral resource for our outreach activities.

Throughout this project, it will be important to avoid jargon and “government speak.” We have extensive experience working to deliver messages in ways that are engaging and interesting to a wide variety of audiences.

**Deliverable 8:** Assist the Superintendent, commissioners and MPRB staff on communications efforts related to the above duties

**Timeline:** Ongoing

Our team's years of experience working with reporters in Minneapolis-St. Paul and around Minnesota means we understand how to tell effective stories and ensure that the MPRB's perspective will be shared through traditional and digital media. We will use the following elements as appropriate:

1. *Press releases/statements* — We can write and distribute press releases and statements to reporters, editors and producers to share information about the MPRB and ridesharing and to expand your influence via media coverage
2. *Press conferences* — We can arrange and coordinate press conferences about MPRB's initiatives or projects when Q&A with reporters would be helpful
3. *Background conversations with reporters/editorial writers* — We will engage key reporters and editors to share background information and ensure that they're educated about ridesharing and other issues that matter to the MPRB
4. *Social media* — Our team members have significant social media followings that include key influencers and media across Minnesota, we can share information through our social media channels to amplify awareness



## RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Partners and staff at MZA+Co have substantial experience working with clients on high-profile government affairs projects.

Our team members have worked at the highest levels of state government, leading large teams, as well as representing the State of Minnesota's highest executive office. Below are two case studies that outline MZA's client work and demonstrates our depth and breadth of experience in government relations and public advocacy at federal, state, and local levels of government.

### **Case Study: US Justice Action Network, 2015-2016 (State Level)**

While Minnesota historically has had some of the lowest incarceration rates in the nation, the state was considering the construction of new correctional facilities because the prison population had increased significantly over the past 10 years. While most states have experienced a recent decline in incarceration rates, Minnesota's jumped 22% from 2004-2014, the fifth fastest growing prison population in the nation. This is despite the fact that arrests and convictions during that time were essentially flat. This problem was exasperated by the fact that Minnesota had some of the strictest drug sentencing laws in the United States.

The US Justice Network, the largest bipartisan organization working to reform the criminal justice system, hired MZA+Co in late 2015 and put Minnesota on its list of targeted states for the first time ever. MZA+Co helped the US Justice Action Network develop a bipartisan plan to gain the support of both DFL and Republican legislators for comprehensive criminal justice reform, including significant changes to the state's drug sentencing laws. MZA+Co led government affairs efforts on the issue at the Minnesota State Capitol and also oversaw coalition building and community outreach.

MZA+Co worked to engage prominent law enforcement officials, police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, defense attorneys, MACDL, Minnesota ACLU, Public Defender's Office, county commissioners, and a bipartisan group of partners before and during the 2016 Minnesota legislative session to introduce legislation and champion its passage. We worked at the state and local level of government to build a supportive coalition for the effort.

We recognized that legislators are loath to take any votes perceived as "soft on crime." By engaging and securing support of the law enforcement community, we were able to build a diverse and effective coalition to legislators.

Part of our effort to convince legislators is providing up-to-date public information on criminal justice reform. Polling conducted in the state as part of the effort showed that 8 in 10 Minnesota voters supported comprehensive criminal justice reform and 79% supported the full reform proposal in the legislation proposed by USJAN and MZA+Co. In fact, 74% of voters said they would be more likely to back a legislator who supported these reforms. The team shared these messages with legislators and worked actively to build support on both sides of the aisle.

In May 2016, the Minnesota legislature passed the most significant reforms to the state's drug laws in almost 30 years. SF 3481 ushered in sweeping changes to sentencing,

decreasing penalties for low-level drug offenses, replacing mandatory minimums for almost all drug crimes, and putting a greater focus on treating the causes of addiction through diversion programs and a new community reinvestment fund. The bill passed the Minnesota House on a unanimous 129-0 vote and passed the Minnesota Senate 45-19 with strong bipartisan support. Governor Dayton signed the bill into law on May 23, 2016 and it took effect on August 1, 2016. Since the bill's passage, there has been no legislative attempt to repeal the changes.

### **Case Study: Goodwill Easter Seals, 2017 (Local Level)**

Goodwill Easter Seals engaged MZA+Co to work with Ramsey County on the solid waste tax. A large portion of Goodwill's work is providing a place for Minnesotans to drop off items – at no cost -- that may be reused for others. However, a significant share of the waste dropped off at Goodwill cannot be reused and must be recycled. This leaves Goodwill with a significant tax liability for undertaking a public service. Without Goodwill, Minnesotans would have to pay to recycle or will dispose of material in a haphazard manner.

MZA+Co developed messaging and materials for this effort prior to reaching out to Ramsey County Commissioners. Our lobbying team, with representatives from Goodwill, met with Ramsey County staff and every county commissioner to secure support for reducing the tax. We provided data that showed the hardship to Goodwill for providing a public service to the community. While Goodwill was not asking to repeal the tax, they wanted a reduction in order to continue operations at the same level.

Within six months of our lobbying efforts, the Ramsey County Board voted to reduce the solid waste tax, saving Goodwill approximately \$200,000 each year.

## **CURRENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT CLIENTS**

The following is a list of current clients we provide government relations services to at the local level. We do not anticipate any conflicts of interest with the MPRB.

- Artspace
- Goodwill/Easter Seals
- MN Humanities Center
- Orange Barrel Media
- Securus
- Summit Academy



## STATEMENT OF ACCEPTANCE

We accept the standard contract form and insurance requirements.

## REFERENCES

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## FEE PROPOSAL

MZA+Co works with clients on a per project or monthly retainer basis in order avoid unanticipated costs and to allow us to work together as partners. We propose a year-round approach and billing cycle, recognizing that effective government relations work requires engagement throughout the year.

We bill separately for approved expenses.

### **Project timeline – June to December 2018**

Proposed budget: \$8,000/month (\$96,000/annually)