



636 Ridge Road  
Highland Park, IL 60035  
[pdhp.org](http://pdhp.org)

**Contact:**

Elizabeth Gogola | Director of Communications & Marketing  
(O) 847-579-3136 (M) 847-830-0881  
[lgogola@pdhp.org](mailto:lgogola@pdhp.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Park District of Highland Park Requests Permission to Discontinue Golf Operations at Highland Park Country Club Beginning in 2018**

**HIGHLAND PARK, IL, July 26, 2017-** The Park District of Highland Park is requesting permission from the City of Highland Park to stop golf operations at the Highland Park Country Club (HPCC) as of December 31, 2017. The decision was approved by the Park Board at the July 25 meeting. The City owns the HPCC property and the Park District is a leaseholder and manager of the golf and banquet operations as part of an Intergovernmental Agreement. The Park District staff recommended the request to stop golf operations based on a five-year trend of lower than anticipated golf participation and associated revenue as well as increasing expenses at the aging country club. Estimated expenditures to open the HPCC golf course in 2018 will be \$400,000. To bring the course back to basic standards would require an additional \$1.5 to \$3 million investment.

“It is a financially prudent decision to make this request to the City,” said Brian Kaplan, Board President of the Park District of Highland Park. “Highland Park residents deserve to have their tax dollars invested into operations that are self-sufficient and benefit the entire community.”

If the City approves the request, the Park District would transition the golf course into an open space for passive recreation as well as create habitat for native plants and animals. Planning for the transition would begin fall 2017. The property would also connect to the Skokie River Woods which recently underwent a five-year restoration by the Park District.

Resident surveys and focus groups conducted as part of GreenPrint 2024, the District’s 10-year master plan, rated passive open spaces for walking and biking as a top priority for the community. “It is rare for a community like Highland Park to have the opportunity to create a large community park in the center of town,” said Liza McElroy, executive director for the Park District of Highland Park. “Though smaller in scale, we envision the property to be similar to the Lake County’s Independence Grove – a beautiful community destination for all ages with natural landscapes and lakes.”

Plans to expand the existing lakes on the HPCC property would also create stormwater storage capacity benefitting the entire Highland Park community – an added benefit considering the recent devastating flooding earlier this month. The Park District would leverage existing partnerships with Commonwealth Edison Green Region Program, Openlands, City of Highland Park, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Lake Country Forest Preserve.

In 1996, twenty-one years ago, the Park District of Highland Park entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Highland Park in response to the community’s desire to save the HPCC property from development and

maintain its status as open land. To fund the purchase of the property, the City of Highland Park issued bonds. The agreement set forth that the City would operate the HPCC until the bonds were paid in full, which occurred in 2014. Once the bonds were paid, the City and Park District were to enter into a 99-year lease, in which the Park District would operate and maintain the property. The City and Park District are in year three of the lease agreement.

The City owns the property and under the terms of the lease, the Park District cannot change the use of the property without the written consent of the City. The Park District may also purchase the property from the City and then change its use without the City's consent.

In addition, in 2002 the Park District, City, and Lake County entered into a separate Intergovernmental Conservation Easement Agreement for the HPCC property. And, any recreational use of the property must conform with substantive Conservation Easements.

The Park District's Sunset Valley Golf Course, which is currently undergoing a major renovation is expected to re-open mid-summer 2018. Should the City approve the District's request to stop golf operations at the HPCC, the Park District will seek an agreement with a neighboring public golf course to provide Highland Park residents with a golf option for the early part of the 2018 golf season until the re-opening of Sunset Valley.

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