

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
AUGUST 6, 2019**

The Special Meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Park District of Highland Park was held in the Board Room at West Ridge Center, 636 Ridge Road, Highland Park.

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by President Kaplan.

ROLL CALL

Present: Vice President Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Commissioner Flores Weisskopf, President Kaplan

Absent: Commissioner Bernstein arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Staff Present: Executive Director Romes; Deputy Director Donahue; Director Smith, Director Carr, Interim Director Becker, Assistant Director Maliszewski, Assistant Director Henriques; Senior Planner Schwartz;

OPEN PUBLIC TO ADDRESS BOARD

Mr. Kurt Meyer, 948 Judson Avenue, Highland Park, shared that he feels Park Avenue Yacht Club deserves a lot of attention

ATTITUDE AND INTEREST SURVEY DISCUSSION

Senior Planner Schwartz introduced Mr. Jeff Andreasen, President of aQity Research and Insights, Inc. Mr. Andreasen gave an overview of the results of the survey conducted for the Park District of Highland Park. The survey reached 851 homes and was conducted via mail, on-line and a few phone calls.

Mr. Andreasen explained that the Park District of Highland Park is held in very strong regard overall, given its strong esteem rating (85% satisfied vs. 8% dissatisfied) and perceived “good” value overall (68% good/great value overall, vs. 13% poor value). He stated that Highland Park residents are especially satisfied with the overall upkeep, safety, accessibility, and service provided at its parks and facilities. These scores are even more positive than the overall opinions for the Park District of Highland Park. Highland Park residents generally feel that aside from needing basic ongoing maintenance, the outdoor parks are in relatively good condition. Park District staff receive strong satisfaction scores overall, and any staff-or service-related issues have more to do with specific District policies or rules. One in four of the relatively few who expressed dissatisfaction attribute these lower scores to a combination of Park District of Highland Park’s policies and the staff’s response. A couple of capital improvements register as priorities to about 40% of residents communitywide, namely: Playground improvements at Sunset Woods Park, and Renovation of West Ridge Center.

Mr. Andreasen reported that other improvements (either tested specifically or volunteered via open-ended feedback) register as lower priorities community-wide. Interest in these other upgrades is mostly limited to current users of each facility, the most popular of which are: the Recreation Center (improved general maintenance, easier access, better bathrooms); Rosewood Beach and Park (improved access, more maintenance/cleaner); Centennial Ice Arena (maintenance, more/nicer bathrooms, easier access/parking); Park Avenue Boating Facility (repair the protective wall, easier access).

In addition to addressing capital improvements that the District deems as highest priorities, Mr. Andreasen stated that other improvement opportunities include the continuation to demonstrate and convey responsible and good stewardship of residents' tax dollars. Residents are quick to recognize the great parks, facilities, and events that the District provides, but give fewer positive scores for the agency overall and the value it represents. Some of this "drag" on the District's image or brand comes from long-held opinions of waste and mismanagement, including decisions and events from around ten years ago. Roughly 5% to 8% consistently cite this concern and is one of the top drivers for lower ratings. These sentiments are sometimes coupled with general concerns about property taxes, and those who oppose any tax increase and expect agencies to do more with the same (or less).

In closing Mr. Andreasen said that the Park District of Highland Park should continue to identify new programming ideas and options for adults (especially active adults and/or empty nesters) who often feel that the Park District of Highland Park is no longer relevant to them. This programming represents the only real "gap" in terms of what the Park District of Highland Park currently offers in programming and indoor/outdoor facilities. The development and consistent promotion/communication of new adult programming represents the biggest opportunity for the Park District of Highland Park.

President Kaplan thanked Commissioner Flores Weisskopf and Commissioner Bernstein for their work with staff and aQity. President Kaplan asked Executive Director Romes what the next steps would be now that the survey was complete. Executive Director Romes shared that staff is planning to share the findings with all full-time staff to discuss the findings and possible opportunities for the Park District. Executive Director Romes explained that staff has been conducting program and facility assessments and will compare findings from the survey to these assessments. The plan is for staff to then regroup with the Board, sharing some internal assessment opportunities, and discuss collectively how the findings will fit into the District's Green Print 2024 Master Plan, and Strategic Plan.

President Kaplan asked if the 50-page slide presentation will be shared with residents. Executive Director Romes said that the presentation will be posted on the Park District of Highland Park's website, and the District will issue a press release to the community. Vice President Ruttenberg asked if this would all be accomplished before the Capital Budget is finalized. Executive Director Romes shared that staff will meet with the Board liaisons in October and go back to the entire Board in November with their recommendations.

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Commissioner Bernstein asked if there was any public comment on the Survey Presentation. Mr. David Sogin, 1092 Wade Avenue, Highland Park, asked Staff to take advantage of the knowledge and be open to the advice of members of the Park Avenue Yacht Club.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Bernstein seconded by Vice President Ruttenberg and approved by unanimous voice vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Romes, Secretary