

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES OF WORKSHOP MEETING  
JANUARY 12, 2021**

The Workshop Meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Park District of Highland Park was conducted remotely due to the Governor’s Declaration of Emergency as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the Workshop Board Meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by President Ruttenberg.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Executive Director Romes; Director Smith, Director Voss, Director Dunn, Director Peters, Director Gogola, Director Carr; Assistant Director Maliszewski; General Manager/Superintendent of Golf Operations Ochs; Manager Johnson, Coordinator Hejnowski

**PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA** – None

**ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA** – None

President Ruttenberg requested to change the order for the items on the agenda, placing Resolution 2020-13 to Approve a Lease Agreement with Realgy, LLC to the fifth item on the agenda since Vice President Kaplan needs to leave the meeting early.

**2021 PROPOSED BUDGET AND BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS ORDINANCE**

Director Peters reported that tonight's discussion is a high-level review since very few changes have been made to the 2021 budget since the December 17 Finance Committee Meeting.

***Review of Letter to the Park Board of Commissioners***

Director Peters reported that while COVID-19 challenged the District from every angle during 2020, the District remains financially healthy. In 2021, the District hopes to work on cost recovery strategies in order to ensure that the programs and activities offered are relevant and are appropriately priced.

Regarding the 2021 Budget overview, Director Peters reported that the General, Special Recreation and Recreation Funds anticipate a combined operation surplus, before transfers, of \$1,977,169. \$1,800,000 will be transferred to the Capital Projects Fund and \$1,556,288 transferred to the Debt Service Fund.

Director Peters provided a couple of highlights from the summary of the budget reporting that the 2021 Budget reflects a districtwide reduction of expenses of \$2.3 million, or 10% compared to 2020 Budget.

Additionally, the District's tax support for the 2021 fiscal year represents 64% of total revenues. 2021 may be a trying year due to the global pandemic and the 2021 budget preparation was guided by guidelines in Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois Plan. Staff will be prepared to adapt quickly. Moving to Phase 5 of the Restorative Plan will allow the District to significantly increase services and improve financial performance and falling back to Phase 3 will continue to challenge operations and strain the short- and long-term outlook. To remain both fiscally responsible and strategic in the delivery of services to the community, staff anticipates the development of its new strategic plan and cost recovery guidelines.

Director Peters reported that the 2021 budget is a collaborative effort that involves supervisors, managers, and support staff, throughout the District. The Budget will be reviewed continuously during the year and could not have been accomplished without the efforts of Park District staff and the support of our Park Board Commissioners.

### ***Future Planning***

Director Peters reported that the District has several projects currently in progress including the Conversion of The Preserve of Highland Park and planning for the Sunset Woods Playground renovation and Site Master Plan. There are also several projects commencing in 2021, including the planning for the Centennial Ice Arena Renovation, and planning for a future Multi-Purpose Facility to address the aging West Ridge Center. As for future projects, synthetic turf athletic fields are noted in the Master Plan, GreenPrint 2024.

In addition to these projects, the District has several plans to address specific goals and objectives related to the Land Management Plan, the Athletic Fields Master Plan, Lakefront Master Plan, the Sustainability Plan, the Capital Plan, the Strategic Plan, and the Annual Work Plan.

- The Land Management Plan covers park maintenance, stormwater management, lakefront maintenance, natural areas, park inventory, real estate, park amenities, connectivity, and cultural resources.
- The Athletic Fields Master Plan is a comprehensive sports field master plan that addresses existing fields to meet current and projected program needs.
- The Lakefront Master Plan recommendations are intended to guide lakefront operations, beaches, capital planning, and support possible future grant opportunities.
- The Sustainability Plan is an internal document guiding practices leading to quantifiable achievements in District operations.
- The Capital Plan is both includes a 5-year outlook which ensures critical repair and replacement for capital equipment, facilities, parks, and GreenPrint projects are identified and funded.
- Strategic Planning Themes for 2021 will coincide with Emergency Response Planning efforts due to COVID-19, which includes fiscal responsibility, operational efficiency, maximized customer experience, and unified and engaged work culture.

***Annual Work Plan***

Director Peters reported this is a living document that changes based on the environment and the plans listed above feed into the Annual Work Plan.

***Salaries and Wages***

Director Peters reported that in 2020 a 3% merit pool increase was budgeted for all employees. Due to the Pandemic, all salaries were frozen beginning April 1. In 2021, there are no recommended changes to the compensation plan. Because of the continued effects from the Pandemic creating uncertainty, the Executive Director will keep the Park Board informed of any recommended merit increases. As such, the Park Board will have the opportunity to review the recommended merit pool increase prior to implementation. A 3% merit pool is budgeted for 2021 to be implemented beginning April 1. According to Park District Policy, every five years, the entire Classification and Compensation Plan shall be reviewed by a qualified third-party consultant. Staff has included this initiative in the annual work plan for 2021.

Director Peters asked the Park Board of Commissioners if they approve of the verbiage regarding salaries and wages.

The Park Board of Commissioners gave consent to the verbiage regarding salaries and wages.

***Debt Position***

Director Peters reported that the Park District recently paid off a series of bonds and issued a new series of bonds for \$7.3 million. The newly issued bonds for 2021 will mature in 2033.

***Tax Funding***

Director Peters reported that for 2021 the budgeted tax revenue is \$13,298,996. Exclusive of the debt levy (Truth in Taxation), the total levy for 2021 is \$11,517,281 which is less than the prior year's extension by 1.91% or \$225,063. This amount represents a cost-of-living increase based on the CPI of 2.3% and anticipated growth. The reason for the decrease was to cause a flat levy for the District by reducing the Special Recreation Fund Levy from .04% to .0245%. The reduction was enabled due to the building payment to NSSRA being deferred to 2021, construction in the District being reduced (including ADA components) due to COVID-19, and fewer inclusion fees in 2020 due to COVID-19 reduction in programs and services offered. This fund has a large fund balance on December 31, 2020.

She reviewed a 2020 tax bill, noting that the Park District represents 7% of the total tax bill for residents of Highland Park. Additionally, she reported that the Park District had a declining EAV from 2019 to 2020, which lowered the levy, however, since the Park District reduced special recreation tax from .04% to .0245% the Park District was able to reduce the total tax rate from .52 to .29, which permitted a flat tax levy.

***Capital***

Director Peters reported that the 2021 Budget includes the following GreenPrint 2024 initiatives in the Capital Fund.

- a. Conversion of the Highland Park Country Club to The Preserve of Highland Park  
The budget expenditures for 2021 total \$1,431,758.
- b. Centennial Ice Area Lobby and Gymnastics Renovation  
The Budgeted expenditures for 2021 total \$200,000.
- c. Sunset Woods Playground Renovations  
The budgeted expenditures for 2021 total \$1,160,000.
- d. Multi-Purpose building to address the aging West Ridge Center  
The District has \$50,000 in planning dollars budgeted for 2021.

***2021 Budget Analysis***

The budget has been prepared with the assumption of being in Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois plan. However, if our State or regional district is placed into Phase 5 at any point during 2021, it will create significant opportunities for increased services, programming, and revenues that are not reflected herein.

***Proposed 2021 Budget by Fund***

As a reminder, the proposed budget for the Special recreation Fund is \$480,000 vs. the traditional \$900,000 this is due to the recommended flay tax levy and the Park District has a planned deficit which is the result of spending \$5.6 million on capital projects. As for the District's fund balances, PMA advised staff to maintain a significantly higher fund balance than the 25% required by board policy in the general and recreation funds in case the state pivots backward due to COVID-19. Overall, she reported that the District is being fiscally responsible.

***Fund Balance History***

Director Peters reviewed a chart of the general, recreation, and special recreation fund balances from 2017 through 2021 and highlighted key changes including an increased fund balance in the general and recreation funds for 2020. As for the special recreation fund, the fund balance is 133% vs. 15% which is the required board policy. This permitted the flat tax levy. However, the Park District plans to spend those funds in 2021 so the fund balance will decrease to 20% as of December 31, 2021.

***District-Wide Budget Comparison (No Bonds / No Capital)***

Director Peters highlighted those changes year over year, noting that the 73.94% surplus reduction was thoughtfully contemplated as the reduction only impacts capital projects, not operations.

***Combined Budget and Appropriation Ordinance***

Director Peters reported that this document concludes the 2021 budget, and staff will be requesting that the Park Board of Commissioners approve the combined budget and appropriation ordinance after the public hearing.

President Ruttenberg thanked staff noting that this was a great presentation.

Commissioner Bernstein commended staff for their hard work.

Commissioner Grossberg reported this was an excellent recap which provided great detail to the public.

Commissioner Flores Weisskopf and Vice president Kaplan thanked staff for their hard work and tonight's presentation.

President Ruttenberg commended staff and reminded the public that the Park District has significant reserves, and the effect of the flat tax is if a homeowner's assessed evaluation of their home remains the same their tax contribution to the Park District will not increase.

Director Peters reported that the next steps will be to lay down the budget, provide a hard copy of the 2021 budget at the Recreation Center of Highland Park along with an electronic copy on the Park District website. Staff will publish the date of the public hearing 10 days prior to the meeting. After the public hearing staff will request that the Park Board of Commissioners approve the 2021 budget and appropriation ordinance. If approved the 2021 budget will be filed with Lake County.

President Ruttenberg asked if there is a consensus from the Park Board of Commissioners to lay down the 2021 Park District Budget, as well as the 2021 Budget and Appropriations Ordinance, for a 30-day public inspection period?

All 5 members of the Park Board of Commissioners consented that the 2021 Park District Budget and Appropriation Ordinance be laid down for a 30-day public inspection period.

Councilman Blumberg would like to know what the general fund balance was in previous years.

Director Peters reported that the general fund balance in 2017 was 59%, in 2018 was 45%, in 2019 was 63%, and for 2020 was 76%. As a reminder, this was recommended by the Park District's financial advisors. Additionally, staff are anticipating spending much of those dollars in 2021 so the fund balance as of December 31, 2021, will mirror the amounts in previous years.

President Ruttenberg reported that the District has a required board policy to maintain 25% in the general and recreation funds and 15% in the special recreation fund. Additionally, over the past 10 years that Park District has maintained that number or greater, so the District has always been in a sound financial position.

### **COVID-19 EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANNING UPDATE**

Executive Director Romes provided an update of the Park District's Emergency Operations Planning efforts, reporting that the state of Illinois is addressing the COVID-19 pandemic under the governor's guidelines that are outlined in the Restore Illinois Plan, which is a 5-phase approach. In November of 2020, the governor instituted additional mitigation measures which were intended to be short-term guidelines aimed at reducing infection and hospitalization rates while increasing availability for ICU and surgical beds. Currently, our region is in Tier 3 Mitigations of Phase 4, which permits one-on-one training at indoor facilities. The only exception is fitness centers and health studios which can operate at 25%. Last week, Executive Director Romes reported that the governor announced that Tier 3 Mitigations will be in effect until Friday, January 15. This is an effort to address holiday travel and an attempt to prevent the number of infections and hospitalizations from increasing.

Effective January 16, the governor is lifting the statewide measure allowing all 11 regions to enter Tier 2 Mitigations of the Phase 4 Plan so long as those regions meet the identified criteria for infection and hospitalization rates. Tier 3 permits in-person indoor programming for 10 participants or less and fitness center or health studios to operate at 50% capacity, so long as consistent guidelines for sanitation and social distancing are enforced. Executive Director Romes reminded the public that prior to COVID staff would spend months planning and preparing for future programming. Currently, staff are given days or hours of notice to react and adapt planning efforts. Therefore, staff has learned to develop alternative plans so that staff can quickly adapt and communicate those changes on such short notice. The Park District is prepared to move forward and enter Tier 2 Mitigations as of January 16 or extend the current Tier 3 Mitigations. Currently, the data on the Illinois Department of Public Health's (IDPH) website indicates that region 9, which encompasses Lake and McHenry counties have a high likely hood of entering Tier 2 Mitigations as of January 16. Staff have multiple plans in place for communicating with participants while planning for a variety of both in-person and virtual experiences based on the attitudes and interest of the community. As a result, the Park District's Emergency Operations team are meeting twice a week to review the updates, and Recreation staff are planning daily for the delivery of Tier 3 and Tier 2 Mitigations along with returning to Phase 4 prior to mitigations.

If region 9 enters Tier 2 Mitigations as of January 16 the community can expect flag football, travel basketball and baseball, and the house basketball league to resume. For programming at Deer Creek Racquet Club doubles and semi-private court reservations will resume. The Recreation Center of Highland Park will offer indoor group exercise classes and swim rentals. At Centennial Ice Arena learn to skate programs and ice rentals will resume the week of January 17. As for general recreation, a new programming brochure will be released on January 15, which offers a variety of indoor in-person programs beginning February 1 through Spring Break. Later this month, the Park District will release the summer camp brochure and staff will provide a presentation to the Park Board of Commissioners. All programs are anticipated to be delivered under Phase 4 guidelines without mitigation measures. However, should region 9 pivot backward, staff have backup plans. Lastly, staff are planning to reintroduce outdoor programming in April if weather permits.

Vice President Kaplan commended Executive Director Romes and staff for their ongoing efforts and creativity to offer programs and services to the community.

President Ruttenberg requested an update from the Sunset Woods Playground Renovation and Master Planning team.

Executive Director Romes reported that the conceptual plans which were last presented to the Park Board of Commissioners were shared with the community and staff are pleased to report that the community provided over 350 responses to the online survey. The feedback from the community survey was reviewed with staff and Park Board Liaisons, Terry Grossberg and Lori Weisskopf. Based on recommendations from staff and Board liaisons, further updates were made to the site master plan and the playground renovation designs. Staff will be meeting with Hitchcock Design Group to discuss the recommendations and an update will be shared with the Park Board of Commissioners in February for review and approval of the conceptual design of the playground renovation and the site master plan.

**REVIEW OF VOUCHERS**

Director Peters reported there was \$3.6 million of vouchers and payables and over \$3 million of that was for the debt service.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Commissioner Bernstein and seconded by Vice President Kaplan and approved by a unanimous vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Romes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Romes, Secretary