

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 16, 2021**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Park District of Highland Park Held on November 16, 2021. Pursuant to Section 7(e) of the Open Meetings Act, The President of the Board of Park Commissioners has made a finding that it is not practical or prudent to hold in person meetings because of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Neither the elected officials nor the public will be allowed to attend Regular or Committee Meetings in person but will participate virtually. Links to the virtual meeting can be found on the Park District website <https://www.pdhp.org/park-board/meetings/>

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 p.m. by President Ruttenberg.

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioner Bernstein, Commissioner Kaplan, Commissioner Freeman, Vice President Grossberg, President Ruttenberg

Absent: None

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

Guest Speakers: None

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

None

PARK AVENUE BOATING FACILITY UPDATE

President Ruttenberg would like to know how much of the Park District funds is the Board of Park Commissioners willing to allocate to the replacement of the breakwater water and boat ramp and he would like the Board of Park Commissioners to provide their opinions.

When the Park District began this process with SmithGroup, the Board of Park Commissioners was told they could have a viable successful facility for \$1.4 million. At that time, the Board of Park Commissioners had a consensus opinion that 50% of the project would be funded by the Park District. As the project commenced that total cost nearly doubled to \$2.7 million. He reminded the Board that other Park District properties provide lakefront access and viewing, and the use of the facility is limited in number when compared to other facilities. Additionally, this facility is limited in its use by intended users, which is relatively unlike our other facilities. Overall, he was originally willing to consider this as a replacement of a park and felt that covering 50% of the costs for a \$1.4 million project would be an appropriate use of Park

District funds. He does not think the Park District should invest more than \$1 million for the repairs of this limited use facility.

Commissioner Bernstein reported that he has given a lot of thought to this subject over the last several weeks and he has drawn certain conclusions. Since he has been elected to the Board of Park Commissioners, he has supported boating at Park Avenue Beach. As of the past couple of months he and his wife become members of the North Shore Yacht Club (NSYC) however, he has always consistently stated that any improvements for Park Avenue or facility/park must be done in a fiscally responsible manner. The Board manages 760 acres of land, 44 parks, and 8 facilities. This project has ballooned from \$900,000 which was the original quote before the pandemic to \$1.4 million this summer, and \$2.7 million this fall. In preparation for this meeting, he requested a list of the unfunded projects on the 5-Year Capital Plan. On this list, many important and immediately impactful unfunded projects may be more pressing than the replacement of the breakwater and boat ramp, this includes the conversion of indoor pickleball courts at Deer Creek Racquet Club, the Lakefront Management Plan which manages all of the Park District's beaches, the Athletic Field Master Plan which has a committee working to improve our rapidly deteriorating sports fields, the Ravine Restoration Project at Moraine Park, the Sunset Woods Master Plan, the Park Avenue Master Plan which addresses areas outside of the boat launch, and the locker room renovation at the Recreation Center of Highland Park. All of these projects are very worthy and important, but unfortunately, they too are unfunded projects. He would like to know if the Board should commit \$2 million to the boat launch or use these monies to fund other unfunded capital projects. He reminded the Board that he is on record stating his support for the use of Park District funds for this project when it cost \$900,000 and when that cost increased to \$1.4 million that was assuming there was a public/private funding model. Now that the project has ballooned to \$2.7 million, he has not taken a position. He too supported having a Special Meeting to determine if the \$2 million should be spent on the breakwater and boat ramp or other unfunded tier 6 projects identified in the 5-Year Capital Plan. He reminded the Board that they have been elected to manage the Park District equities.

Vice President Grossberg feels that the lakefront differentiates the Park District of Highland Park from neighboring communities. He reminded the Board that every park district has ballfields and playgrounds, but what makes the Park District of Highland Park different is having lakefront access and properties. As a result, the Park District's lakefront properties have become a primary focus and he would like the community to know that he supports the Park District funding \$2 million for the replacement of the breakwater and boat ramp. He feels this area has been neglected and he does not feel the boaters should be punished by the lack of facilities down there. Additionally, if he was a boater and saw the barge and parking lots caving that he too would look for another lakefront property to launch and/or store boats and personal watercrafts. He believes there is a community in Highland Park that is willing to fund and support this project. Overall, he is willing to support the Park District funding \$2 million out of this \$2.7 million project, so long as the boaters raise \$300,000 in donations, the Park District receives grants, and that there is a funding model in place to pay back this project. He supports the Loyalty Program, which is the funding model that staff has presented upon several times which he feels the project will ultimately be paid in majority by its users, based on the metrics in the Loyalty Program. While the \$2.7 million is higher than

the Board originally agreed to, he feels the replacement of the breakwater and boat ramp will help make this an outstanding facility.

Commissioner Freeman feels that a price tag and an opinion of cost are different than an investment. Over time, this facility has been neglected and she feels very little was invested into repairs hence why the breakwater has deteriorated, the boat ramp failed, and portions of the parking lot are caving in. If these repairs continue to be neglected the costs of repair will only increase. She is upset that the Park District has a unique amenity such as Park Avenue, however, in its current condition it has very limited users, which is of no fault to the boating community. She, like Vice President Grossberg, is willing to support the Park District funding \$2 million out of this \$2.7 million project, so long as the boaters raise \$300,000 in donations, the Park District receive grants, and that there is a funding model in place to pay back this project. Likewise, she supports the Loyalty Program developed by staff. Furthermore, the unfunded projects identified in the 5-Year Capital Plan lack engineering drawings and opinions of costs, so she feels it is unfair to compare this project to those. She is excited about the commitment from the community, and she is confident the community can meet its goal of \$300,000.

Commissioner Kaplan reminded the Board that he has been on record stating he would like Park Avenue to look like Rosewood Beach, and unfortunately, in order to do so the facility needs a breakwater. Additionally, he has been on recording stating he supported the project when it was \$1.4 million, so long as the boaters raised funds to help support the project. Since then the cost has doubled to \$2.7 million, and the Board has yet to receive any information on how much the boating community has raised. He would like to know what type of timeframe the Park District will receive a payback through the Loyalty Program. Additionally, he understands Commissioner Bernstein's since there are several other unfunded projects in the Capital Plan that are equally worthy of such an investment. He would like to know if there are any plans for those unfunded projects. Regardless, the Park District funding \$2 million out of this \$2.7 million project, so long as the boaters raise \$300,000 in donations and the Park District receives grants.

Vice President Grossberg wanted to clarify, that the entire Board of Park Commissioners feels this project is important, however, we as the elected officials have to consider the budget when approving projects. Furthermore, he wanted to make it very clear that he is only willing to support the Park District funding \$2 million out of this \$2.7 million project, so long as the boaters raise \$300,000 in donations, the Park District receive grants, and the Park District hits the earmarks on the Loyalty Program. If one of those caveats is not met, then he may not support the project.

Commissioner Kaplan would like to know when will the Park District be paid back according to the Loyalty Program.

Executive Director Romes reported that the Park District will be paid back in 20 years, however, the Park District will have to commit funding \$2 million for the project to be eligible for the grant.

Commissioner Bernstein reported that one of our obligations as elected officials is to prioritize projects. Sometimes these decisions are tough, and part of his deliberation is to hear what the public has to say before he votes upon the \$2 million expenditure of Park District funds.

Commissioner Kaplan would like to have a secondary conversation about unfunded projects and what needs to be done to address those projects.

Commissioner Bernstein is willing to have a conversation about reprioritizing projects in the 5-Year Capital Plan.

Commissioner Kaplan would like to know how this project aligns with the Park Avenue Site Improvements presented by the Lakota Group. He does not want to have a dilapidated facility with a brand-new breakwater and boat ramp.

Executive Director Romes reported that there are funds in the 2022 Capital Plan to begin planning improvements for the north beach that are based on the OSLAD grant application, which includes constructing a boardwalk, repairing the parking lot, and providing ADA access to the site. There are also funds allocated for the south storage pad repair.

Vice President Grossberg would like to hear public comments and allow staff to move forward. There is no cost to move forward with the plan at this time. The Board can evaluate when the bids come in January. Overall, this allows the Parks Foundation to help the boaters raise funds and achieve their \$300,000 goal.

Commissioner Freeman reported that there is also a generous community member who is not a boater who pledged a \$150,000 donation match.

President Ruttenberg requested to have a conversation about the Tier 6 Unfunded Projects in the 5-Year Capital Plan at the next Finance Committee Meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Peter Mordini

1853 Sheahen Court, Highland Park

The boating community has been voicing their concerns for the past 8 years. Overall, the current conditions or the breakwater and boat ramp are a safety issue. As a reminder, you cannot drive an ambulance onto the lake, instead the fire department needs to launch a rescue vessel. We need this fixed as an emergency port. The community would like to see the breakwater and boat ramp replaced along with the laundry list of other items at the site not specific to the boating community. The parking lot is gone at the toe of the bluff which will only cause issues along the top of the bluff at Central Park. He is frustrated, reporting that every community but ours has fixed their lakefront properties. Every community has a baseball or football field, whereas we have a unique amenity at Park Avenue. If this project would have been repaired 5 years ago

the cost would not be close to \$3 million. He asked that the Park Board of Commissioners no longer delay this project.

Steve Knapp

700 College Place, Highland Park

Steve read the District's mission statement, which states the Park District is there to enrich community life through healthy leisure pursuits and appreciation of the natural world. What is unique about Highland Park are the lakefront properties. He's glad that some of the Board Members sees the value in this project. Even in its underfunded deteriorating state, the facility is being used. He does not feel that this facility receives less use than others. When the Park District needed \$750,000 to replenish the sand at Rosewood Beach, there was little debate, and the project was approved. He feels this facility deserves the same attention and funds to support repairs. He agrees with Peter Mordini, that safety is an issue. While he appreciates the other funded projects and understands there are limited funds available, he feels this project is the most deserving since the breakwater and boat ramp are no longer functional.

David Mecklenburger

1180 Hilary Lane, Highland Park

David reported that he is a lifelong Highland Park resident and sailor. This summer the Park District arranged reciprocity with the Winnetka Park District so that boaters could use their harbor. He was extremely impressed with what Winnetka has done with their launch facilities and beach. He also visited Glencoe and Wilmette, to see what their lakefronts look like. The fact that these north shore communities compete for families moving in, and Highland Park has let its boating facility deteriorate is a shame and only encourages families to move to those neighboring communities. He would like to the Park District to repair the breakwater and boat ramp and invest additional funds for the rest of the site so that it mimics those neighboring communities.

Daniel Kahn

819 Sheridan Road, Highland Park

Daniel reported that Highland Park was founded as Fort Clinton in 1850. It has a 450-foot pier for boats to tie up. I can only assume there was some means of putting boats into the water, though I don't really know. Suffice it to say, that Highland Park has had a boat launch from more than 60 years. To suddenly give up having such a facility would be a significant move. As my fellow boating leaders have said, after about 5 years of discussion were really close to a solid plan to renew Highland Parks commitment to power and sail boating. The funding model prepared by staff called for a significant amount of funding by boaters and other community members. The boating community has embraced that and has risen to the challenge. Were enormously proud and energized by the very large matching contribution made by a resident who isn't even a boater, just someone who feels boating is another element that makes Highland Park such a special place to live and was willing to put \$150,00 behind their position. While the consultant has asked us to hold off any widespread solicitations pending contacting the larger donors there's lots of excitement that we've heard from and there's lots of interest in supporting the project. We need to be able to tell prospective donors and loyalty members that yes, the Park District is committed to it. Through the past ten years of

interactions between the boating community and Park District, you have seen the board room repeatedly filled with people interested in maintaining boating. Boaters and non-boaters alike, he cannot recall a time when a citizen attended a public meeting stating that they do not think these are worthwhile facilities or expenditures. Highland Park is privileged to occupy more than 10% of Lake Michigan's shoreline, beyond what Chicago has. Highland Park is in a unique position, and it is our responsibility to continue to nurture its use. The Board is certainly justified in wanting to ensure that when the new facility is built it will be used. He feels the Loyalty Program addresses that. In recent years he feels that boat ramp usage has been far more modest, and it's important to note that prior to the two-year shutdown to expand the water treatment plant usage was extremely robust with 977 launches. As a result of the shutdown many boaters found alternative sites to store and launch their boats and personal watercrafts, causing usage to drop by more than 50% with 421 launches. When our Park District executes a project, it is well thought out and done in a first-class manner. Having been involved in the design of this project the boating community has full confidence that this will be another first-class facility.

Steve Fuoco

1055 Golf Avenue, Highland Park

If no one has been to Lake Forest, you should look. He's surprised that the project cost is \$2.7 million. If the Park District needs to cut cost, he recommends taking out the barge, put in the rip rap and the concrete wall, and provide two lanes of boat traffic, so that a boat can launch and dock simultaneously. These changes will preserve the facility as is and as it has been for a number of years. Would I like to make it better absolutely? I love living here, I have since 2000 and I have been boating all my life. I would like Highland Park to have a first-class boating facility, however if it is a matter of cost or unfunded projects, he feels this project should be front and center because of the history and the service to the coast guard and the fire department. He thanked the Park Board of Commissioners for listening and for their service, noting that he understands the difficulties they are faced with, but we need this amenity it is a selling point, and part of this City's history.

James Martin

232 Green Bay Road, Highland Park

I would like to see the repair happen. He loves Lake Forest and Winnetka harbors, although Winnetka has challenges specific to launching and wave impacts. Regardless, he would love to see this facility repaired and designed a little bit better. He would like to lengthen the barge, and for the new structure to have extra protection from the waves. He feels Park Avenue is the worst property within Highland Park, followed by Ravine.

David Sogin

1092 Wade Street, Highland Park

He is very encouraged that the Park Board of Commissioners are moving towards approving the project since the fundraising committee needs as much enthusiasm from Commissioners as possible. There have already been significant contributions, however, the fundraising committee is faced with challenges when there is reluctance from Board. We are coming into a difficult time for fund raising, giving the distractions

of the upcoming holidays. He feels that any real positive support from the Board, that this is a project they support, will greatly assist with fundraising efforts.

Wes Madara

349 Vince Avenue, Highland Park

As somebody who recently moved to Highland Park from outside of the Chicagoland area, and the reason they chose Highland Park was the lakefront. We lose a lot if we don't invest in this facility, which he feels could be a continued revenue source if repaired. He asked the Park District to continue to move forward with this project.

Michael Ezgur

2360 Wood Path, Highland Park

I am a long time Highland Park Resident, and he loves all the amenities the Park District has to offer. He is a Sapphire Member at SVGC, he is a member of the RCHP, and he plays pickleball and tennis at Danny Cunniff and Sunset Woods Parks, however, I could do this anywhere. What makes Highland Park unique is the lakefront. He has been a NSYC member for the past 5 years. Overall, he feels we need to foster and improve upon the entire site at Park Avenue, not just replacing the boat ramp and breakwater. He feels Park Avenue would get much more use and become a revenue source if the entire site is renovated.

Mike Jacker

1687 Ridgelee Road, Highland Park

Question, with the road deterioration, the bluff erosion, and issues involving The Great Lakes Water Management, is there anything in the recently passed infrastructure bill that could be used for this project.

President Ruttenberg reported that staff will investigate the recently passed infrastructure bill.

Brett Schultz

2800 Trailway St, Highland Park

Commended Mr. Kapp and Mr. Mordini for their comments. He is a non-boater; however, he is a paddleboarder. He has recruited several paddleboarders to the site. He feels this is something special and hopes the Park Board of Commissioners approves this project.

Commissioner Bernstein would like to have a discussion at the upcoming Finance Committee Meeting regarding the Tier 6 Unfunded projects identified in the 5-Year Capital Plan to see if there is a way to find funding sources for some of these items. Additionally, he would like to address four items presented during public comment.

First, several attendees referenced the Park District's mission statement. While he appreciated this, he reminded the community that the District's mission statement goes beyond the lakefront and boating community. Highland Park has 30,000 residents that pursue recreation outside of the lakefront so as fiduciaries and representatives of those residents the Park Board of Commissioners have an obligation not

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to ignore their needs. Since he has been a member of the Park Board of Commissioners the District has invested significantly in our lakefront properties, spending millions on lakefront parks and beaches. He does not feel the Board has turned their back on Park Avenue, however, the Board prioritized Rosewood Beach over Park Avenue.

Secondly, regarding security and safety, he appreciates the concerns from the community and understands the Cities roles vs. the Park District's. He wanted it on record that the Park District is mindful of safety.

Thirdly, regarding usage, he reported that he is less concerned about the numbers, reminding the community that whenever the Park District commits to a project it is completed in a first-class manner. Should the Park Board of Commissioners decide to move forward with the project, he is confident that usage will justify the investment made by the Park District. W

Lastly, he felt the best argument presented this evening, is that the breakwater and boat ramp are no longer functional unlike ballfields, and some of the other unfunded projects, identified in the 5-Year Capital Plan however, the School District has made the difficult decision to closed some of it schools, which like the lakefront is a selling amenity point or a reason people move to the area, Overall, he does not feel that people move to Highland Park strictly because of the lakefront.

In short, he is still very uncomfortable with a \$2million buy-in. He reminded the community that he supported the project when it was a \$900,000 repair and a \$1.4 million repair. He feels that the District may need to reengage the experts to try and reduce the project cost.

Vice President Grossberg, Commissioner Freeman, and Commissioner Kaplan support the Park District funding \$2 million towards the \$2.7 million project, so long as the boaters raise \$300,000 in donations, the Park District receive grants, and the Park District hits the earmarks on the Loyalty Program. President Ruttenberg and Commissioner Bernstein are not in favor of the Park District funding \$2 million for this project.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Vice President Grossberg and seconded by Commissioner Freeman and approved by a unanimous vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxanne Hejnowski

Roxanne Hejnowski, Assistant Secretary