



# Sunset Woods Park Master Plan





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Park District of Highland Park Board of Commissioners

*Barnett Ruttenberg, Park District Board President  
Terry Grossberg, Park District Board Vice President  
Cal Bernstein, Park District Board Commissioner  
Jennifer Freedman, Park District Board Commissioner  
Brian Kaplan, Park District Board Commissioner  
Lori Flores Weiss Kopfh (former Park District Board Commissioner)*

## Community Members and Park Patrons



## Hitchcock Design Group

*Steve Konters, Hitchcock Design Group  
Andy Howard, Hitchcock Design Group  
Jenna Beck, Hitchcock Design Group*

## Park District of Highland Park Staff

*Brian Romes, Executive Director Park District of Highland Park  
Jeff Smith, Park District of Highland Park  
Dan Voss, Park District of Highland Park  
Amalia Schwartz, Park District of Highland Park  
Mike Evans, Park District of Highland Park  
Park District Staff Task Force*





A photograph of a family in a park. A man in a light blue t-shirt and camouflage shorts stands on the left, holding a water bottle. A woman in a dark t-shirt and grey pants is helping a young child on a red bicycle. The child is wearing a blue helmet and pink pants. They are on a paved path next to a grassy area with a wooden bench in the background. The scene is set in a park with trees and a chain-link fence in the distance.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Sunset Woods Park Master Plan recognizes Sunset Woods as Highland Park's destination community park nestled in the center of town. The plan strives to consider the timeless park holistically and in the context of the Highland Park community and surrounding area. In partnership with the community, the Park District of Highland Park and the design consultant team developed a Master Plan to honor Sunset Woods Park and guide improvements over the next ten years. This planning effort is supported by the Park District's GreenPrint 2024 Plan.

The Sunset Woods Park Master Plan is conceptual and will be used as a resource to guide future development and identify funding. At the time of approval, the majority of the proposed improvements outlined in the plan are unfunded. If funding were to be identified, the improvement would need to be designed and engineered prior to construction.



# CONTEXT

Sunset Woods Park is the community's signature destination park centrally located just west of the downtown near Park Avenue and Sunset Road. The park contains baseball diamonds, tennis courts, playgrounds, a basketball court, a skate park, picnic areas, trails, and approximately 8 acres of natural areas. The Park is also the site of several special events and summer camp programs.



# PROCESS

An essential aspect of the Sunset Woods project planning process is collaboration with the community. In Fall 2020, the Park District began engaging the public to understand current use and desired improvements for the park and playground. Feedback was collected through online and in-person events such as an outdoor in-person open house, virtual community meetings, listening sessions at the park, and discussions with local organizations. The information gathered was used with additional feedback from Park District staff and the Park Board to prepare preliminary plans for the park and playground renovations. These plans were shared with the community in December 2020 along with a detailed online survey to collect feedback. Over 300 people reviewed the presentation and responded to the survey.

The design plans were advanced further, integrating the feedback received from the community and presented to the Park Board and community in February 2021. A revised plan was developed and presented at a Park District public meeting and posted on the website in Spring 2021. The District continued engagement efforts through Summer 2021 to vet the final plan with park users before approval by the Park District Board of Commissioners.

## **Summary of Feedback Collected:**

**Preserve, protect, and highlight the mature trees in the park**

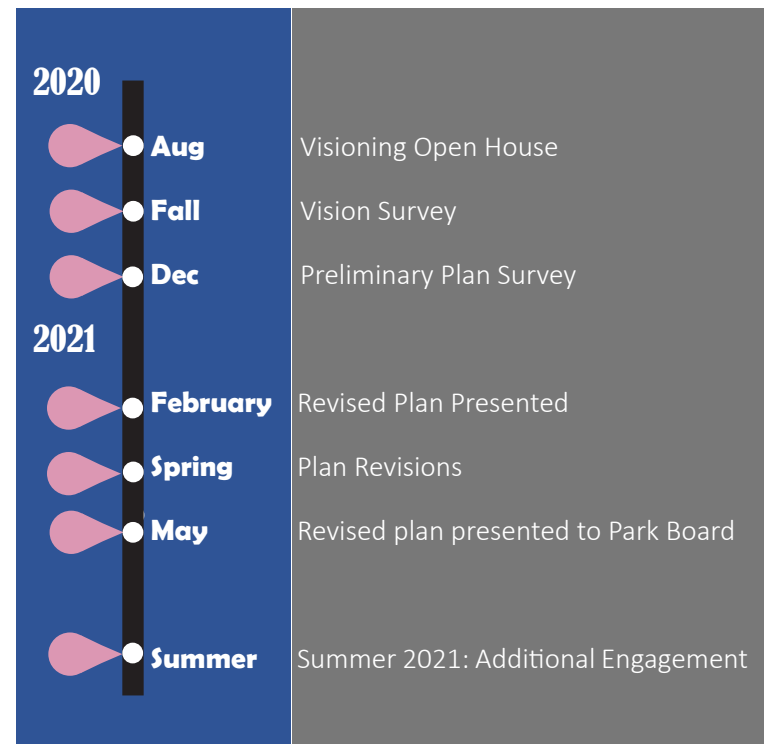
**Many use the park for the paths and enjoy the passive open space**

**The community was not supportive of expanded hardscape in the park**

**Emphasis on maintenance of existing amenities**

**There is a high interest in water play and adult fitness**

**Interest in dog amenities and an off-leash dog park**



# SUMMER 2022 PARK EVENTS

This Summer staff from the Planning and Projects team took the Sunset Woods Park proposed master plan out to the park to vet the plan with park users. Over the course of the summer events, the team spoke with more than 50 individuals using the park.

## Unplugged Illinois @ Sunset Woods Park

The proposed Sunset Woods Park Master Plan inspired the Unplugged Illinois at Sunset Woods Park event held on July 10, 2021. The main purpose of the event was to activate the park to enjoy a day outside away from screens. The proposed recreational elements in the plan inspired the various stations at the event including water play, skate boarding, scooter play, pickleball, and adult fitness. Staff from the Planning and Projects team was available to provide more information to event participants and patrons on the master plan and collect feedback.



## Sunset Woods Park Master Plan Vision Walk

Being out in the park offers a perspective difficult to acquire when looking at a map on paper or screen. The Vision Walk held on September 11, 2021 loosely modeled after traditional garden walks, gave park patrons the opportunity to spatially visualize where the proposed amenities were to be located at the park. Numbered signs were placed around the park in the approximate location of the proposed park component and corresponded with the available maps. Staff was stationed at the central fieldhouse answering questions and collecting feedback.

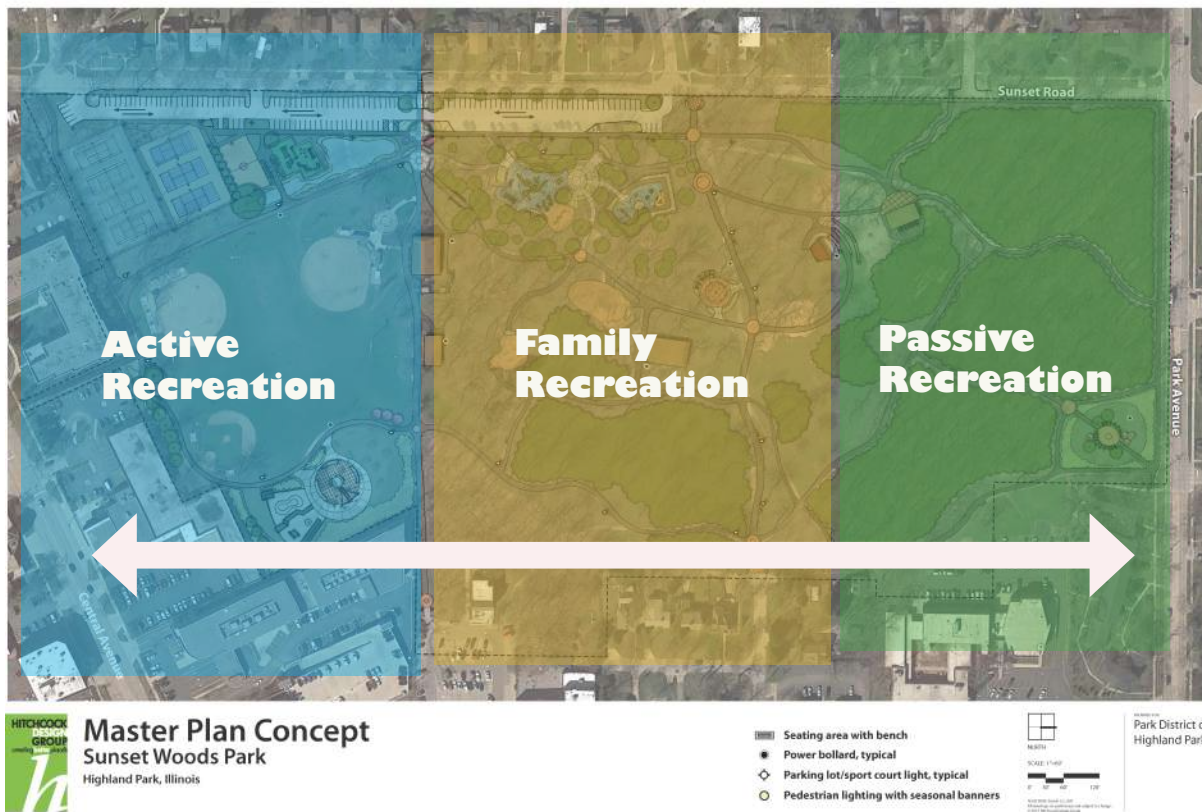
## Sunset Woods Park Master Plan @ Touch at Truck

The Planning and Projects team hosted a table at the Communitywide Touch a Truck event held in Sunset Woods Park. The team had maps and representative images available to share and welcomed feedback on the plan.



# OVERVIEW

Over the course of the master planning effort, it was made clear that Sunset Woods Park is considered Highland Park's central park and serves a diverse population and recreational interests. The park itself spans the recreational spectrum and offers a wide range of recreation activities from active recreation to passive recreation and everything in between. The plan follows a vision developed through community input and Park District guidance that strives to *honor the park's natural character, improve connectivity and parking, enhance existing amenities, re-purpose underutilized areas, and add new recreation opportunities of interest*. The Master Plan serves as a conceptual guide for improvements to the park over the next 10+ years. The plan is conceptual, the proposed improvements represent activities and park elements. As funding becomes available, the Park District will conduct a detailed design process.



## Planning Principles:

1. **Preserve and honor the park's natural character**
2. **Improve connectivity and parking**
3. **Enhance existing amenities**
4. **Re-purpose underutilized areas, and add new recreation opportunities of interest**



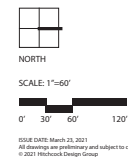


# Master Plan Concept

## Sunset Woods Park

Highland Park, Illinois

- Seating area with bench
- Power bollard, typical
- Parking lot/sport court light, typical
- Pedestrian lighting with seasonal banners



PREPARED FOR:  
Park District of  
Highland Park





### **Preserve Natural Character of the Park**

- *The park's open and natural character will be maintained with a few new activities of interest that support the enjoyment of the park.*
- *New recommendations consider the protection and preservation of the park's majestic trees.*
- *This plan honors and preserves the loved elements of Sunset Woods including the great lawn and ball fields, the tennis area, the natural areas to the north, the woodland nature of the park and the trees.*

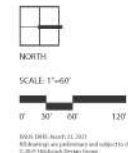




## Master Plan Concept Sunset Woods Park

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PROMISED  
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**Preserve Natural Character of the Park**



**Green Space and natural areas preserved**

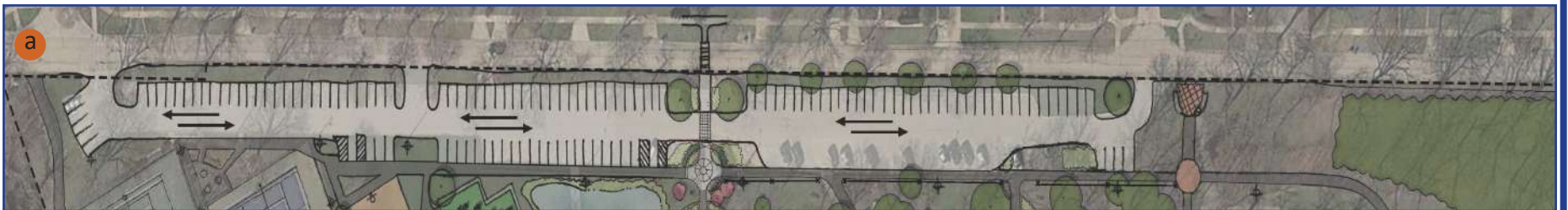


### **Proposed Connectivity and Parking Improvements**

- a** *Adjust the parking lot to allow for 2-way traffic circulation, additional parking, and a drop-off area for buses that can be used for additional parking during designated times.*
- b** *Repurpose the central entry drive as a dedicated pedestrian entry to enhance walkability to the park.*
- c** *Strengthen the connection to the downtown by widening and/or adjusting the main east/west pedestrian path and the addition of new lights for increased pedestrian visibility.*
- d** *Enhance path entries at all locations around the park for improved connectivity and visibility as well as providing a welcoming feel to the park.*







**Improve Connectivity and Parking**



**Sunset Woods Park Entrance**

### Proposed Enhancements to Existing Amenities

- e *Renovate the existing three hard surface tennis courts. (Completed in 2021)*
- f *Replace and relocate the existing basketball court with a new full regulation-size basketball / multi- use court. Consider soccer, as this area of the park is regularly used for soccer, as well as screening for the neighborhood.*
- g *Renovate the field house for improved program space.*
- h *Renovate the north pavilion for improved program space.*
- i *Renovate the existing skate park with an organic aesthetic, complementary to the park environment, and include skate elements such as stairs, ramps, and rails. The area will also include a separate multi-use wheel-friendly plaza containing features that are fun for scooters, bikes, roller blades, and other wheeled activities.*
- j *Activate the northeast corner of the park with enhanced landscaping and a small plaza with seating and pergola, including an opportunity for a memorial garden. The activated space seeks to improve connectivity, park visibility, and additional passive recreation on the north-end.*
- k *Improve connectivity and add gathering space between the play areas with a centrally located plaza. (Planned to be completed with the playground renovation. Expected completion Spring 2022)*

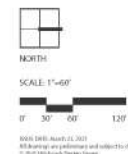






## Master Plan Concept Sunset Woods Park Highland Park, Illinois

- Seating area with bench
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PROPOSED  
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**Enhance Existing Amenities**

**Proposed Enhance/Renovate existing park elements**

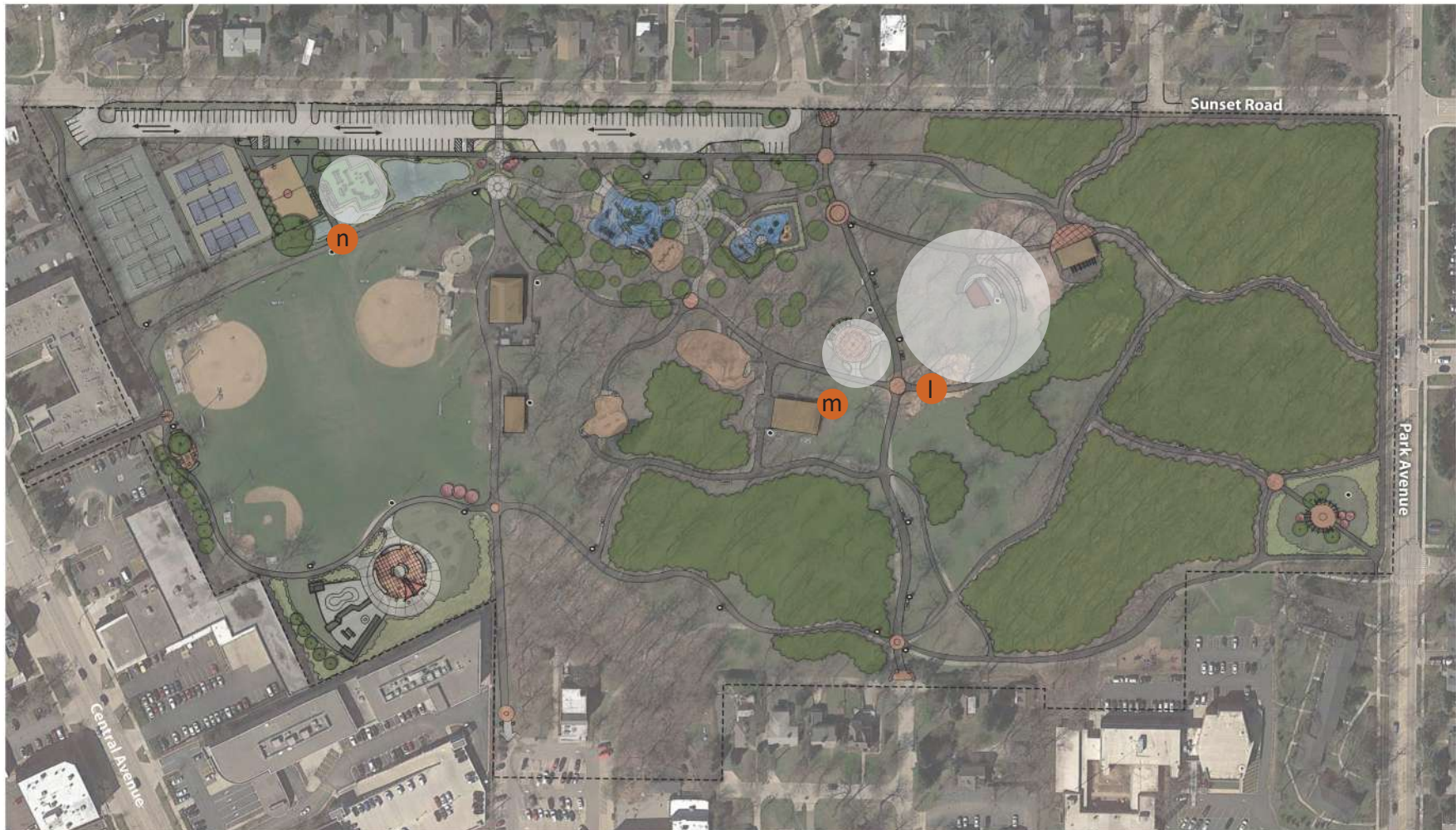


## Proposed New Community Desired Recreation

- l** *Natural style tiered seating area for programs and events, including outdoor classroom use*
- m** *A multi-use water play plaza. When not in use for water play the plaza could be used as a gathering space*
- n** *Outdoor adult fitness equipment*



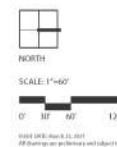




## Master Plan Concept Sunset Woods Park

Highland Park, Illinois

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**New Recreation**



**Proposed new community desired recreation**

# PRIORITIZATION

Implementation will be guided by the proposed prioritization plan, which was developed following community and stakeholder input. The project team considered impact, community interest, and effort to complete the proposed initiatives to determine the recommend priority level. Improvements are categorized by level of priority: High Priority, Medium Priority, Low Priority. Each of the proposed projects is currently unfunded and will only be pursued if funding is identified. This plan is a living document and as such the prioritization plan will be re-evaluated based on community needs.

High Priority (1-5 years)

South Parking Improvements: \$\$\$

Multi-purpose court \$

Adult Fitness \$\$

Playground Plaza: \$

Spray Pad: \$\$

Moderate Priority (3-7 Years)

Central Area Main Walk: \$\$\$

Amphitheater Area: \$\$\$

Fieldhouse Renovations: \$\$

North Facility Renovations: \$

Low Priority (5-10 Years)

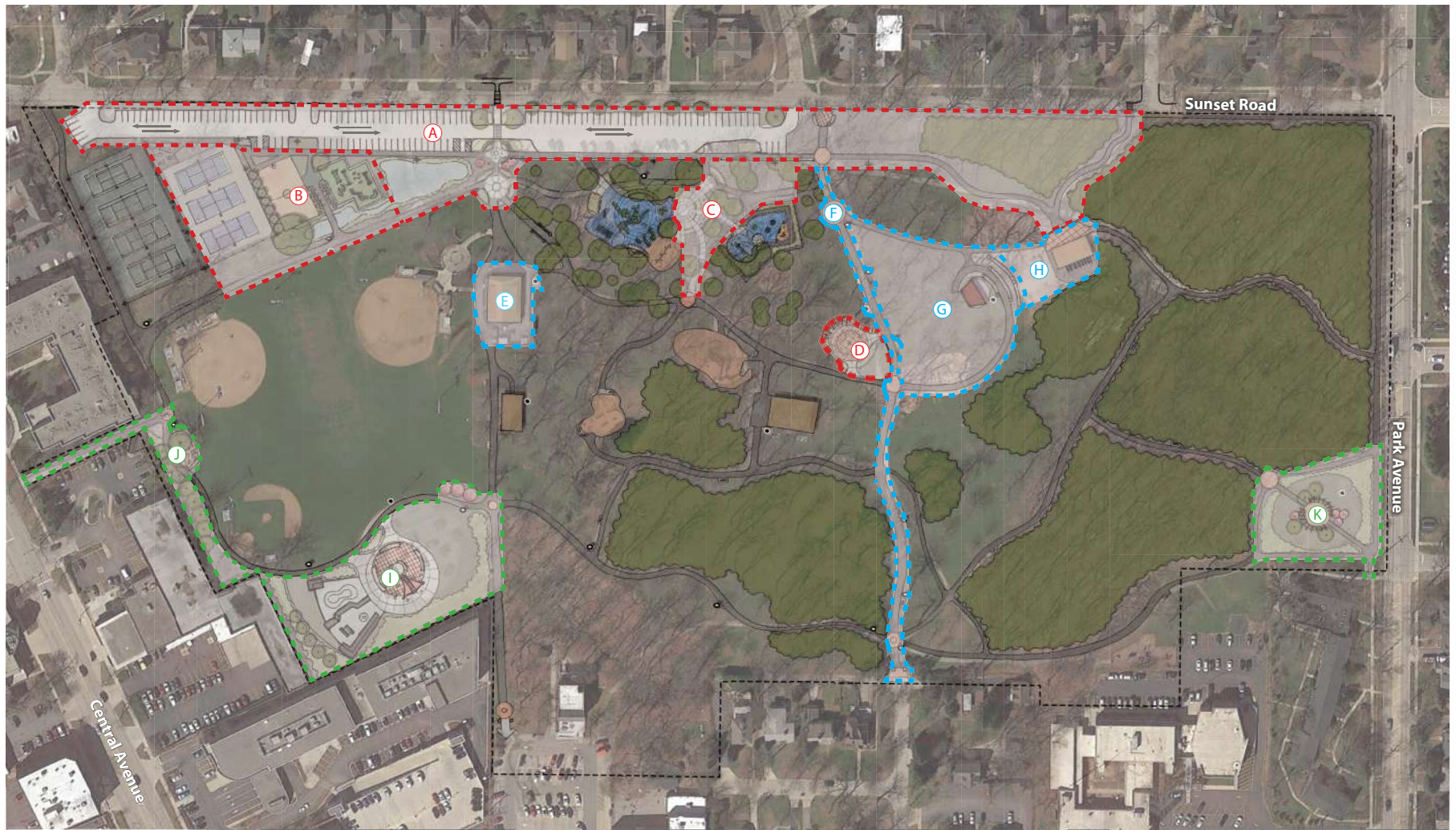
Wheeled Plaza and Skate Park: \$\$\$\$

Oak Tree Plaza and Walkway: \$

North Gathering Area: \$\$

\$: \$50K-\$199K	\$\$: \$200K - \$499K	\$\$\$: \$500-\$699K	\$\$\$\$: \$700K+
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## Master Plan Concept

### Sunset Woods Park

Highland Park, Illinois

#### High Priority

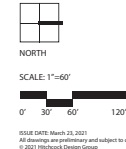
- (A) Parking Lot
- (B) Sport Courts
- (C) Play Area Plaza (if not splash pad)
- (D) Splash Pad

#### Moderate Priority

- (E) Field House Renovations
- (F) Central Walk
- (G) Bandshell/Amphitheater
- (H) North Facility Renovation

#### Low Priority

- Active Area
- (I) Skate Facilities
- (J) Oak Tree Plaza
- (K) North Garden Area



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Prioritizaion grouping - see above for color legend

## NEXT STEPS

Once approved, the Sunset Woods Park Master Plan will serve as a tool to guide future development at the park, and support to identify funding sources. Typically, there are five steps to implement proposed improvements.

*Step 1.* Pursue funding opportunities and identify funding sources

*Step 2:* If funding is identified, confirm the concept with the community

*Step 3:* If confirmed, secure funding

*Step 4:* If funding is secured, proceed to design and engineering. During this step of the process, the District will work with a professional firm and consult with the community to design the park improvement.

*Step 5:* Construction

### Living Document

The Park District will continue to evaluate the Sunset Woods Park Master Plan in light of the present day community needs and interests.



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

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The next step to implementation is identifying funding to support the proposed initiatives. The District can look to government grant opportunities, public-private partnerships, and local fundraising.

Possible government grants include:

- The Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) Program. OSLAD is a state-financed grant program that provides funding assistance to local government agencies for development of land for public parks and open space.
- Park and Recreational Facilities Construction Program (PARC). PARC provides grants to eligible local governments for park and recreation construction projects.
- ComEd Building Incentives for energy efficiency for new construction, rehabilitation of existing facilities, and parks.
- IDNR Federal Recreational Trail Program Trails This program provides funding assistance for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and maintenance of non-motorized recreation trails.
- Watershed Management Boards cost share grant program funds projects that improve drainage and contributes to flood reduction.

The proposed projects at Sunset Woods Park are opportunities to partner with the Park Foundation to seek local fundraising and/or establish public-private partnerships. Possible public-private initiatives may be sought with local recreation groups, local civic/arts groups, or Highland Park downtown groups.

## Overview of Playground

To keep with the four playgrounds' current structure, the two renovated playgrounds will each have a unique theme that will subtly influence the style and character of some of the play equipment and play spaces. There was community interest in both the solar system theme and nature-inspired theme. Also, there was specific interest in maintaining some type of rocket ship feature. The 5-12 age group play area was selected to have the solar theme, and the 2-5 age group area a nature inspired theme based on the input. The supporting play equipment images included for reference with the playground concept plan are representative ideas only and final equipment selection will occur during the playground renovation final design phase. Both playgrounds are expected to have a combination of wood engineered fiber surfacing with poured-in-place rubber surfacing being included as budget allows.

### **Features of the 5-12 age group solar-themed playground.**

*Multi-level rocket style tower with slides, interactive panels, climbers, and connection to other activities.*

*Embankment-play with a crater style hillside climber and slides,*

*Space net climber that can accommodate large groups of children,*

*Group spinner, and*

*Six belt swings.*

### **Features of the 2-5 age group nature-themed playground.**

*Primary play structure with slides, interactive panels, and age-appropriate climbers*

*Sand play area with imaginative playhouse and shade canopy,*

*Balancing activities such as logs, stump steppers, and leaves.*

*Two tot swings with one tandem swing.*



## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the process the Park District heard from a variety of stakeholders and will continue to consider future improvements that are not addressed in the Master Plan. If funding is secured, these elements will be considered through design and engineering.

- *Consider replacing clay courts with hard surface courts due to maintenance challenges and impact.*
- *Continue to monitor the community's interest in pickleball to evaluate the potential for dedicated pickleball courts in the future.*
- *Continue to evaluate the need and locations for pedestrian and activity lighting.*
- *Continue to evaluate the interest in dedicated wheel friendly elements such a pump track.*
- *Continue to consider dog-amenities at the Park including off leash dog opportunities.*

### **Park Site Plan Initiative**

**Concurrent to the Sunset Woods Park Master Planning effort, the Park District is assessing level of service at each of the Districts outdoor park properties. The Park Site Plan initiative has highlighted maintenance and operation improvements at Sunset Woods Park including improved signage, replamcent of waste recepticles, drinking fountains, and other amentities throughout the park.**