

**MINUTES OF A THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING  
OF THE PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK  
HELD ON DECEMBER 03, 2024, 8:03 AM.**

**Present:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Grossberg, President Bernstein

**Absent:** None

**Also, Present:** Executive Director Romes; Deputy Director Carr, Director Peters, Director Smith, Director Voss, Director Gogola, Director Baird, Assistant Director Acevedo, Manager Ochs, Manager Baczek, Manager Kutscheid, Accountant Moraru, Coordinator Hejnowski

**Guest Speaker:** None

A motion was made by Commissioner Grossberg and seconded by President Bernstein to allow Commissioner Ruttenberg and Vice President Freeman to participate by electronic means.

Commissioner Labrador joined the meeting at 8:07 a.m.

Commissioner Grossberg left the meeting at 9:20 a.m.

**Additions to the Agenda**

None.

**Audit Contract Extension**

Director Peters reported that the Park District's auditors, Sikich, requested a three-year extension to their current contract. They have been servicing the Park District for the past five years. Services include an in-depth review of the District's audit and provide recommendations to ensure the Park District obtains the coveted Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting annually. Sikich audits six of the twelve AAA rated park districts in Illinois.

She reviewed the annual cost increases over the three-year proposed contract extension.

It was the consensus of the Finance Committee to place the Audit contract Extension with Sikich on the consent agenda at the December 18, 2024, Regular Meeting of the Park Board of Commissioners.

**Budget Book Presentation**

Director Peters reviewed the 2025 budget overview. Highlights include: the General, Special Recreation and Recreation Funds anticipate a combined operating surplus, before transfers, of \$3,245,759. Of that surplus, \$2,600,000 will be transferred to the Capital Projects Fund and an additional \$1,676,050 to Debt Service. Debt payments total \$3,583,485, while capital expenditures total \$18,439,299, resulting in a planned Districtwide deficit after debt and transfers of \$14,026,056. The transfer of \$2,000,000 from the Recreation Fund to the Capital Projects Fund follows the guidelines of the Fund Balance Policy.

New for 2025, in an effort to remain both fiscally responsible and strategic in the delivery of services to the community, staff anticipates continued development and implementation of a Values Driven Strategic

Plan, updating the Master Plan, approving a new Sustainability Plan, working toward submission for the Distinguished Accreditation award in 2025, finalizing review of the District policy manuals, and relocation of administrative staff from the aging West Ridge Center. The District will continue to collaborate with the Parks Foundation to support Capital Campaign Fundraising, as well as scholarship fundraising.

Projects in Progress include:

- **GreenPrint 2024** - Adopted by the Park Board of Commissioners in December 2015, GreenPrint 2024 is the District's comprehensive master plan representing a vision for the District. It guides future facility and program development through 2024. Two tracks of capital projects were identified in the plan, to be completed over a 10-year period. Several projects within the District's GreenPrint master plan will come to fruition in 2025 and 2026 including the construction of a new recreation facility at West Ridge Park, a Sustainability Plan, and continuation of the Athletic Field Master Plan. The District will also complete a new comprehensive master plan study in effort to revise and extend GreenPrint 2024 initiatives. This plan is anticipated to be completed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2025.

Projects Completed

- Parks Foundation Established (established 2016)
- Recreation Center of Highland Park Fitness Renovations (Completed 2017)
- Parks and Golf Maintenance Facility (Completed 2018)
- Sunset Valley Golf Club – Course Renovations (Completed 2018)
- Sunset Valley Golf Club - Clubhouse Renovations (Completed 2018)
- Conversion of The Preserve of Highland Park (Completed in 2022)
- Sunset Woods Playground Renovation and Site Master Plan (Completed in 2022)
- Centennial Ice Arena Renovation (Completed in 2023)
- Jeff Fox Synthetic Turf Field – Sports Field Master Plan (Completed 2024)

Projects in Progress

- Construction of Recreation Facility at West Ridge Park
- **Land Management Plan** – the plan covers 9 major topics: Park Maintenance, Stormwater Management, Lakefront Maintenance, Natural Areas, Park Inventory, Real Estate, Park Amenities, Connectivity, and Cultural Resources.
- **Park Site Plans** - The Park Site Plan initiative is in response to goals and objectives established in GreenPrint 2024 and the Land Management Plan. The plan will evaluate the Park District's outdoor parks based on Park District standards to then offer recommendations for park improvements.
- **Sunset Woods Site Master Plan** - The plan strives to consider the timeless park holistically and in the context of the Highland Park community and surrounding area. The Park District applied for an Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant (OSLAD) in the amount of \$600,000 to assist in funding components for the master plan. In 2023 the Park District was awarded \$600,000 for phase 1 of the Sunset Woods Master Plan project. Phase 1 includes a newly relocated skate park, wheel friendly plaza, multi-use basketball court, and game area. The project is underway and expected to be completed in early 2025.

- **Golf Learning Center Optimization Report** - The intent of the Golf Learning Center Optimization Report is to improve financial performance while meeting community and regional recreational needs at the Highland Park Golf Learning Center facility. The plan includes a comprehensive assessment and future recommendations that will be used to guide programs and investments. The recommendations address: the driving range, mini golf, building and general site connectivity, programming, operations, agreements and marketing strategy, relationship to the Dome and The Preserve, new amenities, capital improvements, and services.

On August 30, 2023, a Request for Proposal for Recreational Services of an Enterprise Facility at 2205 Skokie Valley Road (commonly known as Lot 3/Golf Learning Center) was issued by the District. As a result, The Golf Practice, a comprehensive golf academy that strives to create memorable experiences and lifelong golfers, had their proposal accepted by the District.

- **Athletic Fields Master Plan** - The Park District provides both informal and programmed competition level sports fields at locations throughout the community. The District's Planning and Athletics Departments developed a comprehensive sports field master plan that addresses existing fields to meet current and projected program needs as well as explores potential new field configurations that would gain efficiencies in scheduling, program management, and tournament opportunities; ancillary amenities and infrastructure; maintenance; stormwater management, lighting, and utilities; as well as improved parking management strategies.
- **Lakefront Master Plan** - The recommendations are intended to guide lakefront operations, beaches, capital planning, and support possible future grant opportunities.
- **Park Avenue Site Master Plan** - The purpose of the plan is to address key issues facing the site including: improvements to the yacht club building, enhancements for non-motorized boaters, and enhancements to the pedestrian connections to and through the park. This plan does not directly address the breakwater nor boat launch.
- The Park District was awarded Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant (OSLAD) funding in the amount of \$400,000 to implement Site Master Plan Phase 1 Improvements. This project will make improvements to the north end of the property including improved pedestrian access, native landscaping, parking improvements and the addition of a beach boardwalk. Construction is underway and expected to be completed in Spring 2025.
- **Beach Management Plan** - During the fourth quarter of 2022, the Millard Bluff Grading & Tree Removal project conducted by RES Environmental Operating Company began with the removal of more than 200 trees, many non-native or hazardous. Three distinct sections of the bluff were regraded to a 2:1 slope, followed by installation of native seed and plant plugs. Finally, Staff planted 18 replacement trees throughout the park to fulfill the City's original tree removal permit.

Following the completion of the contracted work, Parks & Natural Areas staff have maintained the temporary path to protect and allow for the growth of native plantings. Fencing remained into the 2024 growing season to allow for vegetative establishment. During the second half of the season, fencing in the southern portion was set back to allow for increased exposure to the upper portions of the park. In 2025, Staff will set back the fence in the northern half near the gazebo to provide an additional path and better overall access.

- ***Sustainability Plan*** - The Park District of Highland Park embraces concepts of sustainable practices in its mission statement and in its Environmental Policy. From 1992 to 2015 the District's Environmental Policy served as the primary document guiding sustainable efforts. In 2015, Park District staff developed the District's first sustainability plan to identify strategies to achieve sustainability goals and better coordinate with City-wide priorities. The 2015 plan has since been used as an internal document guiding practices leading to quantifiable achievements in District operations. It was updated in 2018 and will be updated again in 2024.
- ***Capital Plan (Annual and 5-year)*** - The Park District's 5-year Capital Plan is approved annually, and reviewed throughout the year, to ensure critical repair and replacement projects, facility and park improvements, and GreenPrint Projects are identified and funded. The Plan is prioritized into 6 tiers: Tier 1: Safety/Legal Compliance, Tier 2: Critical Repair/Replace, Tier 3: Scheduled Replacement, Tier 4: Improvement of existing Items, Tier 5: New improvements, and Tier 6: Unfunded
- ***Values Driven Strategic Plan*** - As the District completed nearly all initiatives outlined in the Strategic Plan, an update to the District's Strategic Plan was completed in 2023. After redefining Park District Values in 2022, the District established a Values Driven Strategic Plan coinciding with updated District Values of Welcoming, Caring and Extraordinary.

***Values Driven Strategic Themes:***

- Build personal relationships
- Create inclusivity
- Deliver the extraordinary
- Empower our team
- Grow our team
- Build and maintain trust
- Create a sustainable future
- Steward our resources
- Value our Team

The Values Driven Strategic Plan outlines mid-range and short-term operations planning and identifies initiatives or tasks to be completed by staff assigned committees. Completion of these initiatives will ensure fulfillment of strategic goals. Staff will continue implementing a Values Driven Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan in 2025.

- **Annual Work Plan** - The Park District's Annual Work Plan is a compilation of annual goals derived from the above Park District planning documents and are financially reflected in the 2025 Budget.

Regarding Salaries and Wages, Director Peters reported that for 2025, a 3.75% merit plus a 1.25% contingency full-time salary pool increase is budgeted for all full-time employees.

In 2023, a Part Time and Seasonal Compensation and Classification Study was completed. Part-time and Seasonal positions were classified by skill and pay ranges were defined. Both studies support the Employee Values Driven strategic theme and initiatives. Salaries are budgeted accordingly in the 2025 budget to adhere to minimum wage laws.

As for 2025 budget opportunities, the budget has been prepared while incorporating District values. Striving to always be extraordinary, welcoming, and caring, we have incorporated opportunities to ensure equity and inclusion, along with fiscal responsibility, in delivering services through our programs and at our facilities. We have a Grant-in-Aid budget of \$150,000, addressing financial barriers for residents, while still incorporating cost recovery strategies and seeking alternative revenue sources such as grants and donations. The Champion's Gala will be scheduled again for 2025 and usually generates tens of thousands of dollars that the Parks Foundation of Highland Park donates toward grant-in-aid and other various District capital improvement campaigns. Investment income far exceeded the budget again in 2024, as interest rates did not start to fall until late summer. Additionally, staff have started laddering investments to make the most of high interest rates, while always being liquid enough to meet financial obligations.

In closing, Director Peters reported that preparation of the 2025 Budget was made possible by the dedicated Park District of Highland Park staff and coordinated by the Finance staff. Many thanks to the Board of Commissioners for their dedication, support, and service to the District.

#### **December Bid Results**

##### **A. Sourcewell Golf Equipment Purchase**

Staff would like to replace and trade in the current spray system used at Sunset Valley Golf Club. There is \$135,044 budgeted to replace this item. If the Park District purchases through the Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative from Reinders, Inc staff can purchase a Toro Multi Pro 5800-G with the GeoLinkPrecision Spray System in the amount of \$114,480.50 for a savings of \$20,563.50.

It was the consensus of the Finance Committee to place the purchase through the Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative Agreement from Reinders on the consent agenda on the December 18, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Park Board of Commissioners.

##### **B. Sourcewell Cooperative Purchasing Contract for Playground Equipment**

There is \$322,00 budgeted to replace the playground equipment at Rosewood Park. If the Park District purchases the equipment through the Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative from Burke the District will save \$341. There is \$1,501,000 budgeted to replace the playground equipment at Lincoln Park. If the Park District purchases the equipment through the Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative from Burke the District will save \$5,020.

It was the consensus of the Finance Committee to place the Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative Agreements from Burke on the consent agenda on the December 18, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Park Board of Commissioners.

##### **C. New Facility and Site Improvements at West Ridge Park Bids**

Executive Director Romes reported that the Park District received 85 bids for this project. He is pleased to report that the base bids and alternates came in under budget. W.B. Olsen is still vetting through the bid specifications and companies; however, he wanted to share this news with the Finance Committee.

#### **Other Business**

None.

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes  
December 03, 2024

**Open to the Public to Address the Board**

None.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roxanne Hejnowski".

Roxanne Hejnowski, Assistant Secretary