

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 29, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. President Bernstein.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Executive Director Romes; Deputy Director Carr; Director Smith; Director Voss; Director Peters; Director Gogola; Director Hall; Assistant Director Reyes; Assistant Director Acevedo; Superintendent/Manager Ochs; Manager Sangern; Manager Saunders; Coordinator Hejnowski

**Guest Speakers:** None

**ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA**

None.

**OPEN TO PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD**

None.

**PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE 2024 BUDGET**

A motion was made by Commissioner Labrador and seconded by Commissioner Ruttenberg to convene the public hearing for the proposed Budget and Appropriation Ordinance for the Fiscal Year beginning January 1, 2025, and ending December 31, 2025.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

President Bernstein reported that the public hearing for the proposed Budget and Appropriation Ordinance for the Fiscal Year beginning January 1, 2025, and ending December 31, 2025, for the Park District of Highland Park is now in session.

Regular Meeting Minutes  
January 29, 2025

As required by law, the budget was, with the Park Board's consensus, laid down for a period of 30 days. The document was available to be reviewed at the Recreation Center of Highland Park, the West Ridge Center reception desk, the Highland Park Library, and the Park District's web site. Also, in accordance with the law, notification of tonight's hearing was posted in the local newspaper.

No members from the public or members from the Park Board of Commissioners wished to speak at the public hearing and Executive Director Romes did not receive any written communication relative to the proposed Budget and Appropriation Ordinance for the Fiscal Year beginning January 1, 2025, and ending December 31, 2025.

Commissioner Ruttenberg reported that the 2025 Budget was reviewed in detail at Finance Committee Meetings, before being presented and laid down.

The Park Board commended staff on the development of the 2025 Budget.

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg and seconded by Commissioner Labrador to close the public hearing.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

None.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg, seconded by Commissioner Labrador to approve the Minutes from December 3, 2024 Finance Committee Meeting, the Minutes from December 10, 2024 Facility & Recreation Committee Meeting, the Minutes from December 11, 2024 Workshop Meeting, the Minutes from December 17, 2024 Special Meeting, the Minutes from December 18, 2024 Facility & Recreation Committee Meeting, the Minutes from December 18, 2024 Regular Meeting, the Sourcewell Cooperative Purchasing Contract for Playground Equipment for Larry Fink Park, Resolution 2025-01 Ratifying the Waiving of Competitive Bidding for the Procurement of Materials for Emergency Restoration and Preservation Measures, and Bills and Payroll in the amount of \$2,376,085.96

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** Commissioner Ruttenberg abstained from Item D: Minutes from December 17, 2024 Special Meeting; Commissioner Grossberg abstained from Item A: Minutes from December 3, 2024 Finance Committee Meeting; and President Bernstein abstained from Item C: Minutes from December 11, 2024 Workshop Meeting

**Motion Carried**

**FINANCIAL FORECASTS AND TREASURER’S REPORT**

***Operations (General and Recreation Funds) Budget vs. Actual***

Director Peters shared the end-of-year projections and actual figures as of December 31, 2024. She is pleased to report that Actual Revenues exceeded budgeted revenues by \$3 million.

***Conclusion***

The following Park District programs and facilities are performing better than budget: interest income has a \$865,000 surplus and property taxes have a \$385,000 surplus. Tennis exceeded the budget by \$2,500,000, Recreation Center memberships, personal training and group ex classes exceeded budget by \$246,000, and golf exceeded budget by \$705,000 surplus. Also, there was a \$270,000 savings from payroll expenses.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**A. Approval of Ordinance 2025-01: Combined Budget and Appropriation Beginning January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025**

Director Peters reported that the proposed 2025 budget was presented to the Finance Committee on November 14, 2024, and December 3, 2024. After review and revisions, a final draft was presented to the Park Board at the December 18 Regular Park Board Meeting. At that time, the Park Board provided consensus to make the draft budget document available for public inspection for thirty days. The budget was made available for public review at the Recreation Center of Highland Park and on the District’s website during this timeframe. No comments from the Public have been received by the District. In accordance with the Park District Code, tonight’s public hearing regarding the budget was posted in the Lake County News Sun on Wednesday, January 22, 2024.

The proposed budget for fiscal year 2025 includes operating revenues of \$27,981,237, additional revenues of \$4,750,969, and total estimated expenditures (district-wide) of \$46,758,262 resulting in an anticipated deficit of \$14,026,056. This is a planned use for capital projects related to master planning.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bernstein and seconded by Commissioner Ruttenberg to approve the 2025 Budget and 2025 Budget and Appropriation Ordinance (2025-01) for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2025.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg,  
Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**B. Approval of a Professional Services Agreement with the Lakota Group for Master Plan Development**

Executive Director Romes reported that the Park District needs to update the existing Master Plan which provides direction on future planning initiatives for the next 5 years. The updated Master Plan will:

- Align the existing community resources and planning initiatives with community needs, attitudes, and interests.
- Recommend Agency Goals, Planning Initiatives, and Strategies for the Park Board and Staff over the next 5 years.
- Review inventory of PDHP assets, planning documents and improvements and report on progress.
- Engage community, staff, board, user groups, partners and stakeholders to guide recommendations.
- Establish goals and initiatives for the next five years.

Additional objectives for the updated Master Planning process include:

- Conduct a Statistically Valid Attitude and Interest Survey
- Public Engagement, assessment and recommendations
- Stakeholder (Board, Staff, Government/Community Partner) Engagement, Assessment and Recommendations
- Recreation Services evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- Park Land and Facility evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- 10 Year Capital Improvement Projects evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- 10 Year Funding Model and Opportunities evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- Values based Strategic Planning evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- Strategic and Government Partnership evaluation, assessment and recommendations
- Planning Initiatives evaluation, assessment and recommendations (Sustainability, Land Management, Athletic Fields, Beach Management, Lakefront, ADA, etc.)

The Park District received two proposals in response to the 2025 Master Plan Review and Revision Request for Proposals issued in November 2024. The purpose of the RFP is to hire a consultant to

update the existing PDHP master Plan to provide direction on future planning initiatives for the next 5-10 years. Both firms were interviewed by Park District staff on January 7, 2025. Staff discussed the unique strengths that each firm can offer the Park District and specifically evaluated their prior experience with the Park District as well as other Park Districts with similar consulting scopes, and their proposed approach to completing the provided scope in the RFP.

After speaking with multiple references for each firm and discussing options with Park Board Liaisons Commissioner Grossberg and Vice President Freeman, staff are recommending that The Lakota Group lead the Master Plan project. Lakota Group lead the development of the Park District's current Master Plan (GreenPrint2024). Additionally, staff is considering using Berry Dunn to complete an internal recreation services assessment, and Aquity to conduct a community wide attitude and interest survey.

The Park District has \$50,000 budgeted in the 2025 Capital Plan for Master Plan professional services.

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg and seconded by Commissioner Labrador to authorize Executive Director to enter into a Professional Services Agreement with The Lakota Group for the development of a Park District Master Plan for an amount not to exceed \$50,000.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Parks Foundation**

Parks Foundation President discussed upcoming fundraisers including the Shiver Me Timbers Polar Plunge on February 23 and the Champions Celebration on March 14. All proceeds for both events will provide scholarship funding to ensure that Highland Park and Highwood residents with financial constraints can participate in Park District programs and to support and enhance exceptional Park District projects.

**B. Board Committee Updates**

Executive Director Romes reported that at the January 08 Finance Committee Meeting, staff shared the AIA Agreement and the Guaranteed Maximum Price Amendment between the Park District of Highland Park and the construction manager, W.B. Olsen, for the New Facility and Site Improvements at West Ridge Park. Park District Legal Counsel, Ancel Glink, and representatives from W.B. Olsen,

attended tonight's meeting to answer any questions regarding language, terms, and conditions in the AIA Agreement and the Guaranteed Maximum Price Amendment.

At the January 28 Finance Committee, the Park District received two proposals in response to the 2025 Master Plan Review and Revision Request for Proposals issued in November 2024. The purpose of the RFP is to hire a consultant to update the existing PDHP master Plan to provide direction on future planning initiatives for the next 5-10 years. Staff reviewed the proposals.

Staff reviewed the Sourcewell Cooperative Purchasing Contract with Landscape Structures, Inc., to purchase playground equipment for Larry Fink Park.

On December 2, 2024, The Recreation Center of Highland Park experienced a leak in a water line that feeds one of the water fountains on the fitness floor. The water damage and subsequent property loss was substantial. Since fitness flooring has long lead time to procure staff ordered the replacement flooring on January 16 in effort to reopen the facility as soon as possible. Staff will be requesting approval of a Resolution at the Regular Meeting of the Park Board, ratifying the waiving of competitive bidding for the procurement of materials for emergency restoration and preservation measures.

### **C. End of Season Golf Reports**

Manager Sangern reported that Sunset Valley Golf Club had 64 groups (254 players) reserve permanent tee times, 320 Sapphire Club Loyalty Members, 254 kids in camps and programs, and 6 leagues. He shared highlights of 2024 tournaments and events.

Manager Ochs reported that three major projects were completed last year including the final phase of cart path resurfacing, clubhouse enhancements including floors, lighting, an expanded bar and new in/outdoor furniture, and the purchase of electric golf carts.

Manager Ochs reviewed budgeted vs actual monthly greens fees and the total paid rounds. He reviewed the actual vs budgeted operational revenues and expenses for Sunset Valley Golf Club.

Manager Saunders reviewed actual vs. budgeted revenues from private lessons, miniature golf, the driving range, and the Golf Practice at the Highland Park Golf Learning Center. He is pleased to report that actual revenues surpassed budgeted.

Manager Sangern shared what's new to expect this year, including changes to the Sapphire Club Loyalty Member options, Lagos Bar and Grill will have an updated menu and a restaurant supervisor will be on site during peak times, the restaurant will have a separate events menu, and beverage cart will operate more often.

The Park Board of Commissioners commended Manager Ochs, Manager Sangern, and Manager Saunders for their leadership and providing outstanding services to the community.

#### **D. Directors Report**

Executive Director Romes reported that at the 2025 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference the Park District was the proud winner of multiple outstanding awards. Each year IPRA honors those agencies that demonstrate excellence in their work and dedication to making the community they serve a better place to live and play.

The Park District was the proud recipient of the following:

- Exceptional Workplace Award.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Place – Agency Showcase Award and 1<sup>st</sup> Place – Agency Showcase Award for People’s Choice.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Place – IP&R Magazine Photo Contest for Nature/Landscape category for a photo of the Preserve.

The Mayor issued a Proclamation at the Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> City Council Meeting recognizing Habitat Highland Park’s efforts to certify Highland Park as a Community Wildlife Habitat. Our Natural Areas Manager, Liz Ricketts, and her team supported this effort in registering 13 of our nature areas as wildlife habitats to meet the National Wildlife Federation requirements.

This prestigious designation signifies that a significant percent of our City’s population is planting and maintaining sustainable, pollinator-friendly gardens, with special attention to native plants.

Also, two of our Parks Maintenance Employees Byron Baker and Jim Polster both received the 2024 Outstanding M.I.P.E. Park Employee award. Jim and Byron consistently demonstrate exceptional dedication, creativity, and initiative, making them invaluable members of the team.

Both Jim and Byron embody the District’s values of Welcoming, Caring and Extraordinary. Jim’s artistry enhances the District’s events and spaces, while Byron’s proactive attitude and attention to detail ensure the highest standards of maintenance and care. Together, they leave a lasting impact on the community, making them truly deserving of this recognition.

He also shared upcoming Valentines Day events, including skating from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. at Centennial Ice Arena on Friday, February 14 and enjoying a romantic bonfire and candle-lit walk along the trails at Heller Nature Center from 6:00 – 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, February 15.

#### **E. Board Comments**

Commissioner Labrador attended the conference noting how impressive it was.

President Bernstein encouraged his fellow board members to focus on the Highland Park Golf Learning Center during the Master Planning process.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**CLOSED SESSION**

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg, seconded by Commissioner Labrador, to adjourn into Closed Session for discussion of Section 2(c) 21: the discussion of minutes lawfully closed under the Act, whether for the purposes of approval of said minutes or for conducting the semi-annual review of the minutes as set forth in section 2.06 of the Act.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Labrador, Commissioner Ruttenberg, Commissioner Grossberg, Vice President Freeman, President Bernstein

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

The meeting adjourned into Closed Session at 7:06 p.m.

The meeting reconvened into Open Session at 7:13 p.m.

**Action From Closed Session If Any**

President Bernstein reported that in accordance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act, the Park Board reviewed minutes of all closed meetings from July – November 2024.

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg and seconded by Commissioner Labrador and approved by a unanimous vote that the Closed Session minutes from August 21, 2024 (Pertaining to Section 2(c)21) no longer require confidential treatment and shall be released for public inspection.

The Closed Session minutes from July 17, 2024 Workshop Meeting, August 14, 2024 Facility and recreation Committee Meeting, a portion of the August 21, 2024 Workshop Meeting, August 28, 2024 Regular Meeting, October 30, 2024 Regular Meeting, and November 13, 2024 Regular Meeting, shall not be released for public inspection since a need for confidentiality still exists as to all or part of those minutes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Commissioner Ruttenberg and seconded by Commissioner Grossberg and approved by a unanimous vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.



Regular Meeting Minutes  
January 29, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

*Roxanne Hejnowski*

Roxanne Hejnowski, Assistant Secretary