

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES OF WORKSHOP MEETING  
FEBRUARY 11, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. President Grossberg.

A motion was made by Vice President Freeman and seconded by Commissioner Beck to allow Commissioner Greenberg to participate in tonight's meeting by electronic means.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Beck, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** Commissioner Labrador

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

**Absent:** Commissioner Labrador

**Staff Present:** Executive Director Romes; Deputy Director Carr; Director Smith; Director Peters; Director Voss; Director Gogola; Director Hall; Assistant Director Soto; Manager Schwartz; Manager Kutscheid; Manager DiTomasso; Coordinator Hejnowski

**Guest Speaker:** None

**ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA**

Executive Director Romes reported there are no additions, however, we are going to change the order of the agenda so members of the public can hear the Ceramics Update and provide public comment.

**PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

*Sandra Tepper*

*2086 St. Johns Ave, Highland Park, IL*

Here to plead for ceramics. We are a wonderful community of people. It was discouraging to all of us that no one cared enough to include us in the new building or find us a place to be. As of April 15, 2026, we have no program. You're cutting off a vital part of your community and people that are interested in volunteering and doing this for people. Make my voice know it should be addressed and there shouldn't be

a whole segment of the community, those of us whole have lived here our whole lives and sent our kids to schools here, we deserve to be here too.

***Wendy Griffiths***  
***1024 Marion Ave, Highland Park, IL***

Glad that so many of our passion ceramic's participants attended this meeting. We are so invested in this program and in this community. I have made the best friends doing ceramics, that I would not have met or had the opportunity to be with and not all of us are athletic and want to participate in the park district's athletic programs. The opportunity for a program that gives people of all ages and abilities a place to gather and create and be supported by this fabulous park district, which I too have raised my children here and have sent them to almost everything you offer. I am so happy to have a program that I can participate in. In fact, two of my daughters also do this with me and they are here this evening. We have come together from our different busy lives and spend our Monday nights doing ceramics and it's been wonderful. I'm excited to hear what your update is on the ceramics program.

### **CERAMICS UPDATE**

Executive Director Romes reported that staff evaluated several options for housing the ceramics program, including existing Park District facilities, adding on to the New West Ridge Community Center, and partnerships with local organizations. Staff determined that the Danny Cunniff South Shelter is the only Park District facility that could potentially accommodate the program. Accordingly, the Park District engaged Williams Architects to conduct a Space Feasibility Evaluation of the Danny Cunniff South Shelter to determine program compatibility, identify required modifications, develop a construction timeline, and provide a cost estimate. Demolition of the West Ridge Center is scheduled to begin in May. If approved, programming at the Danny Cunniff South Shelter would not commence until 2027. As feasibility results and subsequent Board consideration and approval are still pending, it remains uncertain whether the shelter can ultimately house the ceramics program; therefore, the Park District established a partnership with the Art Center of Highland Park to provide alternative programming opportunities.

Vice President Freeman reported that the ceramics program is part of the Comprehensive Master Planning Discussions. The new West Ridge Community Center didn't have the ability to accommodate a number a items including offices for Administrative Staff, a gymnasium, and the ceramics program. The Park Board of Commissioners and staff feel it's critical to explore ways to keep the ceramics program within the park district, since the feedback from participants regarding the program being offered at the Art Center of Highland Park had several concerns, notably the Art Center could not accommodate what you are accustomed to. Overall, the Park Board is well invested into exploring the possibility of moving the program to the Danniff Cunniff South Shelter, it's in a great location by the park with parking.

Commissioner Beck reported that the Park Board has not taken this subject lightly and this topic has been on the radar since construction of the new West Ridge Community Center began. While there will still be a gap in services, the Park Board feels that relocating the ceramics program to the Danniff Cunniff South Shelter is the quickest solution, so the feasibility study was approved to see if the space could work. Yes, it's an investment to look at the building, but the Board feels it's important.

President Grossberg reported that the Park Board approved taking budgetary funds so Williams Architects could conduct a Space Feasibility Evaluation of the Danny Cunniff South Shelter to determine program compatibility, identify required modifications, and develop a construction timeline. Hopefully this shows the Park Board's commitment to the program and its participants. You have been a steady presence here and when people come to me with issues, I ask that they get a few people and speak at the public meeting of the Park Board. This is the best way to get the attention of the Park Board, and you have been heard. I am also a Board member at the Art Center of Highland Park, so you have found friendly people that are artistic and not all about athletics. The arts are a huge part of what we believe in here in the park district. You have a sympathetic ear from us. You should be hopeful that staff and board will continue working to find a solution.

**PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

Public comment reopened. President Grossberg reviewed the process for public comment, noting that the Park Board will not necessarily be able to answer any questions asked. If you would like answers to your questions, please contact Executive Director, Brian Romes.

***Sandra Tepper***  
***2086 St. Johns Ave, Highland Park, IL***

Would like to know when programming must conclude at the existing West Ridge Center.

Executive Director Romes reported that West Ridge Center must be unoccupied as of May 4, 2026, so programming will conclude sometime in April.

***Wendy Griffiths***  
***1024 Marion Ave, Highland Park, IL***

When you receive the findings from the Space Feasibility Evaluation how will you be sharing that information and what is the process for ceramics program participants to learn what you have learned from the study?

Executive Director Romes reported that the findings will be brought to the Park Board at a Regular, Workshop or a Committee Meeting. Staff have a commitment to let ceramics participants know when an update will be on a future public meeting agenda.

Will those meetings be in the new building.

If an update is available in April, the public meeting will be at West Ridge Center. Meetings after April will be at the new West Ridge Community Center.

***Irene Minkov***  
***744 Marion Ave, Highland Park, IL***

I have been with the program for over 35 years. My kids went through this program. I am upset and disappointed that you are not keeping the program. This is the only adult art program in the district. Glencoe, Lake Forest, and Northbrook Park Districts all have their own programs. I hate seeing our people leaving the program and having to go somewhere else.

Was it considered to build onto the Danny Cunniff South Shelter, or is this building being taken as is.

The program acquired several items, what is the plan for those items since West Ridge Center is being demolished.

Chris Plummer would be a great asset; they would love for Chris to continue to lead the program in its new home.

***Jaclyn Lerman***  
***1418 Ferndale Ave, Highland Park, IL***

I Started the ceramics program in June of 2025. It's my weekly highlight. A huge plus has been having a free studio to use anytime the building is open. I have found the most friendly, kind, and helpful community. My husband also started the program. It would be a real disservice to the community if this program no longer continues.

***Karen Meyer***  
***1765 Heather Ln, Highland Park, IL***

Love the fact that there are all ages in this group. It's been a wonderful growing experience. The feeling of community is such warmth, fun, and helping each other. I have lived in highland park all my life. Raised my children here. West Ridge Center has been part of my life and my kids. Ceramics has been a wonderful asset to what I have been doing, my profession is very different from something like ceramics. I thought about quitting, since this program is so out of the box for me. Time flies when you're in the studio, which makes this program so unique. She agrees with Irene and would like Chris to lead the program in its new home.

***Tina Kelly***  
***435 Clavey Ln, Highland Park, IL***

Most disappointed in the lack of communication. It felt like the decisions were made and program participants found out about that decision by default. I ask that you please keep us updated after the review of the Space Feasibility Evaluation. We do appreciate the urgency that we are sensing now.

What is the square footage of the Danny Cunniff South Shelter and would the whole building become a designated space for ceramics.

**UPDATES TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK POLICIES FOR 2026**

Director Hall reported that the Park District has an Employee Handbook to establish and communicate our agency's mission, values, employee policies, and benefits offerings to employees. The Employee Handbook is accessible to all employees. Every year, staff reviews content to ensure policies are up to date with legal requirements, to include a compliance review consistent with Federal and Illinois employment law, and standard practice. A summary of proposed updates to the Employee Handbook is listed below.

- **Introductory section – Just a Bit of Park District History**  
This is the introductory narrative in the Employee Handbook. The facility name for Fitness Club & Recreation Center is updated to Park Fitness.
- **5.1 Safety and Security**  
The Park District revised and implemented a new Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in December 2025. The new EOP incorporates the standards set by the I Love Guys Foundation using the

Standard Response Protocol (SRP) as the Park District's consistent emergency response protocol. The Park District's EOP now aligns with that of School District 112. Policy language is updated to reflect the recently implemented EOP.

- **5.5 Technology Acceptable Use Policy**

This policy is updated to include language for amendments to The Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA). The law outlines that an employee may use employer-provided equipment to record domestic violence, sexual violence, gender violence, or any other crime of violence committed against the employee or a family or household member of the employee. An employer may not discriminate against employees for using equipment for these purposes, and cannot prohibit the employee from accessing any videos, recordings, or pictures related to these various crimes. The added language to this policy allows for more employee rights as aligned with legal requirements.

- **6.3 Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund**

Added language to policy to encourage employees to create an IMRF member account on the IMRF website in addition to contacting customer service through phone. This is added based on the IMRF's preferred communication channel with members.

- **6.7 Employee Participation in Programs and Use of Facilities**

Added language to outline the Park District's current benefit-review procedures for transparency. Additions to the policy are, *Program administration guidelines are reviewed at least annually by each operational program area and the Human Resources Department, with approval from the Executive Director or their designee. Program administration guidelines and eligibility are subject to change with or without notice.*

- **7.4 Holidays**

Added clarifying language under the Compensation for Holidays Worked sub-section. The added language offers clarification with no change to policy administration.

- **7.5 Bereavement Leave**

This policy is updated to include language for amendments to the Illinois Military Leave Act (IMLA). Added language allows for some paid bereavement leave for qualifying employees to perform military funeral honors detail.

- **7.8 Parental Leave**

Added clarifying language to the policy to ensure consistent administration over time. The policy was newly written and implemented effective January 1, 2025. In accordance with the intent of the policy and how it was communicated to the Board of Commissioners during Policy Meetings in 2025, administrative language is updated to match current practices.

- **7.10 Military Leave**

This policy is updated to include language for amendments to the Illinois Service Member Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (ISERRA). Added language updates rules and guidelines for how concurrent compensation and differential compensation may be administered during a military leave of absence.

It was the consensus of the Park Board of Commissioners to place the updated policies on the consent agenda at the February 25, 2026 Regular Meeting.

**REJECTION OF THE 2026 PARK FITNESS LOCKER ROOM RENOVATION BID**

Director Smith reported that the Park District of Highland Park received seven sealed bids on Friday, December 19, 2025 for materials and labor to complete the 2026 Park Fitness Locker Room Renovation. Work is scheduled to occur late May through early August 2026.

Six of the bidders, including the low bidder, were not Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Pre-Qualified Contractors for Swimming Facilities as required under the IDPH permit for this project. Staff provided the low bidder an opportunity to meet this requirement, but they were unable to. Staff have re-bid the project.

Staff recommend the Park Board of Commissioners reject all 2026 Park Fitness Locker Room Renovation Bids.

A motion was made by Vice President Freeman and seconded by Commissioner Greenberg to reject all 2026 Park Fitness Locker Room Renovation Bids

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** Commissioner Labrador

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**CONSIDERATION TO APPROVE THE 2026 PARK FITNESS LOCKER ROOM RENOVATION REBID**

Director Smith reported that the Park District of Highland Park released an Invitation for Bids on January 27, 2026 for the 2026 Park Fitness Locker Room Renovation Re-Bid. Renovation is broken into:

- A. Base Scope, new finishes include: flooring, wall tile, ceilings and light fixtures, new plumbing and shower accessories, and new glass door partitions.

B. Alternates

- 1) Grooming, Stations/Lavatories, Seating, and Storage Room
- 2) Sauna
- 3) Entryway Improvements

The Park District received three bids on February 9, 2026, and provided a summary of the bid results.

A motion was made by Commissioner Greenberg and seconded by Vice President Freeman to authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Kandu Construction Inc. for the Base Bid and Alternates 1 and 2 for the 2026 Park Fitness Locker Room Renovation Bids.

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Vice President Freeman

**Nay:** President Grossberg

**Absent:** Commissioner Labrador

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

**CONSIDERATION FOR AN ART SCULPTURE ON PARK PROPERTY**

Manager Schwartz reminded the Park Board that the City of Highland Park is considering potential locations for the “Miss Nitro” art sculpture at Brown Park or Lincoln Place Park. The City owns the sculpture and will make the final determination regarding its location.

The Park District will host two neighborhood community meetings to gather public input:

- Brown Park meeting on February 23 at 5:30 p.m. at the Edgewood Middle School Library
- Lincoln Place Park meeting on February 26 at 5:30 p.m. at the Edgewood Middle School Library

The primary objective of the meetings is for staff to listen to neighborhood feedback, including residents’ visions for their parks and how the potential relocation of “Miss Nitro” may enhance or conflict with those visions.

Staff will compile the feedback and share it with the Park Board.

**CONSTRUCTION PROJECT UPDATES**

***A. New Facility and Site Improvements at West Ridge Park***

Manager Schwartz highlighted recent progress exterior wall assembly, dry wall installation, painting, building trellis, transformer installation, window/glass installation, and under drain installation, ballfield fence foundation and posts for the ball field, and courtyard masonry throughout the site.

Additionally, Manager Schwartz reported that the last day of programs at West Ridge Center is May 01. Target operations start at the West Ridge Community Center on May 04 along with demolition start for West Ridge Center.

***B. Lincoln Park Improvements Project***

Manager Kutscheid reported that playground and shelter installations are complete, the rubber base surface has been laid, the pedestrian connection path from Green Bay Road is complete, and the ballfield has been seeded. Once snow melts, the contractor will finish final touches, conduct a safety check, and remove the construction fence. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for spring 2026.

**REVIEW OF VOUCHERS**

Director Peters reported there were two remarkable checks, one for D and J Landscape Inc. for Rosewood Park renovations the other for gymnastics equipment for West Ridge Community Center.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD**

None.

**CLOSED SESSION**

A motion was made by Commissioner Beck, seconded by Vice President Freeman to adjourn into Closed Session for discussion of Section 2(c)5: the purchase or lease of real estate including discussion on whether a certain parcel of property should be acquired; Section 2(c) 11: litigation against or on behalf of the District or where the District finds that an action is probable or imminent; Section 2(c)12: the establishment of reserves or settlement of claims as provided in the Local Governmental and Governmental Employees Tort Immunity Act, if otherwise the disposition of a claim or potential claim might be prejudiced, or the review or discussion of claims, loss or risk management information, records, data, advice or communications from or with respect to any insurer of the public body or any intergovernmental risk management association or self insurance pool of which the public body is a member;

**Roll Call:**

**Aye:** Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

**Nay:** None

**Absent:** Commissioner Labrador

**Abstain:** None

**Motion Carried**

The meeting adjourned into Closed Session at 7:47 p.m.

The meeting reconvened into Open Session at 8:12 p.m.

**ACTION FROM CLOSED SESSION IF ANY**

President Grossberg reported that the Park Board of Commissioners met in Closed Session under Section 2(c)5: the purchase or lease of real estate including discussion on whether a certain parcel of property should be acquired; Section 2(c) 11: litigation against or on behalf of the District or where the District finds that an action is probable or imminent; Section 2(c)12: the establishment of reserves or settlement of claims as provided in the Local Governmental and Governmental Employees Tort Immunity Act, if otherwise the disposition of a claim or potential claim might be prejudiced, or the review or discussion of claims, loss or risk management information, records, data, advice or communications from or with respect to any insurer of the public body or any intergovernmental risk management association or self insurance pool of which the public body is a member;

No action was taken.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Commissioner Beck and seconded by Vice President Freeman and approved by a unanimous vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Roxanne Hejnowski*

Roxanne Hejnowski, Assistant Secretary