



**PROSPECT HEIGHTS PARK DISTRICT REPORT FOR
COMPLIANCE WITH DECENNIAL COMMITTEES ON LOCAL
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY ACT**

**PROSPECT HEIGHTS PARK DISTRICT'S
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY
RECOMMEND FOR APPROVAL ON OCTOBER 22, 2024**

**PROSPECT HEIGHTS PARK DISTRICT'S
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
APPROVAL ON NOVEMBER 19, 2024**

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I. Purpose

The Prospect Heights Park District ("Park District") formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on March 23, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the "Committee").

II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

- Tim Jones, Board of Commissioners, President
- Ellen Avery, Board of Commissioners, Vice President
- Betty Cloud, Board of Commissioners, Secretary
- Eric Kirste, Board of Commissioners, Treasurer
- Paul Fries, Board of Commissioners
- Steve Messer, Board of Commissioners
- Karl Jackson, Board of Commissioners
- Marianne Kerr, resident
- Allison Kirby, resident
- Travis Hoying, resident
- Ray Doerner, Superintendent of Recreation
- Christina Ferraro, Executive Director

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
• July 25, 2023	7:00PM at Gary Morava Recreation Center
• April 23, 2024	6:30PM at Gary Morava Recreation Center
• October 22, 2024	6:30PM at Gary Morava Recreation Center

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's website <https://phparks.org/board-meetings/> or upon request at the Park District's administrative office, 104 West Camp McDonald Road, Prospect Heights IL 60070

IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1967. All Illinois park districts, including the Park District, are governed by the Park District Code, 70 ILCS 1205/1 *et seq.*

Having a separate and distinct taxing body for parks, recreation, and conservation within the local community, which operates apart from general purpose governments, is extremely beneficial to the community for many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Park District is governed by a board of seven commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the park district and are elected at the Consolidated Election in odd-numbered years. Pursuant to state law, commissioners are non-partisan and serve without compensation.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Having a dedicated board to oversee these essential facilities, programs, and services provides the community with increased access to their elected representatives and allows those elected representatives to remain focused solely on those facilities, programs, and services. This is contrasted with general purpose governments where elected representatives are responsible for broad oversight on a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.
- **Increased transparency.** Having a dedicated unit of local government to provide park and recreation services also improves the relationship between the park district and its residents because of the transparency and openness related to the board and park district operations. Having detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual units of government are responsible for providing specified services like park districts, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed. Additionally, these items and budgetary decisions are subject to more scrutiny by locally elected officials than is the case with larger, multi-purpose governments with a multitude of departments.
- **Protection of revenues.** Because the Park District is a separate unit of local government, the revenues it generates can only be used for park district purposes. This assurance is contrasted with general purpose governments like cities, villages, and counties that provide a multitude of services such as fire, police, public works, economic development, etc., where revenues that are generated specifically for parks and recreation can be expended on these other services with limited, if any, input from voters.

- **Protection of assets.** Public parks and other real property owned by the park district is held in trust for the residents of the park district, and, subject to very limited exceptions, can only be sold or transferred if residents approve of the sale or transfer by a referendum. This is contrasted with general purpose units of government, which have authority to sell or dispose of property by a vote of the governing board.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Park District does more with much fewer funding options. Unlike other units of local government that receive direct state funding, and income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel and other numerous taxes, the Park District's only tax revenues come from a modest portion of a resident's overall property tax bill. In fact, despite its limited funding options, the Park District share is only eight percent of the local tax bill.

For transparency's sake, the Park District includes accounts payable, financial reports, and staff reports in the monthly board packet that is posted online. Board meeting agendas & minutes, financial reports, budgets, mission statement, contact information, hours of operation, employment opportunities, capital project updates, and park board actions are posted on the website (www.phparks.org). The Park District Directory (<https://phparks.org/park-district-directory/>) is also posted within its facilities. The Park District will work to continually improve so residents can feel confident about the stewardship of their tax dollars.

We have reviewed the following, non-exhaustive list of laws, policies, training materials, and other documents applicable to the Park District in order to evaluate our compliance and to determine if any of the foregoing should be amended.

- Park District Code, 70 ILCS 1205/1 et seq.
- Illinois Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/1 et seq.)
- Open Meetings Act re: policy on public comment at public meetings
- Designation of OMA officer (5 ILCS 120/1.05(a))
- All Board Members have completed OMA Training (5 ILCS 120/1.05(b))
- Schedule of Regular Meetings of the Board (5 ILCS 120/2.03)
- Illinois Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.)
- Designation of FOIA Officer (5 ILCS 140/3.5(a))
- FOIA Officer Training (5 ILCS 140/3.5(b))
- Computation and Retention of FOIA Requests (5 ILCS 140/3.5(a))
- Posting Other Required FOIA Information (5 ILCS 140/4(a); 5 ILCS 140/4(b))
- List of Types or Categories of FOIA Records under Park District Control (5 ILCS 140/5)
- Periodic Meetings to Review Closed Meeting Minutes (5 ILCS 120/2.06(d))
- IMRF Total Compensation Postings (5 ILCS 120/7.3)

- Designation of Whistleblower Auditing Official (50 ILCS 105/4.1 et seq.)
- All applicable officials have filed statement of economic interests (5 ILCS 420/4A-101; 5 ILCS 420/4A-101.5 et seq.)
- Sexual harassment prevention training (775 ILCS 5/2-109(C))
- State Ethics Laws, including, but not limited to the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act (5 ILCS 430/1-1 et seq.)

V. List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Park District works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at the least possible cost. One of the many ways the Park District achieves this goal is by partnering with neighboring park districts, school districts, other units of local government within or near the community, the State, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Park District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

1. Membership in Special Recreation Association

The Park District is part of the Northwest Special Recreation Association (NWSRA). Special recreation associations are a form of intergovernmental cooperation among units of local government that are authorized under the Illinois Constitution, the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, the Park District Code, and the Municipal Code. Their formation is rooted in a fundamental belief and recognition that "Recreation is for Everyone." They are shining examples of local government efficiency.

By partnering together, local communities can effectively and efficiently deliver more successful program opportunities to community members who have special needs. Furthermore, by participating in the NWSRA, the Park District networks with other local governments to provide many more program opportunities for our community members who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in the NWSRA's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

The Park District and the NWSRA also achieve efficiency by utilizing existing facilities that are owned and operated by the NWSRA's members, including the Park District. Utilizing these existing facilities allows the NWSRA to deliver services to its member communities at a lower cost. Currently the Park District provides the NWSRA access to the following facilities for their program offerings: Gary Morava Recreation Center, Lions Pool, and Old Orchard Country Club

The NWSRA also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for the Park District programs or inclusive programming. The NWSRA collects information on the registered participant and determines what support is needed for that participant to be successful in this inclusive setting or the Park District program. This could include additional training of the supervisory staff, additional support staff, the use of adaptive equipment, behavior management, and/or other measures that will assist in the successful participation of this individual in the Park District program. Although success may not look the same for everyone, the NWSRA works with the Park District's staff to ensure the best possible results for all the participants in the program. The Park District's cost of providing these services would be much greater without its participation and partnership in the NWSRA.

In 2023, the NWSRA successfully served 3561 residents in 2350 programs. The NWSRA also supported 113 participants (5 in inclusive programs) that were provided by the Park District.

The Park District is very proud of the ongoing collaboration with the NWSRA. By working cooperatively with other local governments, not only are we better able to collectively serve all citizens within our communities, including persons with disabilities, but we are able to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

2. Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts and conservation groups.

There is a Partner Resident Agreement with River Trails Park District and Mount Prospect Park District so that a resident of any of the three districts is considered a Partner Resident of the other two park districts and is therefore able to enroll in classes or programs at resident rates.

The Prospect Heights Park District and School District 23 entered into an intergovernmental cooperation agreement to save the taxpayers money by sharing the use of properties owned by District 23 and the Prospect Heights Park District in a manner that the facilities may be utilized to their fullest capacity. Part of this agreement includes that all inhabitants who reside within School District 23 boundaries shall be considered partner residents and will not be required to pay non-resident fees. In the spirit of community, Park District staff volunteer to conduct mock interviews for junior high school students. The Park District also provides raffle prizes for student incentives and PTO fundraisers such as fitness room and pool admissions, etc.

3. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government

The Park District has an intergovernmental agreement with Prospect Heights Library District governing the shared use of an electric sign that promotes the programs of both agencies. The Library maintains a collection of books in the recreation center. We also work closely on the Story Walk®, Holiday Trolley Express, the Library end of Summer Reading party, paperback giveaways, and much more. The Park District provides raffle prizes for reader incentives such as fitness room and pool admissions, etc.

The Park District has an intergovernmental agreement with the City of Prospect Heights for (1) an established TIF District and the use of tax incremented financing by the City within the TIF District to redevelop Muir Park

(2) for Stormwater Storage at Somerset Park.

(3) to transfer property to the Park District to enlarge Tully Park. Per the MWRD Flood-Prone Property Acquisition Program, the City participated in the program and at its completion, and the property restored, the City conveyed the property to Park District for the expansion of Tully Park.

The Park District participates in a city-wide "Trustee Open House" where the board members of local government agencies come together and meet each other and establish relationships that can lead to future cooperation and inspiration.

4. Joint Purchasing Program Agreements

The Park District participates in joint purchasing cooperatives pursuant to the Governmental Joint Purchasing Act (30 ILCS 525/0.01 et seq.) thereby saving taxpayer dollars through economies of scale. The Park District is a member of Sourcewell and OMNIA: cooperative purchasing organizations to assist government agencies in operating more efficiently by saving time and money during the procurement process while keeping taxpayer dollars within the community. These contracts cover a wide range of goods, including equipment, office supplies, and technology.

5. Partnerships or agreements with athletic organizations that operate sports.

The Park District has an agreement with Prospect Heights Wheeling Youth Baseball and Softball (PHYBS) to offer and promote baseball and softball as a supplement to the Park District programming. PHYBS is a separate body of volunteers that operate the baseball and softball leagues for five hundred local children. This group not only volunteers its time but its resources as it also contributed money towards projects i.e. batting cage, rebuilding fields, and installing sprinklers. The Park District maintains fields and is reimbursed for lights, water, and materials.

6. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits

Prospect Heights Park District has a working relationship with the Morton Arboretum as they administer the Urban & Community Forestry Grants from the USDA Forest Service and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Over several years, the Park District has been fortunate to have been awarded dollars to plant seventy trees on park district properties, to create an inventory of public trees on park district properties and an urban forest management plan. The Morton Arboretum is considered a partner to assist with its expertise and connecting the District to other partners such as TreeKeepers.

The Park District has an agreement with Openlands, an Illinois not-for-profit land conservation organization and leadership members of Prospect Heights TreeKeepers. Openlands expanded its TreeKeepers program, allowing the use of the name, registered trademark, program best practices and models and coordination of the TreeKeepers to increase local public involvement in long term tree stewardship through community, tree care events and education. Treekeepers lead volunteers in public spaces: mulching, pruning, planting, inventorying, etc. The Park District supports these activities with mulch, tools and facilities. This agreement provides significant increase in advocating and maintaining trees in the community.

7. Partnerships with for profit organizations

The Park District has a 20-year lease agreement with ComEd to maintain and use four miles of right-of-way property for a bike path/ trail for pedestrians and bicyclists,

together with a grassy open recreational area for its restoration of natural prairie habitat. There are no fees charged by ComEd for this lease. The Park District maintains the asphalt path, interpretive signage and mows 2500 acres of grass. The walking and bicycle network connectivity is all about creating seamless, comfortable routes for walkers and cyclists. It is about making walking and biking accessible and enjoyable. The grassy open area has been restored to its natural prairie habitat by the previously mentioned PHNRC. ComEd has also worked with the PHNRC on the installation of two honey beehives placed along this path. The honey produced by the bees is donated to a local food pantry.

The Park District is a member of the Greater Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. This membership offers numerous benefits (such as visibility, networking opportunities, referrals, etc.) and keeps staff on top of important, ever-changing issues and trends within the community and local marketplace. This has been helpful in marketing programs and attracting sponsors.

8. Informal cooperation with nonprofits

The Prospect Heights Garden Club is a very active service organization in the community. The objective of the club is to be beneficial, charitable and educational to the community, conducive to the well-being of the environment and supportive of the cultivation of nature's beauty. The Garden Club meets at the recreation center and plays an integral role in several community celebrations in the community throughout the year such as the holiday tree lighting, arbor day, and community days.

The Rotary Club of River Cities serves Mount Prospect, Des Plaines and Prospect Heights. This Club donates scholarship funds and funding for trees at the Park District. In keeping with one of Rotary International's goals to support literacy, the Rotary Club of River Cities donated permanent signage for the StoryWalk® at the Nature Preserve in Prospect Heights, a project of the local library and park districts in 2019. The children's stories are changed quarterly, and families can walk along the gravel path and read to their child or have their child read to them. The community can enjoy this free service every day of the year.

The Prospect Heights Lions Club has provided significant support to the Prospect Heights Park District. In 1966, the Lions Club built & staffed the original swimming pool. A year later the Park District was formed by referendum, and, in 1968, the District purchased the swimming pool from the Lions Club. Later they also provided funding for the accessible front entrance at the Gary Morava Recreation Center. In addition, the Lions Club provides scholarships annually for Prospect Heights youth to attend summer camp who otherwise would not be able to afford it. The Lions Club's largest fundraiser is held at the Park District annual Block Party: they sell rubber ducks that "race down the water slide" at the Lions Pool.

VI. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of volunteers. One way in which the Park District reduces the burden on taxpayers is using volunteers. Last year, five individuals volunteered 1,978 hours of service at the golf course. At the recreation center, the following programs received a significant amount volunteer hour: Youth Sports 486 hours, KinderStop 240 hours, Special Events 28 hours, and Block Party 16 hours.

Youth employment. The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed ninety-five youth. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workforce.

Prospect Heights Parks Foundation. Last year, the Foundation raised \$1,400 in private donations.

Collaboration with other park districts on best practices. Because park districts are not in competition with one another, they are more willing than the private sector to share best practices. These best practices help to avoid unnecessary costs and deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue. Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Park District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Park District is an economic engine for the community and generates much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, our Park District does not receive any of these revenues. Also, unlike Illinois cities, villages, counties, and school districts that received billions of dollars in direct financial assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Park District did not receive any such direct federal aid. Our Park District also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or General State Aid (GSA) that these same cities, villages, counties, and school districts receive through the State budget.

Instead, the Park District provides all the programs, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from **non-tax sources** such as memberships, program registrations, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Park District may be obtained by residents on the website:

Annual budget and appropriation ordinance

https://phparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-BUDGET-APPROPRIATIONS-ORDINANCE_executed_PHPD.pdf

Agenda and minutes

<https://phparks.org/board-meetings/>

Annual audit

<https://phparks.org/financial-information/>

Statement of Receipts and Disbursements are listed in monthly board reports which can be found on the website (See <https://phparks.org/board-meetings/>)

Park District Ordinances

<https://phparks.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/01/Ordinances.pdf>

Code of Conduct

<https://phparks.org/code-of-conduct/>

Long range plans

<https://phparks.org/master-plan-surveys-studies-reports/>

The following information about the Park District may be obtained by residents upon request at the Park District's administrative office, 104 West Camp McDonald Road, Prospect Heights IL 60070

- Personnel Policy Manual
- Board of Commissioners Policy Manual
- Emergency Action Plan
- Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan
- Annual tax levy
- Capital Improvement and Replacement Plan
- ADA Transition Plan

The Park District offers residents many opportunities to provide feedback. These include:

- Monthly board meetings
- The Park District's annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is available in tentative form at least 30 days prior to its adoption at an open meeting of the Park District board. Additionally, at least one public hearing is held prior to final action, and notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week prior to the hearing.
- The Park District's annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Park District board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The Park District follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law prior to the adoption of this annual tax levy.
- Residents email, phone or visit park district facilities to speak with staff.
- Staff provide users with program evaluations annually for summer camp, swim team, preschool, Kinderstop, etc.
- Public meetings were held throughout the master planning process in 2018.
- A feasibility study was conducted in 2020 with public input to assess the current condition of recreation center and determine if the recreational needs of the residents can be met by renovating/replacing and/or expanding the recreation center or building a new recreation center at another location. There were workshops with staff, board members, stakeholders and users.
- A facilities survey was conducted in 2021 with public input to assess viewpoints regarding plans to repair/renovate and/or replace the pool and the recreation center. A stratified random sample of 4,030 households within the Park District boundaries was generated.
- In 2022 there were pre-referendum meetings held with the community. There were facility user focus groups to review programming needs. There were community meetings to obtain community feedback regarding pool and recreation center designs. Before the November 2022 election, facilitated discussions and more than a dozen community presentations were held to solicit feedback and educate residents about the referendum and its tax impacts.
- A feasibility study regarding pickleball and tennis courts was conducted in 2024 with public input to review the impacts of potential court repairs, updated court layouts, and construction of additional courts within the Park District boundaries.

VII. District Awards and Recognition

The District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has awarded the Park District with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting each year for decades. This demonstrates that the Park District staff go beyond the minimum requirements of generally accepted accounting principles to prepare annual comprehensive financial reports that evidence the spirit of transparency and full disclosure and then to recognize individual governments that succeed in achieving that goal.

The Illinois Association of Park Districts presented the Prospect Heights Park District with the Best of the Best Award in 2023 for the Arts in the Park Award. The Park District was recognized for its support of the arts and for partnering with local artists to enhance the quality of life in the community.

Park District staff are trained in the following: Sexual Harassment Prevention, Cybersecurity Fundamentals, Defensive Driver, Extreme Weather Driving, Playground Maintenance Course Mandated Reporter, OSHA: General Industry Safety and Health Avoid Spear Phishing Threat, Blood Borne Pathogens, Confined Space, Fire Extinguisher use, First Aid CPR AED

The Park District staff hold the following certifications and licenses

- BASSET trained: Beverage Alcohol Sellers and Servers Education
- Diving Safety Train-the-Trainer
- First Aid CPR AED Instructor
- Food Protection Manager
- Food Safety Manager
- Illinois Food Allergens
- Certified Parks and Recreation Executive
- Certified Parks and Recreation Professional
- Pesticide Applicator
- Pesticide Operator
- Playground Safety Inspector
- Pool and Spa Operator
- Pool Operator
- Illinois UST Class A/B Operator
- Lifeguard Management
- NRPA Marketing and Communication Certificate
- PGA Professional Golfers Association of America
- Open Meetings Act (OMA)
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

VIII. Benefits and Services

The Park District serves the entire community from the youngest child to the oldest adult and all ages in between. It does so in a variety of ways.

1. Facilities

The Park District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

- Old Orchard Country Club (one hundred acres) golf course, bar & grill and banquets for up to 250 people.
- Gary Morava Recreation Center (located in Lions Park) includes a fitness center, fitness studio, racquetball court, dance studio, meeting rooms, sauna and gymnasium
- Lions Park (10 acres) includes playground, tennis and pickleball courts, Lions ball field with bleachers, Storywalk, and pavilion
- Lions Pool (located in Lions Park) is an outdoor pool
- Country Gardens Park (9 acres) includes basketball court, sand volleyball court, pickleball and tennis courts, playground, shelter, soccer field
- John Muir Park (4.5 acres) includes softball / baseball field, walking path soccer field
- School Street Park (3 acres) includes a playground and green space
- Izaak Walton Park (4 acres) includes observation deck, natural area, board walks connecting the area and a shelter
- Claire Lane Park (0.5 acre) includes a playground, tennis/pickleball court and shelter
- Jaycee Park (1 acre) includes a playground and sand play area
- Tully Park (2.0 acres) includes a natural area
- Rosemary Roth Park (0.5 acre) includes open space
- Wedgewood Park (0.5 acre) includes two playgrounds, basketball court, fitness station and shelter
- McDonald Field (1.3 acres) includes a field, bleachers, batting cages and equipment shed
- Kiwanis Park (0.67 acres) includes a playground and basketball court
- Somerset Park (26 acres) is green space
- Walnut Woods (8.5 acres) black walnut tree orchard and green space
- Nature Preserve (2.0 acres) stone bridge linking the uplands to the low land, interactive features for children and interpretive signage.
- Bike Path (4 miles) asphalt path, interpretive signage, natural prairie habitat, two honey beehives

2. Programs

The Park District offered the following programs last year. Registration numbers are also provided.

- Summer Camp - 5,046
- Active Adults - 1,320
- Dance - 654
- Preschool - 29
- Kinderstop - 233
- Kids Day Off - 447
- Swim Team - 45
- Tae Kwon Doe - 42
- Magic Classes - 22
- STEM Classes - 21
- Youth Basketball - 154
- Youth Volleyball - 38
- Youth Soccer - 119
- Yoga - 8
- Pilates - 22
- Racquetball - 1,042 reservations
- Tennis - 8
- Pickleball - 315 attendees
- Special Events - 784 attendees
- Block Party - Approximately 1,200 attendees
- National Night Out - 495 attendees
- Golf rounds 23,589
- Banquets 183

3. Additional Services

The Park District provided the following additional services to the community.

- Bi-weekly electronic newsletter emailed to 5,300 individuals
- Seasonal program guide mailed to 5,300 households three times year
- Seasonal senior newsletter mailed to 480 individuals three times year
- Seasonal active senior newsletter emailed to 3,100 individuals three times year
- Free Wi-Fi access throughout the recreation center and the clubhouse
- Upgrade the Park District's network and other technology on a regular basis (Wi-Fi access points, registration system, website updates, etc.)
- Public meeting rooms available for the public and local organizations
- Remodeled the golf course clubhouse interior in 2019 to enhance banquets
- Improved the interior of the recreation center in 2023

- During the COVID pandemic staff was flexible and adjusted to the imposed shutdowns, quickly switched to online and remote options for our programs and assisted the school district to be a remote learning site for students.
- This recreation center is a site for people who are ordered by a court to perform community service. The individuals designated to work with certain staff to complete their hours while helping the Park District staff with set up and take down of programs and events, cleaning the facility, removing trash, etc.
- The recreation center serves as heating/cooling center during extreme weather events for those without adequate heating / cooling in their homes.

4. Other Benefits

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact on the community is multi-faceted and far reaching. The parks, recreational programming, and other opportunities improve the community's overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing health care costs.

Before and after school programs and summer camps offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare options for working families during critical times when school is not in session. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime and provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth.

Recreation programs and parks provide social equity, ensuring that all residents have access and opportunity to benefit from parks and recreation services by removing physical and financial barriers. Scholarships are offered on a sliding scale to residents of the Park District based on financial need. Several health insurance plans include a fitness membership called "Silver Sneakers/Renew Active/Prime" which is free to the user and the Park District receives a reimbursement per person. The Park District facilities are maintained with guidance from the Americans with Disabilities Act ADA to remove physical barriers.

The Park District's open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.

Public parks tend to increase the property value of residential properties immediately adjacent to parks.

IX. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. By way of example, below are other units of local government that charge the Park District even though the Park District's taxpayers are also taxpayers of these other units of local government. Such fees and charges, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the park district's ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

- City of Prospect Heights sanitary sewer
- Village of Mount Prospect water for GMRC and OCCC
- Village of Mount Prospect food and beverage sales tax
- Village of Mount Prospect alarm fee
- Village of Mount Prospect business license
- Village of Mount Prospect vending machine license
- Secretary of State of State vehicle registration
- State of Illinois liquor licenses
- State Fire Marshall boiler inspections
- State Fire Marshall sprinkler inspection
- Cook County liquor license
- Cook County Public Health for pool inspection

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases, the unit of government assessing the fee benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax or other revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are necessary, general-purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the park district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Park District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees on the Park District not only leads to inefficiency, but it is also shortsighted.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited from charging more than their out-of-pocket costs associated with the activities covered by a fee that is assessed to another unit of local government with the same taxpayers. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. Eliminating local permit fees is a way to reduce administrative costs without impacting overall public revenue. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. Some communities such as the City of Prospect Heights recognize this and do not charge fees to other units. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

2. Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates are another cost driver. While the Park District recognizes that there are benefits to some of these mandates, modifications could help alleviate some of the burden to the park district.

A. Cook County Paid Leave Act. As of January 1, 2025, Park District employees can earn at least one (1) hour of paid leave for every forty (40) hours worked per county ordinance. This ordinance requires that all employers with employees in Cook County provide those employees with paid leave to be used for any reason. The financial impacts to the District may be \$75,000 - \$100,000 and are based upon part time and seasonal employees (maintenance, parks, servers/bartenders, grounds, office, guards, instructors, etc.) and the substitute employees when the others are on leave so business is not interrupted. It's an administrative project to track this for the District. This financial impact is significant to a small park district with a total operating budget of \$6million.

The County may amend this ordinance to exempt Park Districts. If not, this may affect staffing, budgets and operational procedures. The Park District may have to increase program fees which may make programs cost prohibitive and then be canceled due to lack of registration or decreasing the number of staff we have for lifeguards, summer camp, preschool program, etc. or decrease the hours of operation both of which affect the quality of the programs. The Park District must abide by PTEL and does not have the ability to raise these funds through other non-property tax methods. The Illinois state minimum wage rate will be \$15.00 per hour in 2025, as the Park District already competes for potential employees who are being offered higher wages at nearby grocery stores, fast food chains, etc.

B. Criminal Background Checks. All park districts are statutorily required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees pursuant to Section 8-23 of the Park District Code. The background checks must be done through the Illinois State Police (ISP). Last year, the park district spent \$4,500 for criminal background checks. The Park District does not recommend eliminating this mandate because it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of children and other park district patrons. However, the State should explore ways in which it could improve the current system and make it less costly for park districts to comply with the law.

The mandate also raises the fundamental question as to why one layer of government is forced to charge its taxpayers to comply with a State mandate when the State made the determination to impose the mandate. Put another way, if the State has determined that criminal background checks are necessary for public safety, the State should assist with compliance.

The Park District recommends studying whether there can be a more efficient background check process implemented through the ISP to reduce the time and expense it takes for background checks. Another suggestion is for ISP to waive the fee for checks on minors or waive all fees for name checks. If there is a "hit" from a name check, the fee could be charged for the more costly fingerprint check. Since it is a state

mandate, the fee structure for park districts should also be reviewed to determine whether the fee being charged exceeds the actual cost of doing the check and, if so, the ISP could consider reducing its cost to local governments.

C. Prevailing Wage. One way to reduce the burden on local government staff is to limit the prevailing wage requirement to larger capital contracts. This would free up tracking of the paperwork on small repairs and projects. One reason for creating a threshold requirement is the cost of the administrative burden relative to the cost of the actual project. For example, eliminating prevailing wage on smaller projects, e.g., those less than \$50,000, will result in more local bids and decrease the overall cost for these smaller public works projects.

D. Newspaper Publication. The newspaper is no longer the most effective way to provide notice. Websites are cheaper and reach more people. Permitting the park district to post the information on its website in lieu of newspaper publications would reduce costs.

3. Opportunities for Other Intergovernmental Agreements

IGA with the PHNRC

The Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission (PHNRC) is a commission of the City of Prospect Heights, reporting to the City Council and making recommendations for legislation and other actions that would pertain to the natural resources of the city. Their mission is to preserve, protect and restore natural areas and raise awareness of environmental issues affecting Prospect Heights Illinois. It is their goal to guide the community in natural open space preservation efforts and encourage private landowners to adopt land management practices that protect and enhance natural resources. They promote community awareness and education of environmental issues affecting Prospect Height's natural resources such as Emerald Ash Borer, storm water and flood management and the threat of invasive species. This is a volunteer network designed to enhance, restore and manage the natural areas and resources to maintain and improve their ecological health and biodiversity. During the year, they conduct work events where volunteers come together to participate in organized restoration projects. They welcome all volunteers – regardless of age, residence, etc. The Park District is working on an intergovernmental agreement with this conservation group as they provide volunteer hours and resources on park district properties: slough, ComEd Prairie, nature preserve, Tully Park, Heron Pond, Remnant Prairie, Remnant Sedge Meadow. Beyond shoreline restoration they also operate a native seed collection and greenhouse program, speakers' series at the library, workshops at the Park District summer camp, summer internship program and bird watching sessions

4. Opportunities for Savings such as Energy Efficiency Projects and the Illinois Century Network Act

ComEd Energy Efficiency Program/Rebate Program

The ComEd Energy Efficiency Program is an initiative aimed at helping business customers reduce their energy consumption and lower their utility bills. This program offers various incentives, rebates, and resources to encourage energy efficiency improvements. There are several key elements such as incentives for equipment upgrades, discounts & financial incentives including lighting, refrigeration, and HVAC upgrades at reduced or no cost. ComEd also provides support for renewable energy systems, such as solar panel installations, through specific programs. The Park District has benefited from the building retrofits

Illinois Century Network Act

Senator Julie Morrison's bill SB2631 amends the Illinois Century Network Act on or before June 30, 2028. The Department of Innovation and Technology offers free internet access through the Illinois Century Network and this amendment will include park districts on the list. The Prospect Heights Park District has been researching the cost to transition to fiber internet and this is a huge operating cost at a time when the District is struggling to fund other mandates such those previously mentioned and the increased FLSA thresholds all in addition to the growing capital needs. Moving the Park District from coax internet to fiber optics will cost about \$66,000 a year. This faster connectivity will make staff work more efficiently and patron use more enjoyable.

Dated: November 19, 2024

Signed:


Tim Jones, President, Prospect Heights Park District Board of Commissioners