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## **Maple Park Focus Group Meetings**

Meetings held: Park District of Oak Park, Hedges Administrative Center  
218 Madison St., Oak Park, Illinois  
Date: June 13, 2006

### **Focus Group Meeting #1, 1 p.m.** **Buildings and Grounds, Safety & Security**

#### **Comments made by attendees at the meeting**

##### Break in Fence along Harlem

- An issue of psychology and image for people both outside and inside of the park
- Reflects on maintenance – on its way to be fixed, bid and contract process delay
- Cars crash into and through fence on Harlem edge 2-3 times a year
- Both a safety and maintenance worry
- Car breakdowns, (in addition to cars crashing through the fence) are frequent on the Harlem edge of the park therefore the parkway edge is useful
- The long fence is an opportunity to add something artistic or aesthetic. The fence if we added color, could be an extraordinary entryway into Oak Park
- It would certainly be better than the gas station
- Fence on Harlem edge could become a testament to the Oak Park image if color or something playful was used
- It does not have to be a stand alone piece of artwork.
- We should work to add aesthetic content to all work carried out by the Village and the Park District.
- Potentially the various art commissions in Oak Park could assist.
- The possibility for color/imagery along Harlem would be nice – especially with so much regional traffic
- Views into the park are still necessary from Harlem for safety.
- Otherwise fence could be black like the one at Barrie so it looks more aesthetically pleasing
- The black fence at Barrie can be difficult to see through either as a result of its black color or maybe of a thicker gauge



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#### Homeless

- Homeless people often occupy southwest corner of park by the gas station and within the playground area - both have heavy vegetation cover and berming
- They are asked to move on by police but return and police do not have staff
- Overall visibility throughout the park is fine except in these two areas and some of the berms
- Most PADS shelters are closed over the summer with the exception of one at Lake and Kenilworth which is some distance away
- With summer temperatures many homeless people will sleep in Maple Park
- Panhandling on the southwest corner by the BP gas station is often a problem

#### Visibility and Lighting

- Visibility should be considered for 24 hours of the day
- Berms and topography limit visibility
- Southwest corner by gas station is difficult to see into as a result of berms and evergreens
- Central playground is difficult to see into as a result of high berms and mature plantings
- Playground is especially difficult to see into and becomes unsafe at night; needs to be well lit
- Park closes at 11 p.m. and playground closes at sundown
- The entire park could be better illuminated at night
- Lighting should not be distracting to traffic nor a problem for nearby residents
- Otherwise there is good visibility throughout the park from both Maple Ave. and Harlem

#### Activities for Older Children

- Activities for older children and teenagers are limited at Maple
- Barrie Park presents more to older children and teenagers – i.e. basketball
- They keep the rims inside and BB is set to the side and fenced
- Barrie Center is staffed while Maple Park is not
- If Maple will not have staff on site then additional activities should not require supervision

#### Vehicular Traffic and Parking

- Overflow parking from Salerno's Pizza often occupies both sides of Maple Ave. almost up to Fillmore Ave.
- Salerno's meets parking code so no change is expected
- T-ball games cause further parking buildup that often goes as far as the tennis courts
- Turning from the south end of Maple Ave. at Roosevelt is dangerous as it is a blind corner
- Turning east is nearly impossible and incredibly unsafe
- A car making a right turn has to creep out and make the turn at a slow speed onto Roosevelt where cars might be going up to 40 MPH
- There is a weave of traffic to the turn lanes at the intersection and the entire intersection needs to be redesigned



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- There has already been several accident reports at the corner
- There is a stop sign at Filmore but not at Harvard
- Mohr trucks are no longer allowed to drive on Maple Ave. as residents objected
- Are there bus stops by the park? Yes on Harlem

#### Biking and Pedestrian Traffic

- Biking to the park should be encouraged and dependence on cars reduced
- More bike racks should be added
- Village bike plan is in progress with the Chicago Bike Federation and should be completed in six months
- Village Board is making health, biking, walking, etc. a priority for the community in an effort to promote sustainability
- Maple has a lack of benches and sitting spaces
- The Village is looking at adding benches at appropriate locations throughout Oak Park
- It could also use a picnic area and picnic tables
- Seating could be used by the comfort station
- Sitting spaces should especially be incorporated for the elderly and physically challenged
- Walking on the existing Harlem sidewalk is unpleasant with the rush and noise of car traffic
- Sidewalk on Harlem which lies outside the fence of the park should be on the Maple Ave. side instead
- Do we want to encourage region ped. Traffic into a park?
- Currently, walking from one end of the park to the other is difficult and the paths are not continuous and are blocked by the tennis courts which results in park users having to walk on the street

#### Recreation

- Tennis courts get a lot of use
- Basketball court fell out of use many years ago
- Overflow concrete tennis court also no longer used. It was unpopular and dangerous – too close to the street
- Concern with change of grade in t-ball outfield (at a later meeting it was stated that this was not a problem for T- Ballers)
- A splash pad or other water feature would be nice (at a later meeting concern was expressed about maintenance and that a water feature would attract many non-residents)

#### Maple Park History



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- Park used to have shallow, asphalt wading pool on north end that doubled as a fun place to ride one's bike after they were emptied with the Polio scare
- North end also used to have a great rose garden off of Lexington
- Park used to have a foot patrol
- The park once was a railroad yard that connected to a station by the current post office

## **Maple Park**

### **Park District of Oak Park Staff**

#### **Focus Group Meeting #2, 3 p.m.**

#### **Comments made by attendees at the meeting**

##### Recreation facilities and maintenance

- Concrete tennis court was too close to street and an issue of safety
- Drainage throughout the park, as well as on the fields and baseball diamonds is fine
- Weak grass/erosion at center of open fields a result of pickup football and soccer games
- Unless garbage cans are chained down they are used as soccer goals and often left on field
- Tennis courts get good use
- Most recent lift was a couple of years back
- Vibrations from traffic on Harlem adds to wear and openings on courts' surface
- NW lighting tower is out and would be expensive to repair as conduit is underground

##### Playground

- Existing central playground is 6-7 years old
- Last time of construction a sub-line was hit and Forest Park lost electricity
- Shaded space in playground is enjoyed, trees are mature
- Timber is great shape
- Fence could be replaced

##### Gas Station

- A low plastic green fence on the south-edge of the park bordering the gas station collects garbage, keeps it out of the park but it then stays there and is not aesthetically pleasing
- A stone wall with screening vegetation on either side along the south end of the park could make clean-up easier and create a much better aesthetic
- Wall could be expensive but it would be a great solution
- As fast as the staff pick-up garbage on the Harlem edge more litter is blown or thrown



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#### Memorial Trees

- There are at least 24 memorial trees in the park
- Most are along the pathways throughout the park
- They can be moved but only with lots of hassle and stress
- Less people want locations for memorials close to Harlem

#### Historic precedence

- Is Maple a Jens Jensen park? (Altamanu Inc to investigate)
- Jensen may have worked on the park but it has been more than significantly altered since.
- It has been altered since the 50's
- Park District does not have an historic map of the park
- The Oak Park Historic Society may have info

#### Recreation

- The north-end of the park could be programmed for active rec.
- No, it is one of 5 designated passive areas in the Park system.
- I never see residents use it
- Residents use it for picnics particularly at weekends
- It is very beautiful but the noise from Harlem is very distracting
- People use the open spaces downtown to eat their lunch and can ignore the noise
- Residents may not agree but Maple Pk is under programmed in comparison to other parks
- There should be more opportunities and features for programs
- A shelter would provide a better place for many programs and could be a pleasant feature
- Possibilities for the shelter could include
  - Restrooms
  - Open walls for views into the park
  - A picnic space with tables and grills
  - Possibly a fireplace
  - Storage
- Grills are not allowed due to safety issues including discarded coals, fires in trash cans, children burning their feet and non-residents coming to the park specifically to grill. Asking them to leave is very problematic for staff.
- There is currently no signage regarding grilling at Maple
- The fields are in good shape except the center because of pick up games
- We should add a roll-hill on one of the central berms in the north end of the park
- A couple of pee-wee soccer fields could fit into the southern half of the park for use in the fall
- Fields should have multiple uses
- A sand volleyball court could be added
- We need warm up cages



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- If a measured/marked path loop was introduced into the park people would use it
- It would be difficult to get a complete perimeter trail but we could make two loops

#### Traffic Concerns

- The park could use a drop-off area by the t-ball diamonds
- Because the t-ball diamonds are so close to Maple children run out into the street
- Add vegetation behind the benches or by add a brick wall and ivy to emulate Wrigley Field
- Could speed bumps along Maple Ave. make the street safer?
- Oak Park does not use speed bumps, they can sometimes cause a car to lose control and veer off the street if one does not see them
- Many of Chicago's neighborhoods have speed bumps and they are all over Europe, surely they have dealt with the problems of liability
- Harlem Ave. is both an eyesore and source of heavy noise pollution
  - Vegetation would further screen Harlem but it barely has any effect on the noise and it could lessen visibility
  - Higher berms would screen Harlem and perhaps even absorb some of the noise but they would extend too far into the park
  - A serpentine wall, approximately 6 ft in height, would work best to breakup and reflect the noise and screen Harlem but it then does not allow for any visibility into the park and graffiti may result
  - Staggered rows of ginkgo trees would not solve the noise concern but they would screen Harlem from the inside of the park while still allowing for visibility into the park from a moving car on Harlem
  - Ginkgos, while slow-growing, are very urban-adaptable, salt tolerant plants that have great character when in bloom
  - There are rows of mature Ginkgo's further south on Harlem and they are splendid
- IDOT (Illinois Department of Transportation) has jurisdiction over Harlem Ave. and the western edge including the sidewalk and chain link fence
- IDOT could possibly fund the ginkgos or other vegetation on the western edge
- The fence on the Harlem-edge could include a guardrail to enhance safety from car traffic from that edge
- Alternatives to guardrails could be the Colorado or Wyoming rails which look nicer and accomplish the same task
- Boulders along the Harlem edge might be another option
  - One concern is that the boulders might bounce the cars back into traffic
  - The Mars factory on Oak Park Ave uses boulders
- Aside from being a magnet for cars, the existing Harlem fence collects lots of garbage

#### Service



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- Service vehicles have no big problems getting in/out of the park; they simply jump the curbs carefully
- A roll-door installed on the storage half of the comfort station would save hours for the grounds crew
- Curved walks are difficult to plow in deeper snows and the turf adjacent can be torn up as a result.
- We used to use a snow blower – not effective and tough work
- Could we add straight walks along the perimeter which we could plough and curved walks in the park that would not be ploughed
- Not in Oak Park. Residents demand that most of the walks are ploughed. It is very time consuming

#### Dog Park

- Proposed area for the dog park is just south of the tennis courts and includes the presently unused concrete pads. It will be set back from Maple Ave. and will have a landscaped buffer
- Close to the comfort station and restrooms
- The reuse of the old Basket Ball Court close to Harlem will actually improve the park
- Any possible noise from the dogs will be drowned out by Harlem
- Harlem noise pollution not a big ordeal for the dogs (participants at the Recreation Focus Group, meeting #3 disagreed. see minutes)
- What about attracting too many people to the park?
- The Baseball is in April, May, June after that parking should be ok
- Would need metal galvanized fencing
- Issues at Ridgeland include gates freezing during winter
  - Could we use vinyl – wouldn't make much difference

#### Planting

- Ornamental Crabs and Jack Pines apples are old and dying out
- Park District have been replacing them
- Crab apples, while hard to dispose of, create much of the character at the park
- People enjoy sitting and watching the various athletics from the shaded parts of the park



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**Maple Park**  
**Creative Play, Passive Space & Sports Areas**  
**Focus Group Meeting # 3, 7 p.m.**

**Comments made by attendees at the meeting**

**T-Ball and Softball Use**

- Diamonds are in good shape
- Added batting cages a few years ago
- The berms along the outfield are no problem
- Both diamonds are used for t-ball games and practices and the north diamond is used for girls' softball at the Jr. Bronco and Bronco levels
- While some T-ballers are able to hit it over the fence onto Harlem, most hits are less
- The north-end of Maple, considered to be one of the five passive areas of Oak Park is still used for practices everyday by the Royals t-ball team
  - No permits are issued for any area of the park except for the two diamonds
  - The passive areas are not supposed to house any athletics and a complaint is occasionally made
- Oak Park does not have enough baseball/t-ball fields
- Teams practiced at the far north-end of the park until a bird feeder installed
  - If the bird feeder was moved it could provide another space to practice
- Another t-ball diamond could be added at the far south-end of Maple and still leave enough room for a pee-wee soccer field
  - It is 30ft in between bases on a standard t-ball field
  - Pee-wee soccer and t-ball could not be played at the same time
- Batting cages were installed last year for safety purposes
- A stretched mesh lining placed in the batting cages could prevent bending of the back stop fence

**Universal Accessibility**

- Handicap parking spaces should be placed by the baseball fields
- There should be easy access to the restrooms from the street, baseball diamonds, and playground
- There needs to be a curb-cut at all walkways and especially the walk that leads to the restrooms
- The bathrooms are handicap accessible
- The restrooms should face the park from the other side
- Bocce ball is adaptable to ADA standards
- A bocce ball court is being added to Field Center
- West Suburban Recreation Association would be a good source on how to adapt it
- We need a full pathway system so that there is easy access to all facilities in the park



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- Kids move quickly between events; we need a proper pathway system so that the disabled can keep involved
- What about raised gardens?
- If there are people to maintain them. We like to have such facilities close to where seniors live and where there are existing facilities.

#### North/Passive Section of the Park

- Rose garden used to exist at north end off of Lexington
- A rose garden might work there today
  - Who would plant and to tend the roses?
  - Lots of maintenance brings up question of sustainability
  - We do not have staff
  - Public enthusiastic at first but after sometime or if the enthusiastic residents move the beds degenerate into a weed patch
- How many people use it as a passive space and how often?
- Mostly used on the weekend for picnics, napping, etc.
- Is there enough park space in Oak Park for such passive spaces and for artworks?
- No distaste for art, but maybe there is not enough room for it
- Becomes a question of scale
- Artwork does not have to be stand alone; it can be part of the park. The park benches on Harrison are still considered art
- Depends on your definition of art
- Ginkgos, if planted along Harlem edge, could wrap around north-end to unify the edge and screen Mohrs

#### Dog Park

- Proposed area for the dog park is just south of the tennis courts and includes the presently unused concrete pads. It will be set back from Maple Ave. and will have a landscaped buffer
- Dog park location at Maple creates use out of otherwise disused unpleasant spaces
- The dog park will actually improve the park
- Any possible noise from the dogs will be drowned out by Harlem
- The noise and traffic could be bad for the dogs. We should screen the view without causing a security concern
- Parking concern with dog owners, t-ball, and Salerno's
- The dog park at Ridgeland has not added a lot of traffic. Use is dispersed throughout the day.
- Ridgeland Common Dog Park is proof that a dog park does not create heavy traffic so parking would not be a major issue.
- Parking is a major issue for the community



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- Parking on Maple Ave for t-ball games and Salerno's goes north to tennis courts at the most
- Would trees and other plantings survive in Dog Park?
- Older trees for the most part survive but new trees do not unless protected
- There are ways of protecting the new trees and the dog park should be well landscaped
- A buffer of ginkgo trees along the Harlem edge of the dog park would be great
- If planted in staggered rows they would not completely block the view into the park
- The shade would be good

#### Tennis Courts

- Some say they are used a lot, others say hardly used at all
- Probably from different times of the day
- They block movement from one part of the park to the other
- Would taking away one court be okay?
- Courts might be moved
- Would be very expensive
- Must get a pathway through

#### Playground

- I like the fencing around the playground at Andersen and seating like at Fox
- Existing playground has a lack of visibility as it is overgrown
- Trees are mature and could be limbed up
- Probably is best suited for 2-8 year olds
- It could have a fence with gate surrounding the whole playground
- It has a partially fenced area now to protect kids from dashing out onto Harlem
- A new playground could be built in-between the baseball diamonds
- Parents could watch their young kids at the playground and at t-baller
- No baseballs are hit into that area, only chance is a ball overthrown to first and it would have to travel far and the trees act as barriers
- Existing playground is too far from baseball diamonds for parents and kids and is awkward to get to from the diamonds
- Playground, existing or new, could possibly use Nike Grind, made from recycled rubber soles
- Parks are trying to move away from using woodchips
- The Park District want to use rubber surface in all their play grounds but it is very expensive at the moment.
- The dugouts could also use it

#### Pedestrian Traffic



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- Sidewalk needs to be on east side of park versus on the Harlem side
- North or South loops would be great for walking or running
- Park and walks could be better lit with maybe solar lighting?

End of minutes