



Ridgeland Common Existing Conditions Study

A seasonal indoor ice arena, outdoor swimming pool and park site

In January 2007 the Park District of Oak Park initiated a comprehensive study of existing conditions at Ridgeland Common, the Park District's "flagship" recreation center. The scope of work includes a comprehensive physical evaluation and analysis of current facility conditions regarding the mechanical, electrical, structural, architectural and park systems.



Why has Ridgeland Common park, pool and ice arena been allowed to get into its current condition?

In November 2002, a Parks Infrastructure Committee made up of Oak Park citizens completed a 14-month study that found that a lack of financial resources had created a serious deferred maintenance problem and that existing financial resources were nowhere near enough to pay for all the needed improvements.

To address the problems, the Park District prepared a Comprehensive Master Plan, a Capital Improvements Program, and started the process to prepare Master Site Plans for every facility in the system. Oak Park voters approved a referendum in 2005 that increased funding for the Park District. The Park District is currently moving ahead with plans to improve conditions in every park and facility. That is why an existing conditions study is now underway for Ridgeland Common.

Why complete the existing conditions study?

The Park District needs solid information and analysis to make good decisions about the future of Ridgeland Common. The Park District is doing two studies: (1) a detailed examination of current conditions and (2) the operational viability of the current layout. Depending on the results of these two studies, the Park District will then prepare detailed rehabilitation plans or a long-term Master Site Plan.

Oak Park residents demand solid evidence for why their tax dollars are being spent on specific projects. They also demand high quality facilities and services. An existing conditions study will be vitally important in the process of winning public support for any improvements.

Why has the Park District developed Site Master Plans for other parks before focusing on Ridgeland Common?

Prior to 2006, the Park District had not completed a single large scale capital improvement or park master plan for nearly a decade. Developing the capacity to run a good public input process and manage park construction projects takes time. Several smaller park plans at Anderson, Longfellow, Carroll, Field and Fox parks have helped to increase this capacity.

Ridgeland Common is a critically important planning process that we need to get right for several reasons. It is centrally located in the Village. It has the only ice rink in the system, one of two swimming pools, and the only two-ball field complex suitable for hosting youth baseball tournaments. It is also a much larger project, with more complex dynamics and potentially greater costs. Fortunately, there are also many partnership opportunities.

What is the historical value of Ridgeland Common?

Its historic value of Ridgeland Common has not been examined thoroughly. The park fields and landscaping were originally designed by renowned landscape architect Jens Jensen. As reported in the 2001 Park District Infrastructure Report, "it is possible that some of the trees may be original, otherwise the only remaining element is the large ball field." The ice rink, pool, and sled hill (constructed from soil excavated for the pool), and one baseball field were not part of the original Jensen design.

Why is it taking the Park District so long to get the work done?

There are many needs throughout the Park District system to be addressed. Money is also an issue. Since the Park District has much catching up to do, there are many projects making demands on the current capital improvement budget.

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In partnership with the community, we provide quality parks and recreation experiences for the residents of Oak Park.

Did passage of the referendum provide enough money?

The Park District does not have the staff or financial resources to address the needs of every facility in the park system at one time. The Park District has developed a 10-year Capital Improvement Plan that will address needs at every facility in phases.

The Park District has managed to use referendum money to leverage additional grant monies. For example, the Park District succeeded in getting almost \$400,000 in Open Space and Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) funds to improve Field Park (next to Mann School) and we will continue to seek grant and sponsorship opportunities as they become available.

Will there be a tax increase and/or referendum to pay for improvements at Ridgeland?

The planning project will identify the current condition of Ridgeland Common, examine alternatives for improvement or replacement, gauge public support and market opportunities, and then estimate costs for a consensus plan. Very modest plans for existing facility improvements would not likely require any additional tax or outside assistance. On the other end of the spectrum, construction of a new facility with expanded recreational opportunities would likely cost more than current tax revenues could support. First partnership and sponsorship opportunities would need to be vigorously pursued before considering asking residents for additional tax dollars.

Who are the consultants studying Ridgeland?

The Project Team is made of experts in aquatics, engineering and landscape and facility architecture lead by representatives from Thompson Dyke & Associates. TDA is a full-service design firm covering all aspects of land planning, landscape architecture and urban planning. Counsilman-Hunsacker and Associates is an international leader in aquatics design. General Energy Corporation, based in Oak Park, is a progressive professional organization providing engineering services. Ehlke Lonigro Architects is an architectural firm recognized for their excellence in design, planning and construction technology.

How long will the study take?

A targeted completion date for the study is mid-May. A second community meeting is tentatively scheduled to be called in May to review the findings of the study. Over the next several months technical audits will be completed on mechanical and operating systems. The project will also entail collecting information for special user groups, Village of Oak Park Compliance and Planning Departments and Park District staff.



Residents enjoying the pool at Ridgeland Common