



**Ridgeland Common Existing Conditions Study
Focus Group Meeting Notes**

Project Name: Park District of Oak Park – Ridgeland Common
Date: March 7, 2007 - 7:00 to 8:40 PM, Hedges Administrative Center –
218 Madison Street
Issue Date: March 14, 2007
Present: Representatives from figure skating, public skate, dog park, WSSRA,
swimming, and the Park District Citizen Committee were in attendance.
Gary Balling and Bill Hamilton from PDOP,
Peter Dyke and Bob Ahlberg from TD&A

1. Welcome and Purpose of Study

Gary thanked everyone for attending, explained the project, highlighted previous meetings and introduced the other consultants involved in the project. He explained the data gathering activities to date and indicated that both he and Bill would be leaving when the Focus Group portion of the meeting commenced.

2. Introductions

Gary introduced himself and Bill Hamilton of PDOP and Peter Dyke and Bob Ahlberg of TD&A.

3. Background on Ridgeland Common (see attached History)

Bill gave a condensed history of Ridgeland Common, provided dates for major improvements since the facility was built in 1962 and mentioned major repairs. He also highlighted various attendance figures. Total yearly attendance has recently ranged from between 10,000 and 12,000 individual pass holders of all types. Approximately 12,000 attend weekly public skating hours in addition to the Ice Show with 300 skaters, and 7 weekly private rental groups. Major uses include: approximately 350 participants in PDOP hockey programs with 6 high school teams using the Rink. In addition, there are 2 swim teams using the pool, 85,000 – 140,000 attendees at the pool, 350 summer camp attendees using the pool, WSSRA summer camp, 1,600 swim lessons, teen events, scuba diving and water polo. Other major uses at Ridgeland Common include: Summer soccer sports camp, with 900 attendees, adult soccer leagues, adult softball, little league baseball, AYSO games and a Dog Park. In summary, it is a very high use facility.

4. Team Organization and Project Schedule/Process

Peter Dyke reviewed the team organization board and mentioned that General Energy, Counsilman-Hunsaker and Ehlke-Lonigro Associates were responsible for various aspects of the project. He reviewed the progress to date and explained that we have about 90 days to complete the project.

5. Site/Facility Orientation

Peter presented a plat of survey and identified the location of facilities at RC. He reviewed the PDOP land/population ratio (approximately 2 acres/1,000 population). Bob Ahlberg added while it

is far more suburban and still developing, the Naperville Park District has about 17 acres/1,000 population.

4. Directed Discussion

Peter asked all attending to introduce themselves and asked everyone to explain their impressions of the facility for about 3 minutes. The following summarizes attendee input:

- The question was raised regarding whether or not we are gearing towards a temporary solution. Peter explained that we have no opinions now until we hear from the experts. In response to a question regarding whether RC should be considered architecturally significant, we have been asking that but have not been hearing that any of those interviewed consider the RC facilities to be historically significant. However, there are aspects of the facility with elements of local character such as the Rink.
- Another attendee stated she prefers tearing the existing building/Rink down and starting new. Too many things are wrong. There have been many plumbing problems this year, the roof has always been an issue and there is no storage. Ice show costumes have to be stored offsite. The locker rooms are horrible and leaks have taken toll on the facility's equipment.
- Plumbing problems have increased recently and are getting tougher to repair. There has been "down time," damage to other portions of the facility and inconvenience to all as a result of the leaks. The basement is packed with electrical and other equipment and problems could ensue with major leaks in the basement. He loves the structure but thinks that it may be time to replace it. The beams are beautiful but he regretfully leans toward replacement. In response to a question regarding how facility problems affect the way residents use facility, he explained that we have been lucky because roof leaks at the Rink are at the perimeters of the structure. If the leaks lead to a major electrical problem, we could lose the ice during peak portions of the season.
- The leaks were minor in the past but are becoming more frequent and costly to address. Equipment at the facility is functional but antiquated. He would hate to see good money go toward repair of outmoded facility. He suggested that we need to build up due to the limited land available, but are limited by the amount of parking provided. He has worked there for years and knows how to navigate around problems. Preventative maintenance is required when bad weather hits. He believes PDOP should replace the facility. He suggested that there are many things that do not comply with current safety standards. Each year, the pool takes longer and longer to open. New leaks occur each year. It is becoming increasingly expensive and time consuming to repair problems attributable to age. There has been lots of water lost with pool leaks. If we want to be the type of District we all vision, we need to replace the facility.
- Dog Park registration occurs inside the facility leading him to discover obvious interior issues. He provided a brief history of the Dog Park. It was imposed on PDOP by Cook County who refused to allow joint use of facilities by canines and humans. PDOP has developed a master plan, which calls for long-term permanent facilities at Maple and Taylor Parks but focussed on RC because of its existing unused concrete pads and the speed with which a temporary Dog Park could be opened. He explained hours for, and the location of, "Dog Park Plus." From the point of view of dog owners, approx. 8 dogs use the Dog Park at a time and there are a total of 350 registered users. The PDOP Dog Park requirements require that owners be registered, dogs inoculated and dogs wear tags. Use of ball fields for Dog Park Plus can accommodate 50-60 at a time with about ½ of registered owners using them. He believes it is a very satisfactory

arrangement but understands it is temporary. However, he would prefer that RC host dogs for as long as possible. The surface here is mulch but there was a big debate on what should be used. Other materials might be better, but bare concrete is not good.

- She indicates she has concerns relating to her belief that the ice rink is too crowded for kids. Crowding is particularly bad during after school programs, which are very well attended. Temporary partitions don't do a good job of separating skaters particularly when new skaters are learning space consuming tricks and routines. Electrical outages in the past have resulted in cancellation of ice programs and events. The small Ice Show does not present a huge demand, but can't be staged without electricity. If a year-round rink was provided, PDOP could generate more ice usage.
- She mentioned that she has kids whom use the facility. She believes that the safety of the facility is the biggest concern. If the public were aware of all of the safety concerns, there would be a bigger push for replacing the RC facilities. So much happens at RC, it is absolutely critical to Village residents. The WSSRA only uses the pool at RC in the summer. This usage consists of 2 groups or a total of 30-35 attendees including staff, for 5 days a week. She indicated WSSRA has stopped using the Rink because WSSRA skaters can't be provided a cordoned-off area. WSSRA uses the Franklin Park ice facility instead. She suggested the Oak Park needs a studio rink that can fit 20 skaters easily. WSSRA provides services from Franklin Park on the north to Cicero on the south. RC facility shortcomings affect what WSSRA can offer its attendees. She mentioned that WSSRA can't use the Comstock Room upstairs or much of the RC facility due to grade changes. She believes that RC has become archaic and a new solution is required rather than a "band aid fix". Some 40% of WSSRA program attendees come from Oak Park.
- She believes a year-round rink would be ideal. In the past residents have been resistant to year-round ice. However, year-round would bring lots of skaters and money to the Village. She indicated that the RC building is shabby and not welcoming. There are no display areas for merchandise or posters. There is no place for employees to eat or gather. The building's bathrooms are horrible. Registration is inefficient due to floor layout. Even if short term "band aids are required," long term solutions are the answer to the present problems. She indicated that there are about 700 skaters (or 200-400 families), but that figure includes some overlap and does not include hockey.
- Lots of ice usage rental money goes to other communities that could stay here if additional facilities and year-round ice were available.
- Given a choice, skaters find the Franklin Park ice facility superior.
- It is tough for Oak Park resident to use the Franklin Park facility (Waveland and 25th) due to trains and traffic.
- Based on his experience with kids in skating programs, year-round ice could be a tremendous revenue generator for PDOP. He also indicated that no temporary Dog Park tags are allowed for visitors.
- He stated that in previous surveys residents have indicated we need a new year-round ice facility and a fitness center. He suggested that residents spend lots of money at outside (non-PDOP) facilities. With the Hedges building on the perimeter of the Village and inconvenient for registrations, RC should be the jewel at the center of the PD with its very best facilities. He suggested that PDOP should put dollars into improving all of the RC facilities.
- She mentioned the need for more programmable space.

- The assumption of recreation activities by the PDOP was well received and was well supported with referendum. Its impact was minor, consisting of an increase of approximately \$50 on a \$100,000 home. PDOP was levying approximately ½ of the amount levied by other surrounding communities. The 2005 referendum was approved but its revenues are limited to capital improvements.
- Land acquisition in Oak Park is extremely difficult.
- He believes that residents assumed it was a one-time referendum.
- The Village didn't want to lose its oversight, but the transfer of recreation took place prior to referendum. (*Note: The actual transfer of properties took place after the referendum.*)
- The Comstock Room is very well utilized for fitness and other activities.
- Every space in the PDOP system is well used.
- Stated that RC, like other PDOP facilities, has been “beat to death” with over use.
- RC has no available space for meetings. In addition, there is no space and ability to rent the facility for weddings etc. He believes that the ice is far too crowded. While PDOP could sell ice usage for \$95/hour there is no time available due to over programming of the Rink. With a smaller studio rink, a big hockey game could occur simultaneously with studio ice use.
- Because multi-family development surrounds RC, dog owners may find RC the most convenient for a Dog Park. He indicated that the field lights at RC are on until 9 PM. Most Dog Park users walk and drive to use the Dog Park but users of Dog Park Plus most often drive to the facility. This usage competes with other events at RC and parking is limited. The sled hill is part of Dog Park Plus.
- Indicated that a sled hill is also offered at Barrie, but sled hills don't have a big constituency because they are used only when it snows.
- The RC sled hill is heavily used and skinned fairly quickly. Users of the sled hill do not find existing parking convenient.
- Suggested that the closing of Scoville is important and may allow the expansion of the ball fields.
- The vacation of Scoville would allow moving all existing facilities further westerly. Bob Ahlberg mentioned that the ROW is only 60' wide.
- Additional parking should be provided at the facility for large events.
- Church parking was available in the past but not any longer. The new High School parking deck is available but is too far away for most RC users.
- Mentioned that most users drive through the RC lot to see if parking is available but traffic movements make access to the parking deck a bit of a drive.
- RC is in an optimal location that is close to tracks, a location that would not work as well for other uses. A state of the art facility would include a year-round rink, year round pool and a facility that is totally accessible.
- Access for residents to a year-round pool will be gone when the Y leaves its present facility and he doesn't know who the new user of that facility will be. The High School pool is kept at a cold competitive swimming temperature and is not really suitable for senior use.
- Suggested that PDOP needs a bigger rink even if only for figure skaters. The existing facility does not provide good circulation for skaters while they are wearing skates. Other facilities provide extensive rubberized floors for skaters. Lack of appropriate facilities takes a toll on the

rental skates. The existing locker rooms are horrible and damage to locker contents occurs because of the leaks.

- Relayed an experience during a fire drill while she was skating with her elderly mother and young child. Many of the older people and kids could not exit the facility while wearing skates.
- RC needs much better emergency exit capability. The existing facility is tough to exit and requires much better interior flow. Everything involves the use of the 3 stairs in the lobby. Newer, better-designed and expanded facilities would generate revenue for PDOP.
- Indicated he was very happy with Dog Park Plus and would hope it would continue at RC in the future. He suggested that more than a small concrete space should be provided. However, he conceded that it also depends upon how the County enforces its requirements. He said that Dog Park users hope to maintain friendly relationships with other RC users. He believes that swimmers would support an indoor pool facility that provides space beyond just family and swim team use.
- Questioned whether providing a year-round rink had to be at the expense of the ball fields.
- Suggested that in the planning for RC, PDOP should focus first on meeting needs of community before building revenue generating facilities.
- Peter Dyke reminded attendees that while it is good to discuss future uses, this study is limited to an assessment of existing facilities.
- Expressed concern over the existing plumbing problems, lack of storage, condition of bathrooms, leaks, lack of landscaping at RC and condition of the concession area. In summary, she believes the facility is ugly.
- Peter Dyke suggested that if anyone has any additional input, they should email Bob with it or any further questions. He also requested attendees to fill out questionnaires. He thanked everyone for attendance and input.

5. Next Steps

Special user group interviews will take place next week. As soon as data gathering is complete, the results will be analyzed and synthesized in a report presented to the PDOP and residents.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:40 PM.

Attach: History Summary