



Ridgeland Common Existing Conditions Study

Special User Groups Meeting Notes

Project Name: Park District of Oak Park – Ridgeland Common
Date: March 14, 2007 - 4:30 to 8:40 PM, Hedges Administrative Center
218 Madison Street, Oak Park, IL
Issue Date: March 22, 2007
Present: Representatives from various special interest groups invited by the PDOP and the members of the Park District Citizen Committee were in attendance. Gary Balling and Bill Hamilton from PDOP, Peter Dyke and Bob Ahlberg from TD&A

All groups were welcomed by Gary Balling who introduced himself and thanked all for attending. He explained the purpose of the Ridgeland Common (RC) study and indicated he would be leaving so attendees can share ideas freely. He concluded by indicating that the purpose of the study is to provide a snapshot of the condition of the RC facilities.

In each group Peter Dyke thanked those attending and described the consultant team members, study process and project timeline. He indicated the information gathering would be complete once these interviews conclude. The consultant's job is to evaluate the existing facility including all RC facilities and mechanical systems. TD&A will develop cost estimates for repairs, an upgraded facility meeting existing needs and replacement facilities. In response to a question regarding whether good input was being provided, it was noted there was good input from the various special interests. However, no one has provided input as a constituent of the building and that may represent a lost opportunity.

Comments from individual groups are as follows:

Group A - Hockey

Present: Lee Graziano, Dan Wolff, Tim Kelly, Dave Kindler, Maggie Kelly, Beth Burdin, Bob Banker, Peter Dyke and Bob Ahlberg. Bob Banker was present for the first two groups.

Lee Graziano representing Fenwick High School and attended the school. Fenwick rents ice for hockey, which is a school-sponsored sport.

Dan Wolff runs hockey program for Fenwick, is a former Commander of Cicero Police Department, ran the hockey program in Cicero previously but has been involved with OP for many years. Neither he or Lee are Oak Park residents.

Tim Kelly grew up in Oak Park and swam for many years at RC and OPHS. He is a former Park Board member and president.

Dave Kindler described himself as a lame duck Board President. He has kids in hockey and the ice show.

Maggie Kelly is a life-long resident and is an architect specializing in historic preservation. She swims at the RC pool and has skated at the Rink. She is a member of the PDCC.

Beth Burdin is on the PDCC monitoring the entire study process and uses RC facilities.

The following comments were provided:

- RC was very unique and remains so because very few communities have the courage to provide ice rinks. Large users can offer assistance and will try to help improve the facilities.
- The rink is too small and needs to be expanded.
- Fenwick High school games would be better with concession stand open and revenues would help RC.
- A skating pro shop would also help RC revenues. 2 rinks would be needed to make money.
- Rental fees are \$360/hr at the Addison rink.
- The Catholic league charges admission to control attendance for games.
- RC opens its rink late because most hockey programs begin practice in late August. Those based at RC have to rent ice to start their seasons.
- Those attending can't really speak about committing school funds for facilities but Fenwick might be interested in participating in the cost of a new facility because the Fenwick campus has a space shortage. It has contributed financially for facilities it doesn't own including baseball fields. Alumni would be interested in contributing and families have contributed to facility improvements over the years.
- There is a need for additional Fenwick pool time, even though the school built its own pool several years ago.
- RC ice equipment has failed and caused event cancellations in the past.
- Games at the Rink are cold but the facility has been improved over time.
- Due to USA Hockey emphasis, referees call more penalties during games at RC because it requires a closer game due to the smaller rink size.
- Kids participating in Fenwick Hockey come from all over the western suburbs. The average hockey team member pays approximately \$5,000 in total fees and expenses per year to play.
- Due to a shortage of available ice time and facilities, lots of ice is rented elsewhere. If RC were improved these funds could be captured for Oak Park.
- Fenwick is a rival but has a good relationship with OPRF High School.
- If the facility study concludes that the rink is not in that bad of condition, it should be repaired and improved.
- The facility in Darien includes 4 rinks. 2 are year-round ice and 2 indoor ice that are convertible to other uses.
- The facility may be significant to Oak Park even though it is a '50s design but is probably not architecturally.
- The thing that is most historic at RC is the people not the space. Any new rink must pull off that historic feel because history is important in Oak Park.
- The RC pool has less of a historic feel and predominantly provides relief for residents when it is hot.
- Based on its present condition, RC should be torn down and replaced with something like the Petit Center in Milwaukee that contains 2 rinks with speed skating ice around the outside.
- The RC Rink used to be used for roller-skating. Previous Boards had very limited money for repairs.
- Repairs to RC may require a referendum.
- If Scoville were vacated and new RC facilities constructed at the NWC of the site, existing facilities could remain open during construction.
- The redevelopment of RC will require partnerships with all of its major users.
- Oak Park will be here a long time and needs new facilities.

- More and more potential users of RC are transitioning to the rink in Franklin Park.

Group B- Groups Renting Space at RC

Group members introduced themselves:

Jim Collins representing indoor soccer and runs a successful grade school soccer program at Ascension that rents indoor soccer time at RC. Grade school soccer success is based on the availability of indoor soccer space. He pays \$50/hour for space and is concerned that if too good a facility is provided, he will have to compete for it.

Cathy Rigalli representing the Millennium Swim Club whom rents pool time at Rehm stated Millennium swims at Fenwick in the winter

Bill Martin rents the rink for hockey, grew up in Oak Park and runs skate rentals. The Rink's season ended last week but the Ice Show will run all weekend.

Maggie Kelly is a life-long resident and is an architect specializing in historic preservation. She swims at the RC pool and skated at the Rink. She is a member of the PDCC and her son uses the facilities at RC.

Beth Burdin is a member of the PDCC monitoring the entire study process and uses RC facilities. She has a 4-year-old son, moved here several years ago and uses the Rink and pool.

The following comments were provided:

- Experience has shown that RC Staff has always been very helpful and have adjusted rink transition times to accommodate the needs of schools.
- The soccer field is also used during the day for camps.
- Rehm is a nice place for families to swim, but recently 2 of its 8 competition lanes were eliminated to make an opening into the baby pool.
- Millennium uses Rehm from 5:30 to 9 and is used by approximately 300 swimmers. It is generally a no cut program because there is no other venue.
- TOPS uses RC while MSC uses Rehm, but due to demand, both only have about 2 hours a day of pool time.
- PDOP has done a good job of scheduling pool usage so that pool use is maximized.
- RC is used for only one big meet a year on Fathers Day that involves approximately 800 swimmers. Millennium hosts indoor meets at Fenwick during winter.
- Parking at RC is tough during the summer because demand conflicts with parking for the farmers market. The new parking structure is important to meet demand for big events.
- Recently there was a period of 2 weeks with no heat at the pool that left patrons uncomfortable.
- When RC opened, hockey was more popular. RC was the best and only rink. Today, RC is the worst because too many alternate uses compete for same space.
- Other rinks in the area are better because they maintain ice all year. Johnny's Ice House in Chicago is premiere facility and very busy in the summer.
- Hockey is not always well tolerated at RC due to competition for the space.
- New locker rooms are horrible and the fixtures resemble those used by the "Dept. of Corrections." They are dirty and unacceptable.
- Rat Hockey is very popular (first 22 guys paying \$7 can play a pick up game).
- There is a lack of effort to publicize RC ice in Hockey World. Other rinks do a better job advertising their availability.
- RC's Rink will continue to suffer unless ice can be offered year-round. More ice time is required for local hockey programs to compete even though it is important that time not be taken away from other uses.

- RC's Rink maintains the best ice surface in Chicago area and has well maintained edgings. Bill Hamilton has to do lots of maintenance chores.
- Other ice rinks in the area will not affect demand for RC ice because they are too far away (Seven Bridges, Addison, etc.).
- Recent locker room renovations were a joke in terms of quality. Showers don't work and pipes freeze. On a recent Sunday morning, only 2 of the 8-10 showerheads worked in the swimming locker room.
- With the elimination of the Rink's ice many programs are transitioning to the Franklin Park rink. It has superb maintenance, new showerheads, new tile in locker room and other improvements even though it is roughly the same age as RC.
- RC employees are great but occasionally illness leads to service lapses. That said, you can always tell a good manager, they pick up a broom and a mop.
- RC suffers because you can't open the pool and offer ice at same time.
- One benefit of PDOP is that it doesn't charge lots of money for its programs.

Group C – Special User Group Staff

Group members introduced themselves:

Bobbi Nance has worked for PDOP for 1.5 years and Urbana Park District previously. She runs pool and skate events including teen programs and has had 130 teens at skate nights but doesn't advertise the programs.

Bret Patnode represents TOPS (The Oak Park Swimmers. He is the meet director and is involved with the Father's Day meet involving 700 swimmers over a 3-day event. TOPS also hosts 2 night dual meets during season.

The following comments were provided:

- The concession stand is open only if it is open for a previous event. It could be open if staffed and would be well used by teens.
- Pizza is served at teen events as part of the admission fee. Admission is \$4 if teens have a season pass. Otherwise, admission is \$9.
- Lacrosse is also played on the ball field that is illuminated.
- Kayaking, outdoor adventure and scuba are also provided at the pool. Teen events occur and non-major holiday events.
- Most teen events are Friday night.
- RC functions well for use of the ice because it is an enclosed space. Also, the size of the Rink is great. However, there is no lobby space and the cashier location leads to long lines. It is bad enough that the lobby is too small but it is exacerbated by the fact that skaters can't wear ice skates in the lobby.
- RC is amenable for teen movies and lock-ins.
- An Ipod plugged into the PA provides music for teen events. Indoor space soccer arena is great if weather is bad. Facility gets revenue, not a benefit to your program.
- Swim meets at RC require borrowing touch pads from OPRF or Fenwick and a borrowed score board. While it had access to a new timing system, it wasn't compatible with the scoreboard.
- TOPS has 167 – 170 swimmers.
- TOPS has an affiliation with the Y and gets to practice at OPHS. Past "issues" with Y membership by some swimmers lead to the creation of MSC.

- Swim meets at RC have also involved vendors selling food and smoothies on the adult deck. However, it was difficult due to limitations in providing electrical power, particularly with meet needs.
- Toilets and locker rooms are well used during meets and the lobby gets very crowded with visitor check in, parents arriving and the posting of scores.
- While the pool is well liked, there are problems with the equipment that comes with it. It is one of two 50-meter pools in the Chicago area. Quincy, Illinois has a tremendous 50-meter facility modeled after a facility in Ft. Lauderdale.
- During meets there is no elevated viewing area on the deck and 2 sets of bleachers are brought in from OPRFHS.
- If the pool were replaced at RC an indoor/outdoor pool would be very nice, though an outdoor pool is preferred. Oak Park would be a great location for a new 50-meter pool. Indoor pools are hot in the summer.
- The High School rents both the east and west pools for meets but meets at the east pool are very tight because the deck is too small to run big meets. In a typical dual meet, there are 120 kids from TOPS. Swimmers can't even watch the meet.
- A 7 team meet at the small High School pool is very tough to run and has lead to lots of accidents.
- Outdoor pools can be closed in the summer during bad weather and a second indoor pool provides an alternate.

Group D – Traveling Hockey Users

Group members introduced themselves:

Carey Shinsako has experience in traveling hockey/OPRFHS hockey. He was born and raised in OP, and his family has lived there since the 50s. He is the hockey director at the High School and the Park District. He played hockey at RC when it was first covered with a roof.

David Lehman has experience with hockey at RC. He started in-house hockey but is moving to travel hockey. His son speed skates at the Franklin Park rink and he coaches the Bronco baseball team. He was at RC today practicing with 5 other teams. He ran the Bronco league last year but is more into hockey as a parent.

The following comments were provided:

- Travelling hockey started 8 years ago.
- RC was the first rink in the Chicago area with a roof, but we need a longer season to run a competitive public program.
- Many skaters have been lost to Bensenville. RC needs 2 sheets of ice.
- If RC were a private facility that could control usage, it could get by with one rink but most rinks now have 3 sheets of ice or more.
- RC needs at least 2 full sheets and we should consider building a two-level facility like those outside of Boston.
- The renovation of the locker rooms was difficult 5-6 years ago. Whatever progress that effort provided has been abandoned due to a lack of significant improvements since that time.
- Jim Carrol had developed plans for a second full sheet of ice to be constructed above the existing rink.
- Johnnie's has an elevated sheet over indoor parking.
- Locally, Northbrook, Bensenville, Bolingbrook, Romeoville, Glen Ellyn, Addison, Fox Valley (Farnsworth Rd.), Darien, Hoffman Estates, Glacier, Arctic, Crystal Lake are the competition rinks.

- PDOP can break even with two rinks if it melts one down in the summer because two rinks reduces incremental costs. For example, the two Zambonis are there anyway and the second sheet opens up the potential for all kinds of clinics, hockey, etc. A second sheet should not be provided in summer because private facilities have done that and are losing money.
- A sport court should have been provided in lieu of a new carpet for the rink.
- The entire RC facility should be replaced with a two-story rink. It is possible if we cooperate with the Church and the High School.
- The pool should move to the High School practice fields and the fields should be moved to RC.
- A synthetic turf field makes sense given the high usage.
- We can't lose the ball fields during construction.
- The layout of the buildings needs to be made more efficient.
- New facilities don't need to be pretty/fancy just more efficient and functional.
- The Franklin Park facility is located at 25th and Addison. It is 30 years old but well maintained because it is shut down for a month in the summer for maintenance.
- The Franklin Park Community Center is also beautiful but Franklin Park has more industrial tax base and can afford such facilities.
- Many work out at the Y or the tennis club on Lake.
- A multi-purpose facility would be tough at the RC site without substantial parking or some arrangement to use the church lot.
- Parking has always been an issue at RC.
- The renovation/improvement of RC will require leadership from the high school, Village and Park District. Everyone can benefit but all must participate. There has to be leadership, which currently may exist. Vacation of Scoville is a key requirement.
- There is concern that the Village is too busy with Downtown redevelopment including Marion Street Mall. Some trustees are primarily concerned with increasing the tax base. The Village's role in RC renovation could include street vacation, expanding the parking garage, allowing parking at the Church and making some TIF money available.
- The OPRFHS needs a new 50-meter indoor/outdoor pool.
- There are eight existing swimming pools in Oak Park but all are old (Rehm, RC, Y, OPHS (2), Fenwick (2) and one at the new health club).
- A new skating rink could be utilized for gym class.
- Friday night open skates are really good for teens.
- Regardless of what happens many residents love RC and it is a second home to kids. Any changes need to retain that local feel. There must be a pride of ownership and community feel.
- There are 96 kids in the hockey travel house program with 85 from Oak Park.
- The bad news for RC is also good news because none of the competitors have surplus land for expansion.
- Some reciprocity for other facilities in town may help finance improvements.
- Leadership from Village might help with other communities contributing construction dollars in return for special user rates.

Group E – Dogs, Baseball, Hockey, PDCC

Group members introduced themselves:

Greg Price representing youth baseball and has been a Board member of Oak Park youth baseball for seven years.

Mike Farley has lived in Oak Park for 12 years, but has only used RC as a dog owner.

Don Stapleton (8:05) representing youth baseball

Andy Marks representing hockey rentals, grew up in Oak Park near RC, used all the RC facilities as a kid and does just about everything available at RC with his family.

Nancy Giangrasso a member of PDCC.

Roy Phifer a member of PDCC.

The following comments were provided:

- The Comstock room doesn't work well for meetings.
- Cook County required separation of dogs and humans led to RC dog parks, long term at Taylor and another park.
- At RC, dog regulations are extensive. Dogs use an existing concrete area as the dedicated dog park. The ball fields are available for use on weekends for two hours. This has worked pretty well considering it went from something to nothing and is now back to something now.
- The plan for a permanent dog park won't provide space as large as is now available at RC on weekends. Bad drainage at entrance has been corrected and fence adjustments are normal.
- Want to see function maintained in OP. Want to make sure fields are left clean so dog owners want to ask ball players whether they are doing a good job. There have been some issues between coexisting dog/baseball uses, but they have not been major.
- The concrete dog park area would be perfect for batting cages but the need to provide space for dogs is understood. The ballfields were used for dogs because they are fenced. Dogs have been ignored in Oak Park.
- The fields at RC are the primary/crown jewel for youth baseball and are the all star fields. They are used by older baseball players and for girls' softball but could use some luster.
- It would be very tough for youth baseball if the fields were eliminated even temporarily. Youth baseball now involves 2,000 kids but it is particularly tough to replace facilities for older kids. They will be used from now to the middle of July when the national Pony tournaments come to Oak Park.
- The concession stand is still used but any nearby space with electrical outlets would suffice. It is not heated and can't be used in winter.
- Pitch tunnels and batting cages would be a great addition to the fields. Multi-use batting and pitching would be available for all ages and girls too.
- Tractors are stored in two sheds on site. Would like to see new fields and correction of drainage issues. Could be shut down because only large fields for Bronco 11-12 year olds. Illumination is also an issue since it is an old system with lots of dead spots. Only lighted dog park.
- If you visit other baseball facilities in tournaments, it is evident that the state of the art is far beyond the RC fields. We don't even come close to providing the amenities that are common elsewhere. Improved fields would generate revenue for the Village. Since Oak Park baseball teams are viewed as a power, the existing field doesn't live up to that reputation. Fences between fields are difficult to locate at RC. Would like nicer amenities, better PA and dugouts. Baseball has been ignored in Oak Park.
- We feel ashamed when we go to other communities and see the facilities particularly those in Joliet. Lots of places we go have abundant land, an advantage we don't have.
- Improving ball field lights is a very important need and there is a real problem with ponding on one field.
- We see little use for the sled hill and could use the space to "slide in" a small diamond for girls softball.
- We have lost lots of ball fields in Oak Park despite the fact that the youth baseball program grew again to 1,800 or 1,900 participants.

- The biggest problem last year was kids having to walk all the way around the dog park to access toilets or the concession stand. We need a better way for kids to access the fields.
- Everyone on the west side of RC has no access to bathrooms even though the two external toilets have been rehabbed.
- RC has been the “Mecca” of all sports for kids in Oak Park and we really have to work hard to reestablish interest in Oak Park programs.
- Because of its shortcomings, many in Oak Park spend lots of time using other facilities and spend 1,000s of dollars elsewhere. Lots of money goes outside of Village that could be retained in the community.
- RC really functions as the Community Center for Oak Park, but lacks the amenities to truly do so.
- Parking at RC is an issue that needs to be addressed. The OPRFHS parking and fields have been expanded.
- As far as ice, it is difficult to understand where to direct our energy. We need a second rink that is available year round since we lose many dollars renting ice from other facilities outside of town. The existing Rink is tired and the Zamboni breaks down. Oak Park needs a better, more inclusive facility.
- Improved facilities could bring in outside users from other communities for hockey. “Build it and they will come.” Franklin Park has two-four hockey teams in each age group. People spend money in communities where their kids are skating. We can’t rent out RC more often because of its poor facilities.
- RC really needs a facelift. Girls hockey teams use the swimming locker rooms. Its bathrooms and showers often don’t work. A room for instructor equipment storage would also be nice.
- Parking at RC is a serious problem. OPRFHS pays the church \$4,000/month to use existing parking at the Church. The parking structure is used only for faculty parking.
- Traffic surrounding RC is a big problem, particularly when school “lets out.”
- It is interesting that hockey parents and other special interests are so passionate, but many in Oak Park don’t have personal involvement with RC facilities or their shortcomings.
- There are probably 600-700 hockey players in Oak Park and there is a \$1,100 hockey fee in Franklin Park. With the large number of players migrating to Franklin Park, that represents a substantial amount of lost revenue. Migration to the Franklin Park pool is becoming more prevalent too. Softball players are also moving to Franklin Park as well and taking their \$800/player fees with them. PDOP cannot afford yearly passes and revenues drifting to other surrounding communities. Revenue from the use of PDOP facilities by special interests is significant.
- Oak Park kids will only skate if facilities for skating are available.
- Phasing of any improvements will be critical.

The sessions ended at 8:30 PM.