

**Project:** Recreation Center Historical Stewardship Committee 2006 (RCSC)  
Park District of Oak Park (PDOP)

**Meeting Date:** March 20, 2006 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Andersen Center

**Attendees:** Committee Members:  
Tom Philion, Chair / Park Board Commissioner  
Beth Burden, Member  
Doug Gilbert, Member (OPHPC chair)  
Lesley M. Gilmore, Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc./ Technical Advisor  
Chris Goode, Member  
Nancy Holmes, Member  
Roy Phifer, Member

Others:  
Gary Balling, Executive Director PDOP  
Bill Dwyer, Wednesday Journal Reporter  
Frank Heitzman  
Frank Lipo, Executive Director, Historical Society of OP & RF

## **KICK-OFF MEETING**

### **I. Introductions**

- A. Introduction of chair and members
- B. Chair's statement of the committee's mission:
  - 1. This process is seen as the third stage of the architectural re-evaluation of the centers. The prior stages were:
    - a) First: 1930s – minor upgrades resulting from early discussions of use and role of the centers/shelters.
    - b) Second: 1960s – significant upgrades and additions.
  - 2. This current stage will include a strategic look as initiated during the infrastructure study, with emphasis on understanding the centers' place in the broader role in the Park District.
  - 3. PDOP is proceeding with Master Plans for each of the parks; this committee's review will inform these plans.
- C. General framework for the committee:
  - 1. Continue to look at the historical significance of the recreation centers, focusing on Field, Carroll, and Andersen.
  - 2. Address the following key questions:
    - a) Do Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers have the remaining architectural integrity and significance to consider their preservation and possible restoration? What are the varying levels of historic significance of each of these three buildings? Can these buildings be relocated?
    - b) What would be the potential financial cost to restore these facilities?
    - c) What are the opportunity costs if these facilities are restored and operated as stand alone single space recreation programming centers?
  - 3. The final goal is to achieve consensus among the committee members.
  - 4. The committee's findings will enable future Park Boards to make decisions about projects that impact these recreation centers.

## **II. Historical Overview of the Centers – Presented by Frank Lipo, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest**

- A. Lipo hopes the committee will consider using the Historical Society as resource on an ongoing basis.
- B. An overview history of the PDOP and Village Recreation Department was presented.
  - 1. 1916 formation of Village Recreation Board, separate from the 1912 Park District.
  - 2. The village wanted to provide small parcels as playgrounds for supervised play.
  - 3. The first three sites purchased were where Field, Andersen, and Carroll playgrounds are now.
  - 4. Erection of small shelters enabled the Recreation Board to provide year-round organized activities.
  - 5. The social force of directed play prevailed, with the goal of developing children into good citizens. There was a strong focus on the arts – music, literature, drama, painting, and dance.
  - 6. 1920s: National contest for design of four shelter houses was won by local architect John S. Van Bergen, who had worked in Frank Lloyd Wright’s office. Each shelter was to cost \$6,000 or less.
    - a) Field was the first one constructed, in 1927.
    - b) The shelters shared common features: Central room, fireplace or central feature, stucco exteriors, overhanging eaves, casement windows, etc.
    - c) Van Bergen had a successful architectural practice in Oak Park and the north shore. He continued designing in the Prairie Style longer than his contemporaries.
    - d) Barrie Center was built in 1931, as designed by local architect Arthur Maiwurm.
  - 7. 1930s: First phase of modifications included additions. The Historical Society and the Oak Park Public Library have some of the drawings for these modifications.
    - a) Arthur Maiwurm, John Van Bergen, and Charles Kristen designed the improvements.
    - b) Field Center was doubled in size.
    - c) The drive to improve these centers and retain the programs was buttressed by the desire to prevent the economic depression from causing a cultural and recreational depression.
    - d) An addition to Andersen was designed in 1939
  - 8. 1940s-1950s
    - a) In 1946 an addition was added to Carroll Center
  - 8. 1965-66: Referendum passed, resulting in increase in the centers:
    - a) New centers: Stevenson (replacement for 1920s building), Longfellow, and Fox.
    - b) Modifications to Field, Carroll, Andersen, and Barrie: sizable additions, and exterior brick cladding as the most evident changes.

## **III. Discussion about the Centers**

- A. The following questions were raised as being worthwhile to follow up on:
  - 1. Are the centers of national importance?
  - 2. Did the creation of the centers influence other park districts? Was Oak Park influenced by other park districts?
  - 3. What is the context within which these centers were created?
  - 4. Why didn’t the playground movement last?

5. What thought process generated the changes made in the 1960s?
6. Has the “structured play” concept run its course?
- B. How does the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission (OPHPC) weigh in on significance?
  1. Doug Gilbert, OPHPC chair, stated that preservationists look at two primary issues:
    - a) Historical significance – locally and nationally. This can include architectural significance and/or social/historical significance.
    - b) Physical integrity – has the building been altered beyond recognition?
  2. Typically buildings aren’t examined in this way unless they are at least 50 years old, when mankind is able to step back and appreciate them.
- C. Does location of the building matter? i.e. will the building retain its significance if it is relocated?
  1. Building location is usually an integral component of the original design.
  2. Building relocation is usually used as a last resort to saving a structure.
- D. Does the fact that the centers were inexpensive utilitarian buildings matter? The cost of the original construction is not relevant, except in that it demonstrates the inventiveness of the original design and how well it fits its program.
- E. How do the buildings fit today’s need?
  1. If designed/renovated for current needs, would they retain their current significance?
  2. Which aspects are representative of the center’s significance need to be identified – whether it’s the interior spaces, the exterior expression, or both.

#### **IV. Aspects to Explore**

- A. WPA murals? Where are they?
- B. PDOP will distribute the following to the committee:
  1. 1950s and 1960s reports about the intents and goals of the park district and the Village’s recreation department.
  2. Jim Talley’s report from the 1970s.
  3. OPHPC’s report on the centers (prepared in January 2004).
  4. Infrastructure study.
- C. Why changes occurred in the 1960s. Jack Barclay will come to discuss the changes.
- D. More about the significance of Van Bergen. Marty Hackl will come to present.

#### **V. Process**

- A. Center Tours, for entire committee, of Andersen, Carroll, and Field: Sunday, April 23, 1-4pm. PDOP van will start from Carroll.
- B. Next Meeting: Monday, May 8, 7pm at Carroll. Meeting to tentatively include presentations by Barclay, then Hackl.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Distributed to: All attendees  
Maggie Kelly, Member

