

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

**Meeting Date:** May 15, 2006

**Locations:** Carroll 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  
Maggie Kelly, Member  
Roy Phifer, Member

Others:  
Gary Balling, Executive Director PDOP  
Jack Barclay, Jack Barclay Architects  
Mike Grandy, Superintendent of Buildings & Grounds PDOP  
Marty Hackl, Van Bergen Enthusiast

**I. Presentation by Marty Hackl, illustrated by Power Point:**

- A. History of Van Bergen and how he came to be an architect of the “Prairie School.”
- B. Examples of Van Bergen’s residential and school designs throughout Oak Park, the Chicago suburbs, and Illinois.
- C. Discussion about Oak Park’s 1926 competition for the playground shelter designs.
- D. Proposition of Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers as the only true Prairie School buildings owned by the citizens of Oak Park.
- E. Illustrations of Andersen, Carroll, Field, and Stevenson Centers as they appeared prior to 1966 renovations.
- F. The question of integrity: Marty posited that the 1966 alterations are reversible, and that if removed, the buildings would be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- G. Example of Ravinia School complex – with mix of original building and additions – being on the National Register of Historic Places, as an understanding of the value of the evolution of a building over time.

**II. Presentation by Jack Barclay, architect of numerous Oak Park (and beyond) buildings since c.1958:**

- A. Jack designed the renovations of Andersen, Carroll, Field Centers, as well as the new centers Fox, Longfellow, and Stevenson in 1966.
- B. Jack spoke of his experience as a youth with architects Charlie Kristen, Rudy Maiwurm, and Sam Bird. Kristen and Maiwurm designed modifications to the recreation centers.
- C. Jack’s recollection is that a \$550,000 referendum funded the 1966 renovations at Andersen, Barrie, Carroll, and Field Centers and new construction of Fox, Longfellow, and Stevenson Centers. He did not know why the original Stevenson Center was demolished at this time.
- D. He presented a timeline for various projects on the recreation centers:
  1. 1966 renovations and new construction (see above).

2. 1977: Installed air conditioning at Fox and Longfellow centers (and possibly Andersen and Carroll).
  3. 1981: Structural repairs at Carroll Center (two columns in main room).
  4. 1982: Ceiling repairs at Fox, Longfellow, and Stevenson Centers.
  5. 1982: Re-roofing (original and additions) of Andersen, Barrie, Carroll, and Field.
  6. 1985: ADA improvements at Andersen and Field.
  7. 1986: ADA improvements at Barrie and Carroll.
  8. 1992: Rebuilt ramps at Fox and Longfellow.
- E. Examination of why the center work was done.
1. *Recreation Areas: Their Design and Equipment* by the National Recreation Association (1958) stated ideal distance from home to playground as no more than ½ mile (to allow it to be walked), and that the best place for a playground was near an elementary school. Heavy-trafficked streets should be avoided.
  2. The Oak Park Rec Dept was really a leader in this area.
  3. 1960's building expansions were necessitated by expansion in the programming for kids and adults.
    - a) The minimal toilets – designed for kids – were updated for adults and children.
    - b) The modifications added support services and increased control by adding offices and reducing the number of exterior doors.
    - c) The three new centers each had two large spaces.
  4. The trend seemed to be leading towards the “Ridgeland Common approach” with a larger building, with a pool, staffed year-round.
- F. 1965 condition of the centers:
1. Jack didn't recall that any one of the centers were in particularly great shape.
  2. Exterior trim was starting to rot.
  3. The built-in gutters were in bad shape.
  4. The windows were in bad shape.
  5. The stucco was not in real bad shape; it (and the decorative tile) was retained behind the brick installation.
    - a) Masonry ties penetrated the stucco to hold the brick.
    - b) In some areas, there was enough concrete foundation wall to support the brick. In other areas, a steel shelf angle was used to support the brick.
    - c) There should be at least a 1” gap between the brick and the stucco.
  6. Murals: Some c.1965 photographs show murals on the walls. Jack has no recollection of them.
  7. General design approach: Jack stated that he wasn't trying to be sensitive to the Van Bergen style, as appreciation for the Prairie School hadn't really surfaced yet. He did think there were a lot of neat aspects to the original designs, which he tried to respect.
  8. The cul-de-sac in front of Carroll had been created c.1957.
- G. Current condition of the centers:
1. Jack opined that the centers are in better shape now than before the 1966 renovations.
  2. Jack hasn't been asked to design centers like this for 20-30 years – even these had a couple of large rooms.

### III. General Discussion

- A. The centers are primarily just for kids, with a few exceptions.
- B. Programming:

1. PDOP stated that the neighborhood recreation center model hasn't really worked for a number of years. The programs were subsidized until PDOP requires a minimum number of participants.
  2. Fox is centrally located, has two large spaces, and a lift, hence is heavily programmed.
  3. Carroll has West Suburban Special Recreation program in the summer.
  4. Field is heavily programmed, primarily with pre-school.
  5. PDOP will have staff present more information on center programming, at a later session.
- C. Question was raised as to which date any/all center(s) should/could be restored to.
- D. Question was raised as to what original fabric remains at the centers.
- E. It was agreed that the paramount question is how to balance the significance of the architectural and social history of the centers with the programming needs of the community.

#### **IV. Next Meeting**

- A. The next meeting will occur June 19 at 7pm at Field Center.
- B. Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc. will present a general overview of what it would take to bring the centers up to good condition, including accessibility.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Distributed to: All attendees