

Strategic Work Product #1: Governance

The Leisure Vision consultant team developed four alternative models of governance specific to Oak Park. The proposed models were reviewed by the project Steering Committee and the sub-committee on Governance. Following review and understanding of the alternative models, the consultant team proposed using “Measures of Excellence in a Park System” as developed by the Trust for Public Lands. These measures were supplemented with additional evaluative factors for measuring the effectiveness of a governance system that the consultant team had experience with in other communities that we’ve served.

The sub-committee on governance thoroughly discussed the proposed 15 factors for evaluating governance models and recommended that the consultant team use the following nine (which incorporated all 15 elements proposed, but grouped some together under a broader category) to test the alternative governance models:

1. VISION

The ability to provide a clear sense of purpose to the community about the parks and recreation system and goals.

2. PLANNING & COMMUNITY INPUT

The ability to effectively plan and involve the community in parks and recreation issues.

3. SUFFICIENT ASSETS

The ability to provide the specific assets of land, staff, and equipment to meet the parks and recreation systems’ goals.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY

The systems’ responsibility to deliver quality services of the highest priority to the citizens. Quality services are defined as including the following evaluative factors: a) equitable access, b) user satisfaction, c) safety, and d) professional staff.

5. CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

The ability to attract citizen input and leadership into the park and recreation system.

6. COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The ability to provide benefits beyond the borders of the parks, i.e. improving home and property values.

7. PARTNERING

The ability to effectively leverage other community assets.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

The ability to raise sufficient resources to meet the goals of the parks and recreation system.

9. ACCESS TO DECISION MAKERS

The ability for community members to meet, visit and influence decision makers regarding parks and recreation issues facing the individual and/or the community.

Each of the above nine evaluative factors was then assigned a weight of importance. On a 1 to 5 scale of importance, with 5 being most important and 1 least, the evaluative factors of *VISION, PLANNING & COMMUNITY INPUT, SERVICE DELIVERY, CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT, AND SUTAINABILITY* were assigned weights of 5. *SUFFICIENT ASSETS, PARTNERING and ACCESS TO DECISION MAKERS* were assigned a weighting value of 4 and *COMMUNITY BENEFITS* was assigned a weight of 3.

The Matrix on the following page shows the results from the four governance models that were evaluated:

Model 1: Enhanced Partnering Status Quo

Description: This Model would result in a park system that is still managed by the Park District of Oak Park in partnership with the Village and two School Districts with enhanced partnering relationships.

Model 2: Independent Park District-Ownership of Community Centers and Grounds, with Enhanced Partnering Relationships with Community Providers

Description: This Model would result in the Village of Oak Park transferring ownership of the Community Centers and grounds to the Park District of Oak Park and work to increase partnering efforts with other community providers.

Model 3: Independent Park District-Ownership and Operations of Community Centers and Grounds by Village, With Partnering Relationships with Community Providers

Description: This Model would result in the Village of Oak Park and Park District of Oak Park allowing the contractual agreement to expire without being renewed, and transfer operations of the Community Centers to the Village of Oak Park, while leaving the remainder of the Park District of Oak Park intact.

Model 4: Village Operated Parks and Recreation System

Description: This Model would result in the Park District of Oak Park being disbanded and total operations of Parks and Recreation being transferred under Village management.

Evaluating Governance in the Oak Park Park System

April 2004 Assessment

<u>Evaluation Factors</u>	Importance Weight	Points Per Model Current System	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Vision-ability to provide a clear sense of purpose</i>	5	3 (15)	3 (15)	5 (25)	3 (15)	4 (20)
<i>Planning and community input-ability to effectively plan and involve the community</i>	5	4 (20)	4 (20)	5 (25)	3 (15)	5 (25)
<i>Sufficient assets-ability to provide sufficient assets of land, staff and equipment (assets that are owned)</i>	4	3 (12)	3 (12)	5 (20)	4 (16)	4 (16)
<i>Service Delivery -ability to deliver services of highest priority to citizens including: equitable access, user satisfaction, safety, and professional staff.</i>	5	4 (20)	4 (20)	5 (25)	4 (20)	5 (25)
<i>Citizen involvement - ability to attract citizen input and leadership into the park system</i>	5	4 (20)	4 (20)	5 (25)	4 (20)	5 (25)
<i>Community Benefits-Ability to provide benefits beyond the borders of the parks, i.e. improve residential values, etc.</i>	3	3 (9)	4 (12)	4 (12)	4 (12)	4 (12)
<i>Partnering-ability to effectively leverage other community assets</i>	4	3 (12)	4 (16)	5 (20)	4 (16)	5 (20)
<i>Sustainability-ability to raise sufficient resources to meet the systems goals, resources to manage assets.</i>	5	3 (15)	3 (15)	4 (20)	3 (15)	5 (25)
<i>Access to decision makers-ability for community members to meet and visit with decision makers regarding park issues</i>	4	4 (16)	3 (12)	5 (20)	2 (8)	4 (16)
Total Points		139	142	192	137	184

Importance Weight 1-5

The following recommendations are offered for Governance:

1.1 An Independent Park District Model of Government should be implemented to operate parks and recreation services in Oak Park.

Both the consultant team and the sub-committee on governance independently and concurrently agreed that two of the four alternative models of governance (Model 2: Independent Park District and Model 4: Village Operated Parks & Recreation System) stood out from the four models that were evaluated and deserved additional study and consideration. While there are compelling arguments for recommending either of the models and the quantitative assessment is very close between the two, it is recommended that the community pursue the Independent Park District form of delivery of parks and recreation services (Model 2) to pursue the preferred vision of the community.

Under this preferred model, the Village of Oak Park and the Park District would allow the current contractual agreement pertaining to the ownership and operation of the seven community centers to expire and enter into negotiations for the transferring of ownership and operation of the centers to the Park District.

The independent Park District or Village operation of parks and recreation services models were preferred over other models primarily because both systems of governance clearly assign responsibility and accountability to a governing body. While the consultant team strongly recommends partnership agreements and cooperation among governmental entities, we prefer that whatever the form of governance ultimately selected, that citizens know to whom to advocate and approach and it is clear who the fiscally responsible entity for the services provided is. We suggest that either organization (Park District or Village) has the authority and ability to appropriate adequate funding (in consultation with the electorate) to achieve the long-term goals of the Oak Park parks and recreation system.

The Park District Board is representative of the “resident experts” in parks and recreation matters. They, unlike the Village Board, are not encumbered with the significant and sometimes over-bearing responsibility of addressing a myriad of critical and wide ranging issues that face a dynamic community like Oak Park. It is our opinion that the Park District Board can more adequately and in more depth address specific parks and recreation related matters that face the community.

Given full accountability for meeting the parks and recreation needs of the community while standing for election enables Oak Park resident’s desirable access to a specific group of leaders who are in touch with the issues and control the resources that may affect them. Alternatively, it is incumbent upon the Park District Board, who may not garner the attention and community exposure that is given to the Village Board, to clearly “stand out and get out” into the community and clearly communicate it’s purpose for existence and how it can assist the community in achieving a better parks and recreation system in the future.

The system of governance has a responsibility for educating and informing the community of the different entities that provide services and engage the community in dialogue as well as the election process. Done effectively, the highly involved citizenry that is so evident in Oak Park will not be confused as to who is responsible and accountable for the provision of parks and recreation services and those same informed residents will be better served by men and women who are elected by their constituents to focus on the community's parks and recreation assets and future.

While the consultant team will readily admit there is no perfect system of governance, we believe, based upon our conduct of interviews, surveys, and analysis of the Oak Park system that the Independent Park District model offers the best long-term strategy to maximize citizen access, establish the closest positive relationship with the Oak Park electorate about parks and recreation issues and pursue a focused preferred future for the parks and recreation system.

Short term, the Village model may achieve faster and more immediate beneficial results for parks and recreation improvements because of accessibility to needed resources to address funding gaps and needs. The Village government may also be more sensitive and understanding of the under-served population of the community. However, longer term, the dedication and pursuit of challenges specific to only parks and recreation related issues is best served by a tightly focused entity which is represented by the Park District model. That said, the Park District must, among other things, sharpen its sensitivity to seeking out and addressing the needs of portions of the community who may not regularly engage in public discourse.

1.2 The Village of Oak Park should make a three year contribution to the Park District of Oak Park, a significant portion of which the Consultant Team recommends becomes the basis of a Capital Improvements Plan for the District

Upon letting the existing agreement expire and accompanying the transfer of facilities would be a proposed three year annual contribution from the Village to the Park District. The Consultant Team additionally proposes that a significant portion of this contribution becomes the basis of a Capital Improvements Plan for the District, thus partially addressing years of no funding for necessary facility improvements within the system.

The three-year annual transfer of funds from the Village to the District should be earmarked both for capital and operating purposes with operating funds declining each year. For example, the three year transfer of funds could be structured as follows: Year 1, 75% operating purposes, 25% capital funding, Year 2, 50% to both operating and capital purposes, and Year 3 25% for operations and 75% for capital improvements.

Thus we recommend the centers and accompanying land be transferred along with \$4.8 to \$6 million to be used to create a Parks & Recreation Capital Improvements Program and to assist in park operations as described above.

Basis for the Funding Recommendation

This recommendation would have the Village pay to the Park District a sum that is more than they are legally required to do over a 3 year period and then not require any addition financial support for an Independent Park District.

Neither the Park District or Village is legally bound to any agreement past the current one. The Village and Park District can simply not renew the agreement in which case the responsibility for the 7 community centers would return to the Village. The Park District allocates \$1.18 million of the Village's \$1.6 million transfer to the community centers. Of that total approximately \$500,000 is allocated to Direct Center Costs, while the remaining nearly \$700,000 is allocated to various Indirect and Administrative Costs for the Centers.

If the Village retakes responsibility for the centers, it is clear to the Consultant Team that their costs would not approach the \$1.18 million currently appropriated. The Village would have the same options to operate all 7 centers with a more cost effective management structure, to convert 2-3 of the centers to non-profit operations, or to close some of the 7 centers that the Park District has. Additionally, the Village could choose to contract out the management of some/all of the centers to a third party, such as a non-profit provider, etc.

All of these actions would reduce the Village's costs for the community centers, some with significantly reductions. Results from the Master Plan clearly indicate to the Consultant Team that there is no recreation need to operate the 7 community centers and the allocations to the centers exceed the benefits received. The Village, acting in the best interests of the wise usage of tax dollars would not in our opinion spend nearly \$1.2 million per year in tax dollars on the centers.

Since the Village had and still has the option of rejecting the governance recommendation, to ask them to pay far in excess over the next 3 years what they are legally required to do, could have them reject the recommendation.

This recommendation would have the Park District receive from the Village a sum that is more than they are required over the next three years and that can be used to jump start the master plan, while giving the Park District adequate time to bring to the voters tax packages.

The Park District of Oak Park has considerable opportunities to increase tax revenues from existing and new tax sources through voter elections. Revenues from existing park district tax sources can increase as much as \$1,514,496 annually through voter elections and new sources of tax support can add to this. For example, a new Conservatory Tax could generate as much as \$573,571 annually. The Park District has not brought any issues before the voters in at least 21 years. The Consultant Team believes that having voters participate in these funding decisions is a benefit of an independent park district.

Summary of Recommendations

The Infrastructure Committee called for a voter election. Repeatedly during the master plan process, the need and desire to have one or more voter elections for raising revenues was raised by Park District officials and citizens, including administrative staff of the Park District suggestions to raise revenues from a Museum Tax to support the Conservatory and a citizen vote on future funding of the centers. Some have suggested having voter elections as early as April 2004.

While the Consultant Team believes that the Independent Park District model is the best model, we do not believe it is the cheapest model. Certainly, there are administrative costs for the Park District model that would not exist under the Village model. For example, there would be no need in the Village model for a “Superintendent of Business Operations” position as is in the Park District. Over the past 4 years, total administrative costs for the Park District have increased more than \$100,000 per year, representing 50% of the total staffing cost growth for the entire Park District. The Consultant Team has previously recommended opportunities for other cost savings as relates to salaries and wages.

In our opinion, the Village should not be required to allocate tax payer dollars for administrative and salary expenses for a Park District model that would not be required in a Village model.

While the Park District has depleted fund-balances, particularly in its Revenue Fund, this shortfall was caused by decisions of the Park District relative to the issuance of the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bonds. That decision has led to Fund Balances in Revenue Facilities of nearly \$800,000 less than in 1994. Pool Net results with debt services are \$1,560,953 less than projected through the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bonds. Collectively, the other 9 Funds in the Park District listed under “Operating Funds” have shown an increase in their fund balances of over \$450,000 since 1994.

Based on numerous communications to the Consultant Team from the Finance Director and Executive Director, the Park District feels that there is a “Trend” for the Fund Balances to improve. The Consultant Team agrees with that assessment. Additionally, the last of the Bond Payments for the Alternative Revenue Bonds will be made in 2006. After that, the Park District will free up significant dollars that have been used to make up for revenue shortfalls from the Alternative Revenue Bond issue for other purposes.

The Consultant Teams recommendations will provide funding to the Park District through this 2006 timeline. We do not believe that the Village should be required to allocate funds to the Park District to improve its fund balance, when the cause of these difficulties were actions of a previous Park Board, under the advice of a previous Parks and Recreation Director.

The Park District has not spent sufficient money since 1980 on the maintenance of the 7 community centers. The \$1.6 million allocated from the Village is supposed to include go monies for the maintenance of the 7 community centers. It is clear that sufficient dollars were not allocated for these purposes, but rather were spent on other areas. In a sense if the dollars that are allocated from the Village to the Park District are used for improvements to the community centers, the Village is paying for some of those improvements twice. First, with allocations since 1980 they have not been sufficiently used for maintenance of the centers, and now with the additionally requested allocation.

1.3 The Park District of Oak Park and Village of Oak Park should set the tone for enhanced partnering efforts in the community.

It is not anticipated that the Village would be asked for any further long-term annual contributions to the District for day to day parks and recreation operations. However, future partnership agreements between the Village, Park District and other community organizations are strongly encouraged in order to accomplish a specific project or address an unmet community need as identified in the community survey.

The Consultant Team believes and encourages the Park District and Village to use the development of an independent Park District as a springboard for forging new and better partnerships for her citizens. This is articulated in our Governance recommendations. One only has to look towards the opportunities presented by the new open space available sports facilities on elementary school property or the Cap the Ike project that envisions greatly expanded areas for walking, biking and use of open space as examples of future partnering opportunities. Both of these opportunities were led by Village efforts. It is citizens of Oak Park who will benefit from these efforts if the Village and Park District can come together and make it happen. We anticipate and hope that other opportunities will also continue to occur to be acted upon.

1.4 The Park District of Oak Park should prepare a 3 year operating action plan that details how the Park District of Oak Park will move forward on implementing the recommendations of the Master Plan.

The Consultant Team recommends that a three (3) year operating action plan be developed by the Park District to serve as a blueprint for transitioning to the new form of governance. This action plan will identify the specific actions and strategies that the Park District anticipates taking to achieve appropriate long-term funding needs (voter elections), potential cooperative ventures, forms of service delivery, and suggested forums for continued citizen involvement.

The action plan will empower the independent Park District to take responsibility for implementing the master plan. Through this they can take ownership on those recommendations they accept fully, reshape recommendations that they feel need refining,

and possibly reject some recommendations and bring before the community their fresh ideas for improvements. The consultant team believes that the community needs to understand where their leadership stands. We also believe that by articulately those positions the Village and Park District will both benefit in the transitioning period.

1.5 The Park District of Oak should adopt by Board action the “Vision Statement” developed in the Master Plan.

An important aspect of planning for and articulating the future of an organization lies in the entity’s leadership clearly “charting a course” and then sharing that course with those that are served by the organization. Spending significant time discussing and writing the group’s vision for the future, as well as the values or “code of conduct” that the leadership will embrace to achieve the developed vision and preferred future, and creating an easy to articulate statement of mission or purpose is a wise and valuable investment. These statements help to bond and “ground” the organization’s leadership, giving them a constant reminder of the higher goal they are pursuing as well as a means of communicating their actions to those impacted by their leadership.

Using information gleaned from interviews, the assessment of community needs, research into past policies and practices and conducting a “visioning workshop” with the Subcommittee on Governance, the Consultant Team developed the following draft Vision, Values and Mission statements that may be further reviewed by the Park District Board and adopted.

THE VISION OF OAK PARK’S PARK SYSTEM

Oak Park’s parks system provides open space and recreation opportunities for all Oak Park residents and we will work persistently to ensure the availability of these quality parks, recreation programs and facilities for generations to come. We strive to provide an excellent parks and recreation system that is deeply integrated into the distinctive Oak Park living experience. We envision the recognition of our parks system by Oak Park residents as a major contributor to the enhanced quality of life that exists in the Village. We value and respect our history, our civic involvement and the Oak Park tradition of innovation and we will strongly consider these factors as we plan for the future.

We believe that citizen participation and access to their parks and recreation programs is paramount. The parks system will conduct the public’s business in an open, communicative and self-evaluative fashion. We will reach out to populations that are underserved and we will continually seek feedback and take corrective measures as we strive for excellence.

We believe the key to achieving and maintaining an excellent parks and recreation system lies in creating partnerships with other community agencies to provide services in a seamless fashion. These critical partnerships are both within and external to Oak Park’s

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boundaries. Who is providing the program or service is secondary to the quality and the diversity of the offerings. We promise, in collaboration with our partners to balance development and maintenance of quality parks and facilities with the preservation of open space. In addition we pledge to offer innovative, high quality programs that provide significant benefits to participants, residents, the environment, the local economy and our overall community.

THE VALUES OF OAK PARK'S PARK SYSTEM

In striving for excellence, we are committed to:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - We will demonstrate attentiveness to our customers' needs by routinely soliciting public input and feedback and welcoming ideas and input. Our processes and procedures will facilitate and reflect open and effective communication.

INCLUSION - We will recognize and appreciate our community's diverse population and we will strive to provide parks and recreation opportunities to all, regardless of economic means or physical ability.

FUNDING - We will aggressively pursue economic sustainability and stability through sound fiscal management and efficient use of resources.

PARTNERSHIPS - We pledge to work effectively with others, establishing and strengthening bonds with governmental entities as well as other community organizations and user groups for the betterment of the community.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT - We will demonstrate the highest standards of ethical conduct, treating everyone with courtesy and respect and recognizing diverse opinions and needs. We will actively listen and respond to requests in a prompt and respectful manner.

PLANNING - We will design long-term strategies and set measurable goals while proactively seeking positive solutions to problems and challenges.

EVALUATION - We will maintain an on-going process of evaluating our performance and effectiveness and we will measure the success of implemented policies and strategies.

SAFETY - We will actively implement sound safety practices in our facilities and in all aspects of our work, ensuring a safe environment for users and employees of the parks system.

We will value every citizen contact and pursue each as an opportunity to demonstrate these highly regarded values.

MISSION

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

1.6 The Park District of Oak Park should appoint 2-3 “Village Elders” to work with the Park District in the implementation of the Master Plan.

The Consultant Team is highly complimentary of the current practice of the administrators of the Village, Park District, two School Districts and the Library regularly meeting and discussing mutual challenges and cooperative efforts. We recommend this practice be expanded in two ways for purposes of implementing the parks and recreation master plan.

First, we suggest the top elected official of each entity join their appointed administrators in attending these meetings on at least a quarterly basis. It is the partnership of elected and appointed leaders that often transcend differences between organizations and those leaders, with the support of the remainder of the governing board members can achieve new solutions and approaches to critical parks and recreation master plan issues, hopefully avoiding paralysis and inaction on important pending issues. Meetings need to be substantive---more than “reporting sessions”. Key cooperative ventures need to be thoroughly discussed and the basis for agreement “hashed out” in these sessions.

Secondly, we suggest the combined body of entities that now regularly meet, select two to three “Village elders” to join the group for all meetings pertaining to the parks and recreation master plan and contribute to the dialogue. These “elders” would be individuals who have served Oak Park in the past and are readily recognized as “wise leaders” who think first, foremost and only about the betterment of Oak Park. Fortunately, it has been the consultant team’s experience that every community possesses individuals of this caliber. They have served the community with distinction, have achieved their leadership status, have no “axes to grind”, have given unselfishly of themselves to the community and they embody the very essence of the community and the good things it stands for.

It has been our experience that the presence of elders tends to provide an overriding calm and “let’s do the right thing here” attitude to a group of leaders who are often challenged by the “here and now” of events and circumstances. In our opinion, this approach will be critical to accomplishing the objectives of the parks and recreation master plan.

Strategic Work Product #2: Park District Financing

It is vital that the Park District carefully consider and prioritize the appropriate tax rate and bonding authority to achieve the parks and recreation system needs and goals for the future without reliance upon Village operational funding, as well as other non-tax sources of funding. This should take place in the Action Plan being developed by the Park District.

The consultants believe that one of the most critical factors the Park District must face is the issue of *Sustainability*---raising and appropriately managing the resources necessary to achieve the objectives of an excellent parks and recreation system that the community desires and deserves. In recent years, one could not conclude that Park District leadership has excelled in this critical area of governance. As a result, there is much “catching up” to be done and it will be a significant challenge to overcome multiple years of under funding and attention to potentially beneficial cooperative ventures.

Towards these objectives the following recommendations are offered:

2.1 The Park District of Oak Park should aggressively move forward in increasing non-tax sources of funding for capital projects.

Chapter 10 of the Master Plan summarizes a full-range of recommended non-tax sources of funding for capital projects. Some of these recommendations are for new sources of revenue while others are expansions of existing sources of revenue. These sources include:

- ◆ *Private fund-raising, including development of a Park District Foundation* - Currently the Park District of Oak Park does use private fund-raising, although it creates little current revenues. One source that has been successful is the Austin Trust. The Austin Trust is established for extraordinary maintenance and recreation activities at Austin Gardens. The interest generates about \$12,000.00 annually. The Memorial Trust has contributed over 400 trees to our parks.

The Consultant Team believes that private fund-raising and gifts are a major potential source of funding projects for the park system, particularly those that have historic significance in the community.

To act upon this potential the Consultant Team recommends the establishment of a Park District Foundation, which would act similarly to a community foundation. Many Park systems across the country are turning to private fund-raising as a major source of revenue development, particularly for specific projects.

While the Park District can accept gifts within its current structure, development of a foundation board will allow the Park District to bring in new community members that are focused on private fund-raising. Just as with any other revenue source, those organizations that articulate a clear case statement of need for private fund-raising

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dollars, set specific targets and revenue types for their fund-raising efforts, develop policies that create incentives for fund-raising, and go about reaching those goals in a strategic manner are most successful.

Aggressively raising revenues from private sources can serve as a catalyst and be used as matching sources for grants. Equally important, aggressively raising revenues from private sources will further illustrate to tax payers that local tax dollars are only a piece of a comprehensive revenue policy for the Park District.

The Park District can also establish incentives for community organizations to raise private fund-raising dollars. For example, the Topeka Parks and Recreation Department had a policy whereby the Park District would match with tax dollars any moneys raised by private organizations for parks and recreation purposes. Within three years more than \$3.5 million in private fund-raising revenues had been raised or pledged.

- ◆ *Recreation Service Fee:* This is a dedicated user fee which can apply to all organized activities which require a reservation of some type, or other purposes as defined by the Park District. Examples of such activities include adult basketball, volleyball, and softball leagues, youth baseball, soccer, and softball leagues, and special interest classes. The fee allows participants an opportunity to contribute towards the upkeep of facilities being used.

A Recreation Service Fee was recently implemented by the Park District. This is a recommendation that came out of the Infrastructure Committee Report and was referred to as a “CIP Surcharge”. The Park District has implemented a \$5 per participant fee through various partnership agreements, i.e. OPRF Pony Baseball, Oak Park-River Forest Strikers Soccer Club, Inc., the Windmills, Oak Park Youth Baseball/Softball, etc.

The current Participant Fee is an excellent partnership project which can also be improved. Current language in the contracts between the Park District and the various non-profit organizations indicate that “the Required Fee shall be applied by the Park District for park improvements and for extraordinary park maintenance, as determined solely by the Park District.” None of the partnership agreements spell out specific projects that the Park District and community organizations can partner on developing.

With the results of the master plan in hand, the Consultant Team would recommend that each agreement include a written long term plan on how the facilities utilized by the community organizations can be improved. We would recommend these be joint decisions and not decisions that are determined solely by the Park District. The Consultant Team would also recommend that the Park District consider developing multi-year contracts rather than yearly contracts. These multi-year contracts will allow

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both organizations to plan better and provide incentives for private contributions that might not be available without clear direction on how the dollars will be used.

- ◆ *Interlocal Agreements:* Contractual relationships entered into between two or more local units of government and/or between a local unit of government and a non-profit organization for the joint usage/development of sports fields, regional parks, or other facilities.

The Park District of Oak Park has an extensive range of interlocal agreements with non-profit providers and other public agencies. Information from the benchmarking survey shows that the Park District of Oak Park has 12 partnerships out of a total of 15 potential partnership opportunities that organizations can partner with local schools, other local units of government and non-profits in the development, use, and funding of parks and recreation facilities. The average benchmarked community has 7.5 partnerships.

It is imperative the “fully independent” Park District aggressively seek new models of cooperation with other community providers and regional partners to achieve the objectives of the Master Plan. Our recommendations in this area will be more fully described under the partnership section.

- ◆ *Grants:* A variety of special grants currently exist through the Federal and State governmental systems. Grants are available for a wide range of projects. Federal grants have been historically more available for outdoor recreation, parks, and trails projects than indoor projects. State and federal grants require local matching funds of various amounts. The Open Space and Land Acquisition Grants administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources are very achievable but require site master plans and a 50% match. This grant option was used in 1998 at Lindberg Park.

The Park District of Oak Park has used grants in the past and recently received an Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant for \$40,000. *The Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory provided a \$80,000 match to the Park District for the Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant.*

Some of the identified areas of citizen needs, such as walking and running trails are excellent new areas to pursuing grants. The consultant team believes this is a revenue source that could be increased substantially.

2.2 The Park District of Oak Park should aggressively move forward in increasing tax sources of funding for capital projects

The Park District of Oak Park has under-funded capital project needs for a number of years. Repeatedly during the master plan process, the need to have one or more voter elections for raising revenues was raised by Park District officials and citizens. The Park District has not brought any issues before the voters in at least 21 years. The Consultant Team believes that having voters participate in these funding decisions is a benefit of an independent park district.

The following tax sources of funding projects are recommended:

- ◆ *Property Taxes:* Tax levied on the assessed valuation of all non-exempt real and personal property. Property taxes are the major source of funding operations of the Park District. The Park District has a number of existing tax sources including corporate, museum, and recreation.

The Park District of Oak Park has considerable opportunities to increase tax revenues from existing and new tax sources through voter elections. Revenues from existing park district tax sources can increase as much as \$1,514,496 annually through voter elections and would increase the property tax rate by \$.132.

New sources of tax support can add to this. For example, a new Conservatory Tax could generate as much as \$573,571 annually through an increase in the property tax rate of \$.050. We believe that given the importance of the Oak Park Conservatory this would be a very appropriate funding source.

The Parks Infrastructure Committee recommended holding a voter election to increase the Corporate tax levy rate with the additional dollars, with the public understanding that a portion of the tax levy would be dedicated for capital improvements and the remaining for daily operations. These revenues can increase as much as \$2,877,878 annually through voter elections from a \$.25 per \$100 of EAV tax increase. The Consultant Team supports this action.

- ◆ *Non-Referendum Debt Service Deferred Bonds:* The PTELL establishes a limit on non-referendum bonds that the Park District may levy annually for debt service. The limit was established in 1994 at \$219,000.

Along with the Alternative Revenue Series 1996 Bonds, this has been the principal source the Park District has used to provide capital improvements. All of the current debt will be retired by 2008. The Consultant Team recommends this source of funding be continued.

- ◆ *Referendum to Increase the Debt Service Levy Limit:* This is a voter approved increase in the debt service levy limit in order to pay for specific projects. The Park District of Oak Park does not currently have any voter approved long term debt.

The Park District has prepared information that shows that a bond proceed (example) for the maximum debt of \$32,980,309 would increase the property tax rate by \$.23 per \$100 of EAV over the next twenty years. This would generate \$2,646,425 in revenue each year to pay off the bonds. It is imperative that the scheduling of the debt service be tied into the realistic life of the project(s) being funded.

The Consultant Team recommends that the 3 Year Action Plan which is being developed by the Park District contains the specific projects from the Master Plan which are of the highest community priority to bring before the voters.

2.3 The Park District of Oak Park should reallocate operating dollars consistent with areas identified as high importance and priorities in the Master Plan.

The Master Plan has shown that in some cases the current allocation of operating dollars to specific service areas by the Park District is not consistent with community priorities. As one example, it is clear that additional dollars, resources, and strategic direction need to be allocated to the care and maintenance of neighborhood parks.

In the Consultant Team’s opinion, the Park District needs to reallocate its operating resources based on identified community needs. The Park District is spending a disproportionate amount of its tax revenues and the current Village transfer revenues on the 7 community center operations. This does not allow sufficient revenues to be allocated to other operations and capital areas of high community importance.

The chart below shows tax support for direct and indirect expenses for various major service areas in the Park District. Tax support for the community centers is derived from Park District taxes and revenues from the current Village Transfer. The total tax support for the community centers is nearly \$500,000 more than for parks and sports programs combined. 30% of household respondents to the community survey rated small neighborhood parks as one of the 4 most important parks and recreation facilities to their households as compared to 9% for community centers. The amount of tax support for the community centers is more than is received for the Conservatory, Dole Center, swimming pools, Ridgeland Commons Ice Arena, the 2 historic properties, and the Gymnastics Center combined.

Park District of Oak Park

<u>MAJOR SERVICE AREA</u>	<u>Total Tax Support</u>	<u>Percent Tax Support of Service</u>	<u>Percent Relationship of Tax Support To Community Centers</u>
Community Centers	\$1,326,795	37.27%	
Parks (Open space and sports)	\$842,859	23.68%	64%
Conservatory	\$341,724	9.60%	26%
Dole Center	\$251,838	7.07%	19%
Swimming Pools	\$298,661	8.39%	23%
Ice/Arena	\$166,227	4.67%	13%
Historic Properties	\$117,030	3.29%	9%
Adult Recreation	\$95,665	2.69%	7%
Early Childhood and Summer Camps	\$63,411	1.78%	5%
Gymnastics Center	\$55,693	1.56%	4%
Total	\$3,558,903	100.00%	

Source: Park District of Oak Park and Leisure Vision

The Consultant Team recommends that the Park Board and staff reallocate operating dollars consistent with areas identified as community priorities. We would additionally recommend that the Park District under its “Tax Support By Service Area” costs and revenue tracking break out Park Maintenance and Sports Fields into their own Service Areas, so that the costs and revenues for each of these important citizen services can be tracked.

2.4 The Park District of Oak Park should develop “Board Policies” for assessing administrative costs for parks and recreation facilities and programs.

The Consultant Team agrees with the tracking of administrative costs for parks and recreation facilities and programs as identified in the current practices of the Park District. However, currently these costs can be charged or not charged off to specific programs, facilities, etc by administrative actions. The Consultant Team believes that the practices for assessing administrative costs should be governed through Board policy and would recommend these policies be adopted.

2.5 The Park District of Oak Park should consider a review and some modifications in its Comprehensive Revenue Policy.

The Park District of Oak Park adopted its first Comprehensive Revenue Policy in January of 2002. The policy document indicates that “this policy will be reviewed on an annual basis to guarantee that the changing needs of the community continue to be addressed. The Consultant Team would recommend in the next review that the policy that does not allow advertising in Park District publications being reviewed. Many Park systems are paying portions of the costs for publishing their brochures, etc. through advertising revenues. We believe this would be a new and important source of revenue for the Park District.

Additionally, we would recommend that the next review of the Comprehensive Revenue Policy include a written overview of the impact the policy has made on revenue generation. Overall, the Park District does an excellent job in generating revenues from program fees, facilities, etc as we have indicated under the benchmarking chapter of the Master Plan. On a percentage basis, we have not seen clear evidence that the Comprehensive Revenue Policy has had a substantial impact on the amount of revenue that is being received. For example, revenues from the pools over the past two years is only up a little over 1%.

2.6 The Park District of Oak Park should reallocate the majority of dollars saved through staffing recommendations towards funding capital projects.

Chapter 7 of this Master Plan “Draft Report” outlines a number of steps the Park District can take to save staffing costs in the operations of facilities. These recommended reorganization actions would recognize a minimum of \$124,000 to over \$250,000 in savings from staffing costs per year just on the direct costs of operating the community centers.

Regardless of which option or variation the Park District implements there is a potential for phasing the reorganization over an extended period, which we would recommend to be between 1-3 years. Making small incremental changes as staff turnover and attrition occurs is a reasonable implementation plan, and should allow these changes to occur without laying off any present staff. The full financial benefits of reorganization will take longer to fully develop in this manner, but the Consultant Team would recommend a 1-3 year phase in so as not to cause any staff lay-offs.

The Consultant Team recommends reallocating the majority of dollars saved in these actions towards funding capital projects. For example, if these actions resulted in a minimum of \$150,000 in savings per year, over 5 years \$750,000 in capital projects could be funded. We believe that this action would further illustrate to the community the prudent fiscal steps the Park District is taking and benefit the Park District when it goes out for a tax increase voter election.

2.7 The Park District of Oak Park should develop a full written report regarding the performance of the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond Issue.

As has been noted in Chapter 10 of this “Draft Master Plan Report”, the Park District’s fund balances have decreased substantially over the past 10 years. This finding was initially pointed out in the Infrastructure Committee’s report. The Year 2002 and Year 2003 fund balances for the Park District both for the Operating Funds and for Total Funds are the lowest in the past 10 years. The Year 2003 fund balances did show an increase over 2002 for both the Total Fund and Operating Fund.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Fund Balance</u>	<u>Operating Fund Total</u>
1994	\$1,432,038	\$820,730
1995	\$2,022,890	\$1,122,382
1996	\$3,588,607	\$1,724,685
1997	\$2,321,266	\$1,690,262
1998	\$3,552,079	\$1,081,952
1999	\$2,576,227	\$711,450
2000	\$1,235,054	\$609,803
2001	\$951,445	\$711,956
2002	\$571,989	\$503,139
2003	\$623,363	\$525,737

Source: Park District of Oak Park and Leisure Vision

The Consultant Team has worked extensively with Park District officials to understand the principal reasons that the fund balances have decreased. These efforts have shown that the principal reason for the reduced fund balance is the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond issue not meeting its revenue goals.

It should be noted that no current Park District Board members or top administrative staff were with the Park District when the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond was issued. This is a situation they inherited and have had to correct.

This \$2 million bond issue was issued to fund improvements to Rehm Pool and additionally for improvements at the Ridgeland Commons Pool. The Bonds were issued based on a 3 to 2 vote of the Park Board. Bond costs were supposed to be paid through increases in pool revenues.

However, pool revenues have not increased sufficiently to cover bond payments. Through the end of 2003, pool expenses including debt service have exceeded pool revenues by \$1,560,953 since 1997. Pool revenues are accounted for under the Revenue Facilities fund.

Summary of Recommendations

Over the past 10 years the fund balance in Revenue Facilities has decreased over \$750,000. Revenue Facilities is one of 10 Funds listed under “Operating Funds”. As indicated in the chart below, in 1994 the Revenue Facilities Fund had a balance of -\$59,143. *In 2003 the Revenue Facilities Fund had a balance of -\$822,848.*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Revenue Facilities</u>
1994	-\$59,143
1995	\$55,217
1996	\$43,059
1997	-\$28,327
1998	-\$53,472
1999	-\$237,447
2000	-\$349,615
2001	-\$459,885
2002	-\$657,832
2003	-\$822,848

Source: Park District of Oak Park

The Revenue Facilities Fund is used to account for revenues and expenditures related to programs that are not directly tax supported including outdoor pools, indoor ice-arena, gymnastics, recreation programming for adults, preschoolers, and summer camps. The deficit in the Revenue Facilities Fund would be even greater except for positive revenue generation in other areas of the Revenue Facilities Fund and other actions that the Park District has taken.

Collectively, the other 9 Funds listed under “Operating Funds” have shown an increase in their fund balances of over \$450,000 since 1994.

The performance of the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond was not considered in the Infrastructure Committee’s report. This information is newly developed for the Master Plan. Given the great importance of the Park District’s fund balances and the considerable impact on the fund balances by the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond Issue we would recommend that the Park District prepare a written report regarding the history of this issue, what occurred, the corrective actions that the Park District needed to take, and any recommended policy changes that the Park Board either has taken or will take in the future.

Strategic Work Product #3: Community Centers and Historic Properties

A major focus of the master planning process was analysis of the current system of delivering parks and recreation services through the seven community centers. This analysis was conducted to answer key questions regarding the efficiencies and effectiveness of the current service delivery model and recommend options as appropriate. Chapter 7 of the “Draft Master Plan” contains a full analysis of the seven community centers.

The key question to be addressed in the analysis centered around “*Does the present community center model of service delivery work?*” In the opinion of the Consultant Team, the current model of service is failing for numerous reasons including:

Duplication of services. Many of the programs at each community center are the same. To a certain degree the community centers are competing with themselves for program participants. Program occupancy rates for the community centers range from 17% to 85% of capacity. This duplication of programs inhibits efficiency and restricts the ability to reach full potential in revenues.

Financially it is more efficient to compress the participants into fewer classes. The staff costs for each center to run this program, regardless if the class has a minimum number of participants or maximum number of participants, is the same. If fewer classes are held the cost of instructors drop and the net revenue increases because classes are running at a higher occupancy rate. This efficiency will help improve the cost recovery rate at each center.

Staff costs are the single biggest cost at each center. Each of the seven community centers has a full-time director assigned to the building and various part-time instructors and supervisors to assist with monitoring and programming the building in the evening and weekends. Personnel costs are ranging from 77.8% to 88.3% of the community center budgets. The mean percentage is 84%. Typically personnel cost in a community center range from 60-75% of the total facility budget.

About 30% of the community center budget and staff costs are allocated to outdoor sports. The single biggest contributor to the cost of operation outdoor sports through the centers is the Park District philosophy of having paid coaches.

High administrative overhead. The administrative overhead costs for operating the centers appear high. Analysis of the 2003 budget reveals that 37% of the total community center budget is associated with administrative costs. There does not appear to be a method in place to accurately identify and distribute administrative cost on a Park District wide basis.

The neighborhood focus is changing. Community focus and interest by the residents is changing. At one time the community centers were the hub of neighborhood activity. Today there is less emphasis on the neighborhood aspect of the centers. Some families may be looking for activities for the entire family to participate in together, which the existing community centers are lacking.

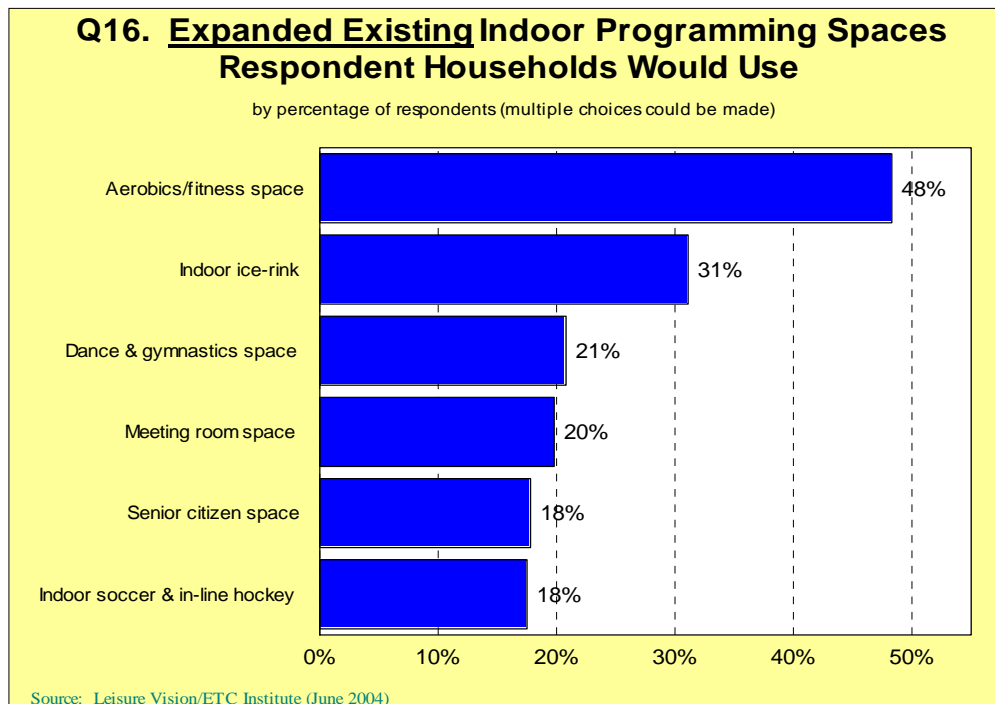
Summary of Recommendations

For others, personal fitness is important and the community centers do not have facilities or equipment to meet their needs. Statistically, exercise with equipment ranks third in popularity based on the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) data. The survey validates the importance of exercise for residents of the Park District. 52% of survey respondents indicated there is a need for a fitness and exercise component.

The community centers are putting financial strain on the Park District budget. The community centers accounted for about 12% (\$669,881) of the total Park District budget of \$8,115,513 in 2003. At the same time, community center revenue accounted for only 2.5% (\$207,436) of the \$8,115,513 revenue generated by the Park District.

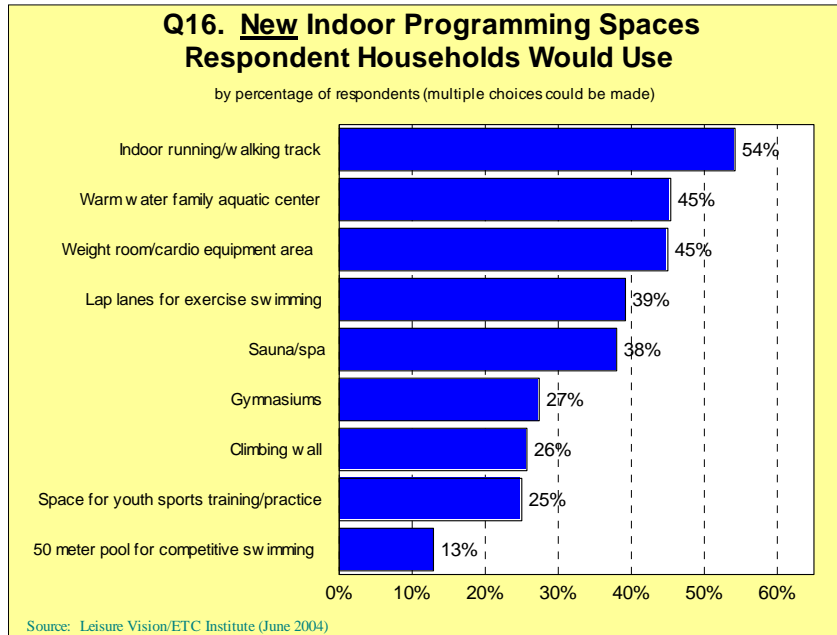
The community centers do not have the types of programming spaces that are of highest importance to the community. The Consultant Team has visited with some people who feel that the problems at the community centers are a result of poor programming. While we certainly agree that that programming could be improved, even with this improved programming, the centers do not have the types of programming spaces to meet the highest priority needs of the community.

The chart below indicates the community priorities for *expanding existing indoor programming spaces*. The highest priority spaces are spaces that are at the Dole Center and Ridgeland Commons and not at the existing 7 community centers.



Summary of Recommendations

Additionally, the citizen survey asked community priorities for *developing new indoor programming spaces*. These new indoor programming spaces are indicated below. Again, the types of programming spaces (and related programming) that are high priorities can not be offered at the community centers nor in most cases cost effectively be added.



Results of the “Indoor Spaces Report” conducted by the Park District Citizen Committee. The PDCC report summary comments indicated “The current facilities of Park District do not provide sufficient or adequate space for the Park District of the future. Regardless of the means, the end must be additional space for indoor fitness. The Park District can put to use its community center space, but that space will not adequately address the future demands of the public for indoor programming and, as shown by the survey results, does not adequately meet those demands at present”.

The Park District is spending a disproportionate amount of its tax revenues and the current Village transfer revenues on the 7 community center operations. This does not allow sufficient revenues to be allocated to other operations and capital areas of high community importance. Tax support for the community centers is derived from Park District taxes and revenues from the current Village Transfer. The total tax support for the community centers is nearly \$500,000 more than for parks and sports programs combined. 30% of household respondents to the community survey rated small neighborhood parks as one of the 4 most important parks and recreation facilities to their households as compared to 9% for community centers. The amount of tax support for the community centers is more than is received for the Conservatory, Dole Center, swimming pools, Ridgeland Commons Ice Arena, the 2 historic properties, and the Gymnastics Center combined.

Although the community center model in Oak Park is failing one cannot overlook the tradition and emotional attachment residents have for the community centers. The community center model is one of the qualities of life issues that help make the Village of Oak Park a unique place to live.

That being stated, there are a number of options the Park District should considering in determining the future operating plans for the community centers. The following recommendations are offered:

3.1 The Park District of Oak Park should self-operate 4 community centers.

There is no question that there is not an established need to continue to operate 7 community centers. The financial reality facing the Park District and the relatively small market niche that the community centers serve raises questions on continuing to operate the centers as status quo. The community survey conducted clearly indicates that the community focus has changed. When factoring the financial position of the community centers, use patterns and survey results, it appears a major structure change is needed in delivering community center services.

Members of the Leisure Vision consulting team recommends that the Park District should reduce the number of community centers that it operates from 7 to 4. We believe this move on behalf of the Park District would reflect meeting community needs while at the same time reflect a proportionate share of tax dollars being used to support the community centers. This change will enhance the financial picture for the Park District and provide the funding necessary for much needed capital repairs.

The Park District could either continue programming the four community centers as it is currently or convert two of the centers for specialty purposes. There is certainly a community need to convert one of the centers for fitness programming. Either of these options for programming the four community centers is far superior to current operations.

Detailed line item budgets and revenue estimates have been prepared for this recommendation and are contained in Chapter 7 under Options 2 and Options 3 for the community centers. The Consultant Team estimates annual tax savings from Direct Costs of between \$267,000 (Option 1) and \$390,000 (Option 2) from the 2003 Park District budget by implementing this recommendation.

3.2 The Park District of Oak Park should partner with community providers in the operations of the remaining 3 community centers.

Each of the remaining three community centers could be adapted to other areas of community needs through partnerships with local non-profits. The Consultant Team certainly believes there is sufficient community needs and interests on the part of other

community organizations to develop partnerships for the operations of the remaining 3 centers.

The Consultant Team believes that the model the Park District should pursue in any partnerships with non-profit providers would be one where the taxpayers would pay for the initial capital improvements to the community center to get it into condition for the non-profit organizations. A non-profit organization could then lease the facilities from the Park District and pay all operating costs for the facilities, and put a percent of revenues into a sinking fund to cover future maintenance and capital costs.

The Consultant Team recognizes that the possibility exists that the Park District will not be able to develop partnerships with community organizations for the operations of the 3 community centers. Should that occur, we would recommend that those centers where a partnership cannot be developed be closed. We recognize that closing any of the community centers will evoke many emotions. However, it does not make financial sense for the Park District to operate and allocate tax dollars for more than 4 community centers, given the other critical needs in the community.

3.3 The Park District of Oak Park should reduce direct administrative costs for operating the community centers.

The tax savings and options listed in Recommendation 3.1 do not include any cost savings associated with direct administrative costs or other administrative costs. Each of the options is based on only those costs and revenues from the direct operations of the 7 community centers.

The administrative overhead costs for operating the centers appear high. Analysis of the 2003 budget reveals that 37% of the total community center budget is associated with administrative costs as the table below illustrates. There does not appear to be a method in place to accurately identify and distribute administrative cost on a Park District wide basis.

Category	2003 Budget
Direct Cost	\$669,881
Administrative Cost	\$375,032
Total Community Center Costs	\$1,013,546
Percent of Administrative Cost	37%

The Park District has made a concerted effort to address cost issues in the entire Park District over the past few years. The Consultant Team would encourage the Park District to continue these efforts and conduct a thorough analysis of the administrative cost savings which can additionally be realized through the recommended options.

3.4 The Consultant Team does not recommend that the Park District of Oak Park pursue developing a large community recreation center at this time.

Many of the indoor spaces that are of high priority of Oak Park residents could be accommodated through the development of a large community recreation center. Residents of the community have shown support for the operations of Village wide facilities, through their support for Ridgeland Commons the Dole Center and other Village wide facilities.

There are two major obstacles facing the Park District of Oak Park's development of a large community recreation center.

First, the District is not in a financial position to take on the financial costs to develop a large recreation center. While the Consultant Team believes the operating costs in tax dollars from such a facility would be considerably less than in being paid for the 7 community centers, the capital costs would be substantial. Given the other critical needs of the Park District we do not believe the right time for this type of facility.

Perhaps just as important is the fact the Park District lacks an adequate space to construct a recreation center. Any recreation center construction would drastically reduce the amount of green space in the existing park system or buying a property large enough would add significantly to the cost of constructing a new facility.

As a result, the Consulting Team does not feel the development of a large recreation center in Oak Park fits at this time. However, one option that merits consideration in the future (5 to 10 years out) is the possibility of expanding and renovating Ridgeland Commons. The ice arena is short (185 feet) by industry standards and the building infrastructure and equipment is in need of major repair. There is a possibility to complete the necessary repairs and upgrades to Ridgeland Commons while at the same time planning to expand the facility to incorporate other program areas (fitness area, gym, weight room, classrooms, etc). There may also be a possibility of enclosing the Pool to incorporate a swimming component into the expansion plans.

However, accommodating any expansion of Ridgeland Commons will result in a losing the ball field space adjacent to the facility. The Consultant Team does not recommend this occur currently, as there is already a shortage of sports facilities in Oak Park. Should the Park District move forward in the development of additional sports facilities at other locations, this option may be more feasible. This entire option may have been more feasible if the Park District would have moved forward on a partnership with the High School District and Village to vacant Scoville Avenue. The Consultant Team believes it might be reasonable to put this location back on the table at some future date.

3.5 The Park District should continue to operate the Historic Homes and put increased emphasis on private fund-raising activities.

48% of household respondents to the citizen survey indicated they have a need for the two historic homes. 11% of household respondents indicated that Cheney Mansion and Pleasant Home were among the 4 most important parks and recreation facilities to their households, which is slightly higher than the 9% of household respondents that ranked the community centers among their 4 most important parks and recreation facilities. Total annual tax support for the operations of the two facilities is approximately \$117,000, which is among the lowest tax support for any Park District operations.

At the same time, 72% of household respondents who had a need for the historic homes indicated that the facilities 100% met their needs and only 1% indicated that the facilities do not meet their needs at all. Allocating \$1.9 million to address capital improvements for Pleasant Home, Mills Park, and Cheney Mansion was the lowest rated capital improvement that household respondents would support with their tax dollars of all the improvements recommended in the Infrastructure Committee report.

The Consultant Team believes that capital improvements for both historic homes should be strongly based on private fund-raising efforts. The Consultant Team would recommend that the agreement with the Pleasant Home Foundation includes a written long term plan on how the facility can be improved, including a funding strategy that concentrates on the raising of private fund-raising dollars leveraged by tax dollars. We would suggest that these efforts, along with the improvements to Cheney Mansion and Mills Park recommended by the Infrastructure Committee be one of the focuses of the newly formed Park Foundation, working in partnership with the Pleasant Home Foundation.

Strategic Work Product #4: On-Going Citizen Involvement

Until recently active citizen involvement has not been stressed by the Park District of Oak Park. This was particularly true during the period between 1990 and 2000. It is no coincidence that this same period of time saw a substantial decline in the conditions for many of the Park District facilities.

On at least one occasion, the Park District did not go forward with a vote on a major capital improvement project, because of concern that the election would not be won. The resulting decision by the Park Board to issue the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond issue has been previously discussed and had a severe negative impact on the current park system.

By 2000, it had been over 35 years since a successful voter election in the Park District and at least 15 years since voters had an opportunity to go to the polls to vote on a tax increase to fund services. That situation along with an aging infrastructure, the negative impact on the Revenue Facilities Fund of the 1996 Alternative Revenue Bond, and other strategic management, financial, and planning issues led to the Park District forming in September of 2001, a citizen's advisory committee called the "Infrastructure Committee" whose mission was "to inventory and assess the district's properties and make recommendations to the Board of Park Commissioners regarding immediate and long-range capital planning".

The result of the Infrastructure Committee's work was a proposed capital improvement program that was presented to the Board of Commissioners in November 2002. One of the major recommendations included in this plan was to develop a comprehensive plan that would include a vision statement and an examination of the neighborhood-based community recreation center philosophy.

The current master planning efforts has thousands of Oak Park citizens, under the leadership of the Park District of Oak Park and the Village of Oak Park and including the Park District Citizens Committee, several hundred citizens involved in stakeholder interviews and focus groups, and a statistically valid survey that was completed by 824 survey respondents in Oak Park. The results of the statistically valid survey have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-3.4%.

It is extremely important that the Park District of Oak Park maintains and increases the involvement of Oak Park citizens as the District moves forward on implementing the Master Plan. Towards that objective, the following recommendations are offered:

4.1 The Park District of Oak Park should hold a citizen election for purposes of funding recommended improvements to the parks and recreation system.

Summary of Recommendations

The Park District has not brought any issues before the voters in at least 21 years. The Consultant Team believes that having voters participate in these funding decisions is a benefit of an independent park district.

The Infrastructure Committee called for a voter election. Repeatedly during the master plan process, the need and desire to have one or more voter elections for raising revenues was raised by Park District officials and citizens, including administrative staff of the Park District suggestions to raise revenues from a Museum Tax to support the Conservatory and a citizen vote on future funding of the centers. Some have suggested having voter elections as early as April 2004.

The Consultant Team does not recommend holding elections as early as April 2004. We believe that a more appropriate time frame would be either in November of 2004 or April of 2005. It will take at least 3 months for the Park District to complete its 3 year action plan and capital plan. We believe that the Park District should take a minimum of 9 months sharing this plan with the community.

It is important to note that while there has been tremendous community involvement in the Master Planning process, the results from the citizen survey indicate that just 25% of respondents would “vote in favor” of a bond referendum to fund the development and operations of the types of parks, aquatic, historic and recreation facilities most important to their household. An additional 24% of households indicated they “might vote in favor”, with 33% responding “not sure” and 18% responding “vote against”.

The percent of households indicating “vote in favor” is very low for a successful bond election. At the same time with 57% of households indicating “might vote in favor” or “not sure” it is important that they are fully educated about the reasons for the issue and the benefits to the community.

Last, we believe that it is in the best interest of the Park District and the entire community that the election be held on a date that maximizes the opportunity for citizens to vote in the election.

4.2 The Park District of Oak Park should form a broad base Oak Park Master Plan Election Committee to work with the Park District on the voter election.

On-going citizen involvement in educating and informing the entire Oak Park community will be particularly important to ensure a successful voter election. Towards that objective, we would recommend that the Park District of Oak Park form a broad base Oak Park Master Plan Election Committee to work with the Park District on the voter election. We believe the Park District should immediately get started on forming this committee.

Certainly citizens who have been involved with the Master Plan to-date, whether through the Park District Citizen Committee, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, public forums,

or the Infrastructure Committee should form a strong base for this committee. At the same time, we believe the Park District will need to reach out beyond this existing base to be successful. It will be particularly important to bring onto the committee individuals who have worked on previous successful public voter elections. The Village elders should be of great assistance in the formation of the Master Plan Election Committee.

4.3 The Park District of Oak Park should form a Park District Foundation.

As previously noted, the Consultant Team believes that private fund-raising and gifts are a major potential source of funding projects for the park system, particularly those that have historic significance in the community.

To act upon this potential the Consultant Team has recommended the establishment of a Park District Foundation, which would act similarly to a community foundation. Many Park systems across the country are turning to private fund-raising as a major source of revenue development, particularly for specific projects.

Equally important, aggressively raising revenues from private sources will further illustrate to tax payers that local tax dollars are only a piece of a comprehensive revenue policy for the Park District.

4.4 The Park District of Oak Park should as a normal business practice solicit both qualitative and quantitative citizen input.

Public input has been the cornerstone of the Master Planning process. It is clear that the Park Board and the administrative staff of the Park District see the value of public involvement. We would strongly encourage the Park Board to actively consider and act upon additional on-going methods for both qualitative and quantitative citizen involvement in future Park District planning, management, programming, and financial decision making.

Strategic Work Product #5: Partnerships

The Park District of Oak Park has an extensive range of interlocal agreements with non-profit providers and other public agencies. Information from the benchmarking survey shows that the Park District of Oak Park has 12 partnerships out of a total of 15 potential partnership opportunities that organizations can partner with local schools, other local units of government and non-profits in the development, use, and funding of parks and recreation facilities. The average benchmarked community has 7.5 partnerships.

It is imperative the “fully independent” Park District, now fully responsible and accountable for the provision of quality parks and recreation services to the community and charged with achieving the preferred future, aggressively seek new models of cooperation with other community providers of leisure-related services and leverage public, non-profit, and private sector resources to achieve the objectives of a well rounded parks and recreation program. This is a big commitment that the District must embrace and be fully prepared to accept.

Focusing on an enhanced partnering strategy accomplishes at least two major objectives. First, local organizations and governmental partners can be effective providers of parks and recreation services, relieving the Park District of some administrative costs and financial overhead responsibilities. In addition, collaborating with community user group organizations and Village institutions fosters support and commitment, creating bonds that become highly beneficial when seeking tax revenue support from the electorate.

The following recommendations are offered:

5.1 The Park District of Oak Park should aggressively pursue new partnerships with community and regional providers.

The Park District Citizen’s Committee has strongly encouraged the Park District to aggressively pursue new, and to enhance existing partnerships with other community organizations (the Village of Oak Park, District #97, District #200, the Township of Oak Park, the Oak Park Library, the YMCA, etc.) in providing facilities and programs.

The Consultant Team strongly endorses this direction and would additionally encourage the Park District to reach out into regional partnerships with other local units of government, forest preserve districts, etc. that are mutually beneficial. For example, the Park District might forge regional alliances for the development of youth sports facilities. Many teams in Oak Park play many games, etc. outside of Oak Park due to a lack of facilities and space. The Park District might also consider regional alliances to take advantage of the drawing power it has with some special facilities, particularly the Oak Park Conservatory and Ridgeland Commons.

5.2 The Park District of Oak Park should jointly develop, fund, and manage long range capital plans with community providers.

As previously mentioned the Park District has done a very good job in developing written partnerships with community providers. We believe these agreements can be improved to act upon recommendations of the Master Plan.

For example a Participant Fee was recently implemented by the Park District. This is a recommendation that came out of the Infrastructure Committee Report and was referred to as a “CIP Surcharge”. The Park District has implemented a \$5 per participant fee through various written partnership agreements, i.e. OPRF Pony Baseball, Oak Park-River Forest Strikers Soccer Club, Inc., the Windmills, Oak Park Youth Baseball/Softball, etc.

The current Participant Fee is an excellent partnership project which can also be improved. Current language in the contracts between the Park District and the various non-profit organizations indicate that “the Required Fee shall be applied by the Park District for park improvements and for extraordinary park maintenance, as determined solely by the Park District.” None of the partnership agreements spell out specific projects that the Park District and community organizations can partner on developing.

With the results of the master plan in hand, the Consultant Team would recommend that each agreement include a written long term plan on how the facilities utilized by the community organizations can be improved. We would recommend these be joint decisions and not decisions that are determined solely by the Park District. The Consultant Team would also recommend that the Park District consider developing multi-year contracts rather than yearly contracts. These multi-year contracts will allow both organizations to plan better and provide incentives for private contributions that might not be available without clear direction on how the dollars will be used.

This same recommendation should be adopted in other written agreements of the Park District, i.e. Pleasant Home.

5.3 The Park District of Oak Park should enter into a partnership with the school districts and Village for use of school properties.

The facility sharing and use relationship with the two local school districts is absolutely critical, and new, mutually beneficial and strong cooperative agreements between these entities is of paramount importance to achieve community desires.

Of all the agencies that participated in the benchmarking survey, the Park District of Oak Park was the only agency that does not have written partnership(s) with local schools. This is a significant weakness that should be corrected with a fully independent park district. The Consultant Team has previously spelled out recommendations to enhance current partnerships with youth sports organizations and other non-profit partners, through

Summary of Recommendations

developing multi-year agreements with specific capital improvement long range plans spelled out in the agreements to be jointly implemented and funded.

The Park District should aggressively move forward in developing written interlocal partnership agreements with both local school districts. In particular we believe it would be extremely important for the Park District to become a full partner with the Village and Elementary School District 97 on the new partnership agreement allowing for recreational usage of school properties. We believe this partnership would be very beneficial in providing available land for the development and expansion of needed youth sports facilities.

Strategic Work Product #6: Parks and Recreation Facility Priorities

A number of Master Plan activities focused on assessments of existing parks and recreation facilities, opportunities for new parks and recreation facilities, and in particular community priorities. These activities included:

SWOT Analysis - An assessment of the recreational facilities and site amenities of twenty Park District properties by CYLA Design Associates as well as eleven school sites. This assessment is included in Chapter 6 of this “Draft Master Plan”. The site inventory consists of one condensed report for each site plus three overall summaries—one for the major park recreational features, a second for park amenities, and the third for the school sites.

Twenty-two categories of recreational facilities and twenty-three categories of site amenities were inventoried and broadly evaluated for condition. The condition assessments, through subjective, were included to better describe the general quality of each feature and their contribution to the recreational experience.

Needs Assessment Citizen Survey – A statistically valid random sampling survey conducted of 824 households in Oak Park during January and February of 2004. The results from the survey have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of +/-3.4%. Questions on the survey focused on usage, needs, unmet needs and establishing priorities for the future development of parks and recreation facilities and services within the Oak Park community as well as the funding of the improvements. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone.

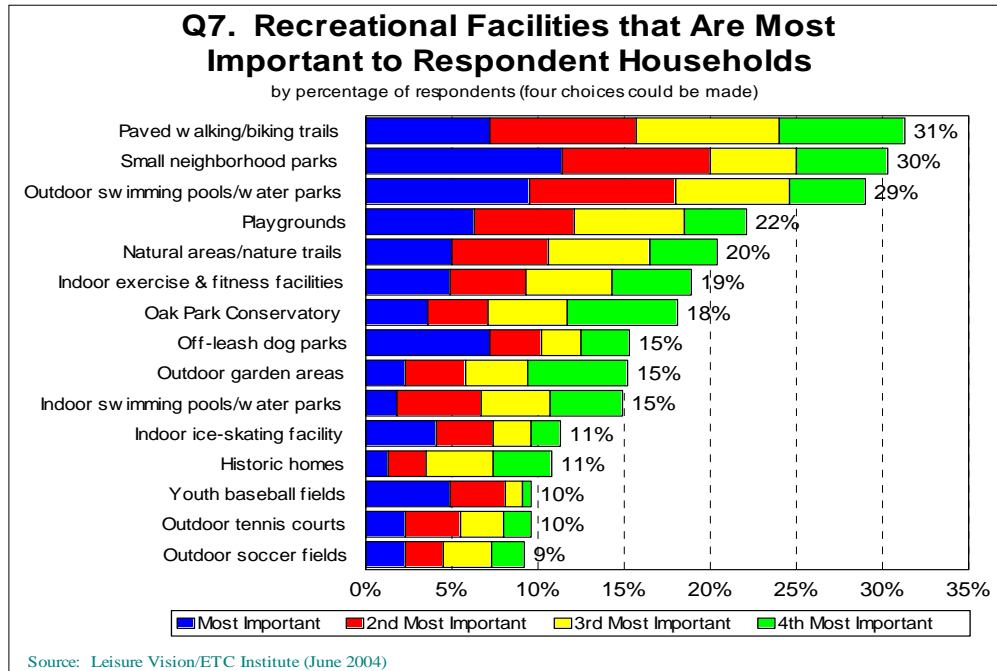
Comparative Communities Benchmarking Survey - This activity included a comprehensive benchmarking survey of 13 communities comparable to the Park District of Oak Park. The Park District Citizen Committee coordinated the identification of communities to participate in the Benchmarking Survey. Topics covered on the survey included: types, numbers, and acres of parks and open space available; types and numbers of outdoor recreation facilities; types and numbers of indoor recreation facilities; revenues from taxes, fees and charges; staffing costs; cooperative use agreements; capital budgets, etc.

Parks and Recreation Standards for Oak Park - This activity includes the development of “Standards Unique to Oak Park” for 29 different outdoor and indoor programming spaces identified from Question #6 in the needs assessment survey. The Consultant Team is working with a sub-committee of the Park District Citizens Committee on these standards. This activity was added as an additional service for the Master Plan and is still being completed.

The following recommendations are offered:

6.1 The Park District of Oak Park should address areas of high citizen need in the action plan and capital improvement plan.

Twenty-nine existing recreational facilities were evaluated in the citizen survey. Respondents were asked to indicate the four facilities that were of highest importance to their household. The following facilities ranked in the top 15 most important parks and facilities to resident households and should be a focus of the action plan and capital improvement plan. In particular the Park District should concentrate efforts on improvements to neighborhood parks.



6.2 The Park District of Oak Park should address deficiencies in the numbers and quality of athletic fields in the action plan and capital improvement plan.

The Park District is seriously deficient in the number of sports fields, particularly for youth sports that are available in Oak Park. Benchmarking comparisons with similar communities indicate that Oak Park is particularly deficient in the numbers of junior and regulation soccer fields and somewhat deficient in the numbers of youth softball fields. 50% of the available fields for sports in Oak Park are composed of multipurpose fields. Preliminary findings by the Sub-Committee on Standards for Oak Park suggest that the Park District is currently deficient up to 16 sports fields of all types.

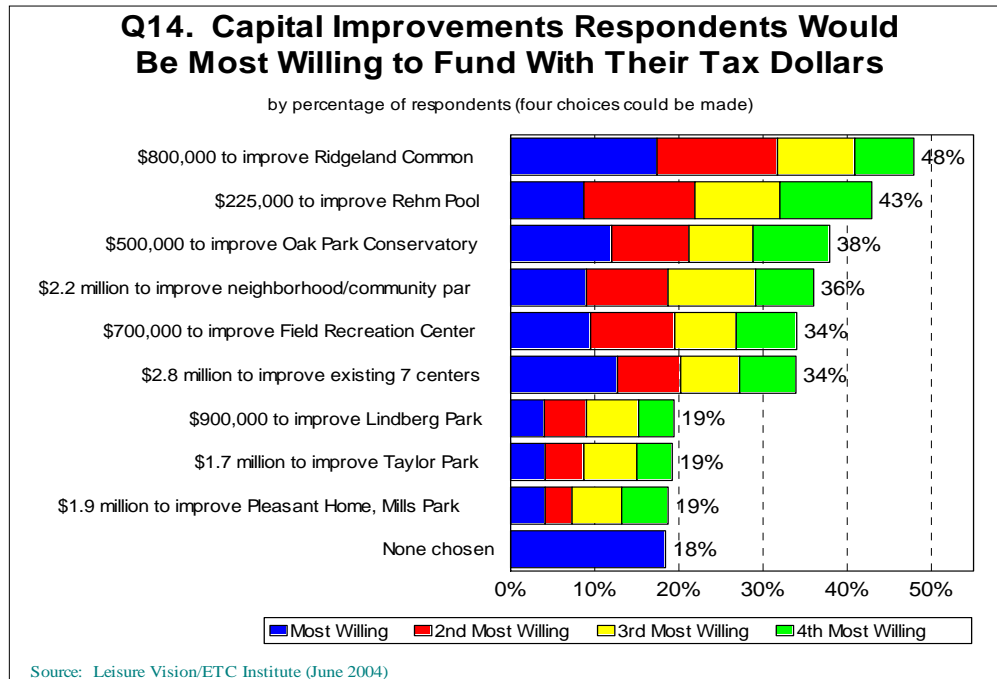
As one way of addressing these needs, we would recommend that the Park District work with the Village and Elementary School District 97 on the development of needed sports fields on these properties. This action will also potentially free up some green space on existing parks. We would additionally recommend that the Park District reach out into regional partnerships with other local units of government, forest preserve districts, etc. that are mutually beneficial. Many teams in Oak Park play games, etc. outside of Oak Park due to a lack of facilities and space.

6.3 The Park District of Oak Park needs to upgrade park maintenance.

83% of respondent households to the survey have visited Park District of Oak Park parks over the past year. This is a very high percentage of usage. Only 24% of respondents indicated they would rate the condition of parks as excellent. This is a lower percentage than the average of other Illinois communities (31%) we have surveyed and also lower than national averages (29%). The results of the SWOT analysis also show significant opportunities to upgrade the conditions of facilities. Neighborhood parks is clearly a high priority for citizens in Oak Park.

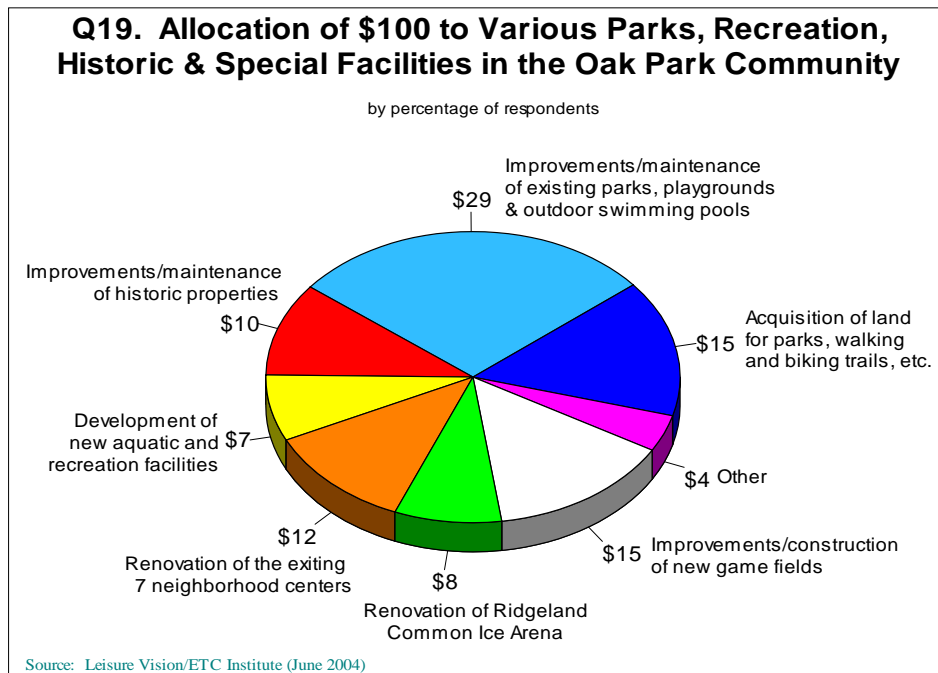
6.4 Improving Ridgeland Commons is an area of high community importance.

48% of respondent households to the survey indicated that allocating \$800,000 to improve Ridgeland Commons was one of their top 4 choices to fund with tax dollars for existing facilities. \$225,000 to improve Rehm Pool and \$500,000 to address capital improvements for the Oak Park Conservatory were the next two highest supported improvements. The dollar amounts for the improvements came out of the work of the Parks Infrastructure Committee



6.5 The Action Plan for Capital Improvements needs to be well balanced.

Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, playgrounds, and outdoor pools is clearly the most important direction for the Park District. At the same time 15% of respondents supported allocating 15% of new tax funding to the acquisition of land for parks, walking and biking trails and an additional 15% for the improvements/construction of new game fields for sports. This would suggest support for reaching out for partnerships with the school districts and on a regional basis for sports fields as previously recommended.



6.6 The Park District should recognize that funding improvements to Parks and Recreation Facilities is of importance to the Oak Park.

78% of respondents to the citizen survey indicated that funding improvements to parks and recreation facilities was either “very important (34%) or “somewhat important” (44%) compared to other priorities for Oak Park. Only 10% of respondents indicated improvements were “not important”. Clearly Oak Park residents would like to see the Park District aggressively move forward on a comprehensive approach to addressing improving the system. We believe this includes a capital investment funding plan that is balanced through tax revenues, non-tax revenues and savings from operations.