Park District of Oak Park, Hedges Administration Center
218 Madison St., Oak Park, Illinois
February 13, 2006

Field Park
Focus Group Meeting #1, 10 a.m.
Buildings and Grounds, Safety & Security

School Drop-off

- A traffic plan is in place and is annually reviewed for drop off and parking
- Village to provide PD with circulation/parking plan for Mann School
- School drop-off is at the east end of Berkshire, but parents do not follow regulations.
- They stack on the west end of Berkshire and also use the alley.
- Berkshire becomes a temporary one way east during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up
- School concern about stacking. The school wants parents to loop around.
- School wants police to ticket parents who stack cars at Berkshire
- There is no parking on Division. People park on Kenilworth south and Berkshire

Alley

- Alley at west edge of park has an 8' Right-of-Way. Narrowest alley owned by Village.
- Alley wasn't paved until a few years ago
- All but two residents agreed to a 2' wide Grass-Crete pavement to be added along the alley.
- Cars race down the alley—a safety concern
- Parents use alley to drop-off and collect kids from school and PD day-care
- Alley traffic is an issue for safety and security

Bike Racks

- Bike racks were installed by Village south of parking lot. One individual resident opposed their installation.
- Add bike racks at south entryway by school
- There is no school policy against bikes at Mann
- Village is interested in trying to reduce car trips to school and have students/parents use alternative forms of transportation

Roads and Utilities

- Not sure if sewer still runs through old Woodbine R.O.W., Village will check and get back to PD.
- Looks like school ran a water main from the center of Woodbine recently.
- School has redone the catch basins recently
- Berkshire reconstruction is in design phase currently. Any design recommendations coming from the master plan must be made soon so that they can be included in the design.
- Division to be resurfaced in 2007 (Austin to Harlem)
- Berkshire to be resurfaced in 2006 (Woodbine to Oak Park)

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Structures/Center

- If the Recreation Center were to go, it would provide a wonderful blank slate on which to design a new park
- The PD Board is setting up a committee to look at historic structures and give direction and it is being organized.

Dogs in the Park

- There are conflicts between dog owners and other residents and school officials.
- Owners are leaving dogs unattended and tied up at north end of park
- There have been confrontations between parents and dog owners because the unattended or unleashed dogs pose a safety concern for kids
- People are used to letting their dogs off-leash and continue to do so
- Police are supposed to ticket dog owners who do not comply with rules but do not do so
- Police want this to stay a park district problem/issue
- Tickets may be given when there are dog parks?
- Dog owners not keeping to schedule at Lindberg, not picking up after dogs
- It is dangerous to have dogs off-leash when there are lots of kids playing soccer
- Participants at later meetings confirmed these statements and added that dog fecal matter was a problem.

Safety/Lighting/View Corridors etc.

- Police think this is safest park in Oak Park
- Hard to access park without being noticed and neighbors tend to call if they see someone who looks like they shouldn't be in the park
- Would like a southern access point into park for the police cruiser
- Fence along Division St. prevents access which has positive and negative attributes
- Access is also then unclear and difficult for users. Need clearly defined entryways
- In 2005 a driver drove onto school property. The fence helped to slow him down and stop car
- Since the basketball hoop has been removed there haven't been any problems with youth hanging out at night, but this used to be an issue. (Participants at later meetings stated that teenage drinking still occurs around the Tot-Lot)
- Lighting is key for safety
- Need better lighting by center and tot lot and middle of fields
- Lighting is good at parking lot and at school edge
- Sometimes PD staff remain at Field Center until late at night and they can not be seen leaving by the police as they cross the fields
- Police on beat drive by the park all the time
- Police drive through site on blacktop by school on the east side of the park
- If alarm goes off at center, police have to park at parking lot and walk over. This takes too much time.
- Would it be possible to provide a loop around the entire park approximately where the current loop path is?

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- Police also use alley to patrol and view the park
- Visibility into park is generally good.
- Hedge at south edge of park is not a visibility issue for policing
- Basketball court at Field Center was used as parking lot in the past

Park Recreation

- Carroll and Field were always seen by the Village as the two sites that could be shared for recreational uses.
- Field is a main soccer hub.
- Park needs more space for more soccer
- Maybe move softball to SW corner
- Play Centers could be closer to each other so parents and PD staff can supervise both.
- Tot lot equipment is old
- Shade needed at playgrounds
- Consolidate all three playgrounds
- Could move one softball field to NE corner where parking currently is located.
- Put parking lot on south east corner of site where third playground it located now

Field Park
Focus Group Meeting #2, 1 p.m.
Park District of Oak Park Staff

Ownership

- The boundary between school and PD ownership runs down the middle of Woodbine.
- However, the PD regards this as a shared facility
- PD maintains open space up to the western wall of school
- School maintains the rest of the grounds to the east of the school

Size of Park

- 3.4 acres Field Center; 7-8 acres including school property

Drainage and Subsoil

- Subsoil drainage problems
- Compacted soils where Woodbine used to come through
- Ball fields still flood
- Mike of the PD installed an ad-hoc drainage scheme that helped
- Still flooding/erosion behind back stops and other areas of the park
- A lot of erosion due to drainage problems and over-use
- Ground plain uneven and there are excessive slopes down to catch basins

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Paths

- The park already has a circulation path.
- The path system is cohesive and symmetric
- Could use a running surface
- Could put markers along running path in winter
- 20-25% of paths broken that should be replaced
- Subsidence is a problem

Entrances

- Where do/should we encourage people to enter the park?
- Parents use all current entryways. North, NE, SE, South and South West
- Parents also use the alley entrance
- There is no proper gateway
- Need proper signage
- Add entryway plantings, potentially annuals but there needs to be a water source

Topography

- Hill/berm at NW corner was used for performing arts in 20's and 30's
- The berm eroded over time and Mike from PD has added to berms and over seeded them
- Could we add more topography to berm?
- Larger berm may create security issues
- Berm has been teenage drinking spot
- It is a special area, a quiet zone, make it a nice place for parents and kids
- More topography needed in the park
- Berms provide raised areas for people to watch the games, natural amphitheaters

Park Recreation

- Need more area for soccer, camps, baseball
- But we have some beautiful trees we should keep
- The trees and mounds provide a wonderful structural background to build upon
- The master plan provides a challenge/opportunity. There is not enough land and we need to be bold in our decisions
- April 1-October 30 park space is programmed
- Spring-softball
- Baseball spring to July 1, September to October
- Fall –soccer
- Could we use a limestone infield?
- Fall soccer 2 fields (k-1) 2 fields (2^{nd} – 6^{th})
- Spoke wheel development of fields is popular with a concession stand and building in middle
- Nice when you have lots of acreage, but not here
- Move the ball fields to SW and NE corners and add third ball field.
- Move parking lot to SE corner
- Put Ball field in NE corner?

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- A third ball field would be too much. Participants in later meetings called for the improvement of existing ball fields not adding ball fields.
- Are school changing facilities used during games? We don't think so
- Create aesthetically pleasing gateway to ball fields, then ball spaces are more acceptable visually

Shared Indoor Facility

- If we had a new facility here and at Carroll we could facilitate programming at N and S of Village
- This site has the most potential for sharing facilities and making the most of the site
- Add a new gym/Center at SE corner of School?
- A new gym would need to be at NE corner of the site by the existing school gym so that they could be used together
- We would prefer Gym space over ball diamond hands down. There is a great lack of recreational indoor space in Oak Park
- If we moved the Center to the new gym location could we have another diamond?
- Can you add second gym on top of existing one?
- If we are thinking outside of the box why not put the gym underground?
- Because it would cost a fortune
- Add Center to school and extend the existing parking west of possible new center location
- Add a drop-off on Berkshire
- Locate playgrounds closer to school and new gym

Field Center

- The plan is to use it for :
    - Preschool and after school care
    - Camp location during summer
    - To support exterior uses
    - Meetings and rentals
- 1 of 2 largest preschool age programs
- Field Center building is in the worst condition of all centers
- Move or rebuild the center and open up area where center is now

General

- Could we benefit from fencing off green from asphalt area?
- Not really but we could try planting trees
- Nice to delineate green from asphalt—edge very dog eared—maybe with hedge
- Clean up sidewalks, they are cracked and in poor condition
- Could install irrigation field over existing sub grade
- Buffer Division St. with trees
- Restore water fountain and create entry at south —formalize with flowers
- Drain is still there and a water feed
- Add 1.5" hookup to water fields if necessary
- Water at play centers would be popular?
- Could run line from school

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- Maybe add splash pad
- What about mud?
- Improve fencing or have less
- Memorial tree program? We could move some trees and have a new tree program
- Playgrounds are not part of program portfolio
- Need passive space for neighborhood to use during active season
- Need as much irrigation as the budget can bear

Future Recreation

- Provide open contiguous space so that we can have multiple uses
- Expand into programs that are not traditional:
    - Ultimate Frisbee
    - Sand volleyball—lit, multiple courts, minimum 2 to 4
    - Adult kickball

The attendees worked on a plan of the park

The center was moved and 3rd diamond added but

- Saving mature trees considered positive
- Central path would be moved to edge
- Lose trees by attrition and plant new ones at the periphery of the park

Field Park
Focus Group Meeting # 3, 3 p.m.
Mann School PTO & Staff & Representatives of School District 97

District 97 will have to carry out a strategic planning exercise before any commitment can be made to change, or invest, or support changes to any existing facility

Drop-off

- On Berkshire next to entry to parking
- No buses drop-off at school
- There should be one line of cars
- Many walk in from south east
- Difficult to see that corner, it is a security issue
- Parents use all entryways
- Kids line up on west side of school
- Late arrivals use east entrance
- Kindergarten enters at south of building
- There is a NE entry to school
- Parking lot is for teachers use. Center parents use the lot on weekends and it is usually filled.
- Kenilworth and Berkshire are one way during school drop-off/ pick-up from 7:40 to 8:05 am and from 2:45 to 3:15 pm
- Barricades put up during those hours

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- Cars come into parking same way as kids come into school site – sort of a conflict
- If parents bring their dogs they are asked to wait at Woodbine for kids
- Dogs off-leash are a concern

Security

- There are too many openings into the school site
- People walk through when kids are in playground
- Stands are an issue, they cause accidents if wet and slippery and there is dog poop under them
- Small toddlers climb on stands
- Skateboarders?—not an issue
- Visibility through park is ok
- Close the openings on Division
- Walk to school day encourages kids to cross Division at Woodbine from the south
- Beer and liquor bottles at NW corner and are dark at night.

How School uses Site

- North-south path on the west side is the boundary line for school kids
- They should not be west of the path unless they are with a formal class and fully supervised. Participants at other meetings stated that children from the school regularly use the far west side of the site unsupervised
- 1st and 2nd use the playground at south end of site
- Use south field for kickball (there is an opening at SW corner that is a concern)
- Kids use playground at Center though they are not supposed to use it when PD staff and kids are using it
- Fields are used for recess
- Gym class uses NW corner
- NW of site used for football, sledding for K through 5th
- SW of site used for soccer and capture the flag
- During lunch park is heavily used
- Olympic day in June on the last day of school the whole park and school are used
- Hephzibah uses south end of school and playground

Dogs in the Park

- Dogs off-leash and fecal matter are big issues
- Dog poop is found in play areas, in the sand that the children play in and under stands
- SW corner was informal dog park for 3 years and public got used to it
- People let dogs off-leash in park during the summer and then think it is their right
- School District is working to remind the public that no dogs are allowed on school property
- Sidewalks were off limits to dogs along Division and Berkshire but that was a mistake
- Principal has spoken to the police about the issue

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Field Center

- Kids at lunch run to Center playground before supervisors can catch up.
- We use it but it is far from school building
- Center building not worth saving
- Center is nice opportunity for early childhood programs for neighborhood

Play Centers

- The south play ground is not visible from school. This is a security issue
- Best location for a playground is immediately west of school building where the kids can be seen
- Remove sand area from playgrounds because of dog feces
- It would be nicer if the Field Center playground was closer to school
- More hard top at the center of the park so there is space to expand playground

School Needs

- Gym used by school during school hours
- Gym used after school hours by Park District, YMCA, striker soccer (?), brownies and scouts
- Gym has serious ventilation and flooring issues.
- The gym floor is refinished every summer—it has poor footing and needs varnishing
- Unused locker rooms/showers in school gym
- Ventilation systems needs to get fixed
- In summer AC system doesn't work
- Same air stays in gym all the time
- Pipe along walls not used
- Checking into status for ventilation
- Have beautiful auditorium
- No AC

Potential of New Shared Center attached to the School

- There is no additional space if they were to have an all day kindergarten
- If there is a shared use, school does not want strangers coming into school
- There could be a reception manned by PD staff and a separate entrance after hours so that the school could be locked
- School has a kitchen for cooking classes if needed
- In general the school currently has enough space
- Classroom sizes and quantities ok

School Wish List

- Would like a climbing wall
- An outdoors climbing wall preferably—issues with liability, controlled access
- PTO is allocating funding for climbing wall
- Tennis on site would be nice-kids could play on Astroturf?
- Gym teachers takes kids off site to play tennis
- Increase the size of the ball field. Currently if ball hits blacktop it is a home rum

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- Diamonds could be at NW and SW corners, further from school since school does not use them officially
- Synthetic surface would be great for T ball—no mud brought in. Maybe an enclosed area at SW end of site

General

- New sewers put in recently
- Flooding used to be a terrible problem but better now.
- PE teacher likes Holmes playground as kids can run on it.
- 80 kids at playground at south end
- 240 kids outside sometimes at once
- Play pick up soccer and kickball
- Basketball on school building – there are 4 hoops on SW side of building
- PTO putting more trash cans out on S playground
- Move parking to SE corner of site

Field Park
Focus Group Meeting #4, 7 p.m.
Creative Play, Passive Space & Sports Areas

Field Center Building

- There is no place to sit at Field Center for parents/caregivers while they wait for their children to attend a short (30 minute for example) class
- Center is very small
- 9-10 year olds travel to baseball—visiting parents say that the center is 'very quaint' in other words: worn, old, substandard, out of its time.
- There is mold in the center, children and staff complain about allergic reactions, sneezing etc.
- Basement is dirty and dingy and falling apart
- Maybe demolish the Center and build a new Center somewhere else on site or off-site, but where?
- Must have facility within vicinity to provide services north of Chicago Ave.
- Definitely need a Center
- Expand the Center preferably for multi use.
- Young parents with kids probably won't want building to go
- But you could keep the programs and have a new building
- Would be nice to have regular gym inside park district
- Field center is placed in an inappropriate location:
    - The parking is far away
    - Drop-off is from the alley
    - Basketball not used—the broken up concrete pad could be used for something else
- The money allocated for Center improvements probably will not improve it much. Doesn't sound like a lot of money
- Center is a 'nightmare'

- AC too loud—can't' hear anything when it comes on.
- Thermostat set at 55F and center is at 85F, therefore must open windows which is against preschool rules/codes
- Could you fix the system? Maybe but it is out of date
- Building could be redone and expanded in its current location
- Need space for 2-3 hour classes for preschool that will hold up to 19 kids
- Center is used for kid's birthday parties
- Many children are walked to Center, but there are also issues with drop off in alley
- Preschool from all over Oak Park and beyond

Potential of a New Shared Center

- If building went away completely
  - Probably affect local parents
  - Would need use of bathrooms and water fountain though they are not always available anyway
- New Center could be at SE corner, but school gym is at north
- New center in NW corner? Too far away from school?
- Move parking to SE corner and building to where current parking is located
- Better to have Center away from busy intersection
- Keep programs for local early childhood
- Would need extra play equipment next to new Center

Safety

- Random beer bottles outside
- Female park district staff have safety issues at night leaving the Center. The park is dark
- Teens use Tot-Lot for drinking.
- It is difficult to see into the area due the evergreen trees.
- Limb up the trees

Park Recreation

- Soccer fields not large enough for AYSO use
- Need a larger field

Drop-Off

- 8 am to 4 pm school days there is no parking along Berkshire

Future Recreation

- There are many mature trees but if some of them could go then a new soccer field would be nice (about 50 yards x 110 yards)
- Add 2 basketball hoops for a short court, and volleyball and badminton, consider SW of school as a location

Baseball Field

- Really need bigger fields for diamonds
- Improve what we have not add a third diamond
- Expand the two existing fields, add good dugouts, etc.
- Grading? Will we fix it? Kids are running sideways downhill to catch balls and wipe out
- Proper irrigation for watering fields

Gardens

- There is no community garden space in the Village, maybe Field Park is not the best place, but what about an area where half the year it is a community garden and the other half the year a dog lot.
- Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory are interested in community garden space. They have a task force that is assessing locations
- What about a children's garden on the south end of the school or an educational garden with seasonal plantings, large seed pods, items the kids can collect and use in class
- Some natural/non field, passive space on site
- Garden spaces south of school or by alley

Play Centers

- Tot lot has 8 swings—too many
- Have a mix of bucket and strap swings
- Evergreens block views to Tot-Lot, trees could be limbed up
- Teenagers use evergreen areas for drinking
- Mann school students are supposed to stay off playground when Center staff and classes are using it

Paths

- Use circular path for running and learning to ride a bike
- Make path more usable for exercise i.e. mile markers
- Widen walks inside park to 6-8' wide at least for jogging, walking, tricycles etc.

Traffic and Drop-off

- There is a Parking/traffic Committee for school
- Existing Ped access both North and South need better sight lines.
- The chain link fences are bleak, replace with decorative fences and add plantings
- Berkshire—do something mid block at crosswalks especially if Village makes changes/improvements
- Add bike racks near baseball fields
- Parking in south will obstruct entry into school site? Main crossing guard at this location
- Widen alley into park district land for better access to Center

Dogs in the Parks

- Lots of issues with dogs off-leash and preschool kids
- Owners not cleaning up after their dogs.

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