

EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE URBANA PARK DISTRICT

**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY
ON NOVEMBER 7, 2023**



I. Purpose

The Urbana Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on **May 9, 2023 (Resolution 2023-07)**, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the “Committee”).

II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Michael Walker, Commissioner;

Meredith Blumthal, Commissioner;

Roger Digges, Commissioner;

Cedric Stratton, Commissioner;

Laura Hastings, Commissioner;

Megan Puzey, Resident Member;

Ashley Withers, Resident Member;

Tim Bartlett, Executive Director;

Allison Jones, Staff Member.

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
September 5, 2023	6:00 PM, 1011 E. Kerr Ave., Urbana
October 3, 2023	6:00 PM, 1011 E. Kerr Ave., Urbana
November 7, 2023	6:00 PM, 1011 E. Kerr Ave., Urbana

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's website and upon request at the Park District's administrative office.

IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in **1907**. All Illinois park districts, including the Park District, are governed by the Park District Code, 70 ILCS 1205/1 *et seq.*

Having a separate and distinct taxing body for parks, recreation, and conservation within the local community, which operates apart from general purpose governments, is extremely beneficial to the community for many reasons, as detailed below:

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Park District is governed by a board of **5 commissioners**. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the park district and are elected at the Consolidated Election in odd-numbered years. Pursuant to state law, commissioners are non-partisan and serve without compensation.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Having a dedicated board to oversee these essential facilities, programs, and services provides the community with increased access to their elected representatives and allows those elected representatives to remain focused solely on those facilities, programs, and services. This is contrasted with general purpose governments where elected representatives are responsible for broad oversight on a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.
- **Increased transparency.** Having a dedicated unit of local government to provide park and recreation services also improves the relationship between the park district and its residents because of the transparency and openness related to the board and park district operations. Having detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual units of government are responsible for providing specified services like park districts, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed. Additionally, these items and budgetary decisions are subject to more scrutiny by locally elected officials than is the case with larger, multi-purpose governments with a multitude of departments.
- **Protection of revenues.** Because the Park District is a separate unit of local government, the revenues it generates can only be used for park district purposes. This assurance is contrasted with general purpose governments like cities, villages, and counties that provide a multitude of services such as fire, police, public works, economic development, etc., where revenues that are generated specifically for parks and recreation can be expended on these other services with limited, if any, input from voters. These dedicated funds are further protected through an efficient

and thorough annual audit process, of which the results are available to the public for review.

- **Protection of assets.** Public parks and other real property owned by the park district is held in trust for the residents of the park district, and, subject to very limited exceptions, can only be sold or transferred if residents approve of the sale or transfer by a referendum. This is contrasted with general purpose units of government, which have authority to sell or dispose of property by a vote of the governing board.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Park District does more with much fewer funding options. Unlike other units of local government that receive direct state funding, and income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel and other numerous taxes, the Park District's only tax revenues come from a modest portion of a resident's overall property tax bill. In fact, despite its limited funding options, the Park District share is only approximately **11%** of the local tax bill. The Park District increasingly relies on gifts, grants, and fundraising to support its programs and projects.

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the Park District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

- **Board Policy Manual**
- **Personnel Policy Manual**
- **Intermittent and Seasonal Staff Personnel Policy Manual**
- **Administrative Procedures Manual**
- **Use of Parks, Rules, and Regulations**
- **Customer Service Standards**
- **Safety Manual**
- **Strategic Plan**
- **Americans With Disabilities Act Transition Plan**
- **CARES (Climate Action, Resilience, Education, and Sustainability) Plan**
- **Trails Master Plan**
- **Annual Comprehensive Financial Report**
- **"You Belong Here" Inclusion Plan**

V. List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Park District works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at the least possible cost. One of the many ways the Park District achieves this goal is by partnering with neighboring park districts, school districts, other units of local government within or near the community, the State, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Park District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

1. Participation in Joint Special Recreation Program

The Park District is part of the Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation ("CUSR") program. This joint program allows for intergovernmental cooperation among units of local government and is a shining example of local government efficiency.

By partnering together, local communities are able to effectively and efficiently deliver more successful program opportunities to community members with disabilities. By participating in the CUSR program, the Park District networks with the Champaign Park District to provide many more program opportunities for our community members, as well as critical inclusion services.

The CUSR program achieves efficiency by utilizing existing facilities that are owned and operated by either agency. Utilizing these existing facilities allows CUSR to deliver services to its member communities at a lower cost. Currently the Park District provides CUSR access to the following facilities for their program offerings:

- **Anita Purves Nature Center**
- **Brookens Gym**
- **Phillips Recreation Center**
- **Crystal Lake Park Family Aquatic Center**
- **Lake House**
- **Urbana Indoor Aquatic Center**

The CUSR program also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for the Park District programs or inclusive programming. CUSR helps determine what supports are needed for each participant to be successful in this inclusive setting or the Park District program. This could include additional training of the supervisory staff, additional support staff, the use of adaptive equipment, behavior management, and/or other measures that will assist in the successful participation of this individual in the Park District program. Although success may not look the same for everyone, CUSR works with the Park District's staff to ensure the best possible results for all the participants in the program. The Park District's cost of providing these services would be much greater without its participation and partnership in the joint CUSR program.

In 2022, CUSR successfully served 91 residents in 58 programs. CUSR also supported 12 participants in inclusive programs that were provided by Champaign or Urbana Park Districts. CUSR provided nearly \$7,000 in scholarships for participants and utilized 33 volunteers for over 61 hours of volunteer time.

The Park District is very proud of the ongoing collaboration through Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation. By working cooperatively with other local governments, not only are we better able to collectively serve all citizens within our communities, including persons with disabilities, but we are able to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

2. Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies

- Participation in the IPARKS insurance program
- Joint residency reciprocal agreement with the Champaign Park District
- Kickapoo Rail Trail project partner

3. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government

- Joint operation and management of the Urbana Indoor Aquatic Center with the Urbana School District #116
- Joint management of the Perkins Road Wet Prairie park site with the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District
- Shared resources/partnership with the City of Urbana, including police protection, fire safety evaluation and protection, IT support, and programming. Additional large-scale cooperation on stormwater management is on-going.
- Utilize rental space from the County of Champaign for athletic programs
- Joint programming with the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

4. Intergovernmental agreements with the State of Illinois

- Participation in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund
- Multiple project grants from the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant
- Multiple project grants from the Illinois Department of Transportation

5. Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues

- Joint programming with the Crystal Lake Nadiators swim team
- Lease agreement and joint programming with the East Central Illinois Archers organization
- Program support for the Cricket Club of Illinois

6. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits

- Programming and fundraising with the Urbana Parks Foundation
- Membership agency of the Urbana Municipal Employees Credit Union
- Joint programming with Greater Champaign County AMBUCS
- Joint programming with the Jettie Rhodes Day Committee
- Joint programming with Uniting Pride of Champaign County
- Joint programming with Champaign County Audubon Society
- Staff membership in the Environmental Education Association of Illinois
- Joint programming with the Urbana Country Dancers
- Joint programming with the English Country Dancers
- Partnership with the East Central Illinois Master Naturalists
- Partnership with the Champaign-Urbana Herb Society
- Membership agency of the Champaign County Museum Network
- Membership agency of Illinois Association of Park Districts
- Staff membership in the Illinois Park and Recreation Association
- Participation in the Champaign County Community Coalition
- Joint programming with 40 North Champaign County Arts Council
- Partnership with the East Central Illinois Community Action Agency
- Solidarity Gardens CU program partner

7. Partnerships with for-profit organizations

- Member of the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce
- Participation in the Champaign County First initiative
- Member of Visit Champaign County/Experience Champaign Urbana

8. Informal cooperation with other units of local government which save taxpayer dollars by eliminating redundancy

- Sharing of facility space, such as tennis courts, baseball fields, and other parks, with Urbana School District #116 sports teams

VI. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of volunteers. One way in which the Park District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through the use of volunteers. Last year, **559** individuals volunteered **1,760.5** hours of service to the Park District, with a total value to the park district of **\$45,773**.

Youth employment. The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed **approximately 300 youth**. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workforce.

Joint purchasing. The Park District participates in joint purchasing cooperatives pursuant to the Governmental Joint Purchasing Act (30 ILCS 525/0.01 *et seq.*) thereby saving taxpayer dollars through economies of scale. These include:

- **Playground equipment**
- **Vehicles**
- **Other major tools and equipment**

Urbana Parks Foundation. Last year, the Foundation distributed **\$1,525,826.13** in private donations to the Park District, which help alleviate the burden on taxpayers. The Foundation also supported the Park District by:

- **Co-hosting joint programming and events**
- **Sponsoring Park District events**
- **Managing multiple fundraising campaigns for Park District projects**
- **Highlight and fundraise for the Park Districts Youth Scholarship program**

Collaboration with other park districts on best practices. Because park districts are not in competition with one another, they are more willing than the private sector to share best practices. These best practices help to avoid unnecessary costs and deliver services more effectively and efficiently. As a twin city with Champaign, Urbana and Champaign Park Districts work closely on programming, community planning, and large-scale projects that benefit the Champaign-Urbana community as a whole. The Park District is also able to collaborate on a county-wide level with the Champaign County Forest Preserve District for large scale projects that benefit the county and region as well. The District is also able to collaborate with other local agencies, including the Savoy Park District and the University of Illinois Campus Recreation, without being in competition and best utilizing resources to serve the community.

Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue. Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Park District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Park District is an economic engine for the community and generates much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, our Park District does not receive any of these revenues. Also, unlike Illinois cities, villages, counties, and school districts that received billions of dollars in direct financial assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Park District did not receive any such direct federal aid. Our Park District also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or General State Aid (GSA) that these same cities, villages, counties, and school districts receive through the State budget.

Instead, the Park District provides all of the programs, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from **non-tax sources** such as memberships, program registrations, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Park District may be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

Document	Location(s) Available
• Annual tax levy	administrative offices, website
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	administrative offices, website
• Agenda and minutes	administrative offices, website
• Comprehensive Annual Financial Report	administrative offices, website
• Annual Budget Book	administrative offices, website
• Annual Audit	administrative offices, website
• Statement of Receipts and Disbursements	administrative offices, website
• Park Guidelines	administrative offices, website
• Strategic & Master plans	administrative offices, website
• Capital improvement plan	administrative offices, website
• ADA Policies and Procedures	administrative offices, website
• Urbana Parks Foundation Annual Audit	administrative offices, website
• Recreation Programming Annual Report	administrative offices, website

The Park District offers residents many opportunities to provide feedback. These include:

- The board of commissioners meets **twice** each month and residents may provide public comment at every meeting.
- The Park District’s annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is available in tentative form at least 30 days prior to its adoption at an open meeting of the Park District board. Additionally, at least one public hearing is held prior to final action, and notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week prior to the hearing.

- The Park District's annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Park District board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The Park District follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law prior to the adoption of this annual tax levy. **The Park District's annual levy is also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.**
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at **217-367-1536** or email at ***info@urbanaparks.org***.
- The Urbana Park District maintains a citizen advisory committee called the **Urbana Park District Advisory Committee (UPDAC)**. Since its formation in 1971, UPDAC has studied issues important to Park District residents and provided feedback to the Board of Commissioners. UPDAC meets monthly and provides residents a direct line to the Park District Board and staff.
- The Park District solicits feedback during all major park projects and planning processes, including surveys, focus groups, and community meetings/open houses.
- The Park District strictly adheres to all Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Open Meetings Act (OMA) laws.

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

The District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

- Regular recipient of the Government Finance Officers Association "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting"
- Multiple "Best of the Best" awards in several categories from the Illinois Association of Park Districts
- "Strategic Plan Award" from the American Planning Association, Illinois Chapter
- "Gold Leaf Award" from the Illinois Arborist Association
- "Project of the Year" from the American Public Works Association, Illinois Chapter
- "Employer Champion" recognition from the Developmental Services Center
- Multiple "Governor's Hometown Award" project award winner/honorable mention
- Staff award recognition from multiple agencies
- Illinois Association of Park Districts "Distinguished Agency" Accreditation 2014-2019

IX. Benefits and Services

The Park District serves the entire community from the youngest child to the oldest adult and all ages in between. It does so in a variety of ways.

1. Facilities

The Park District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

Park	MTD Bus Route	Archery	Ball Diamonds	Basketball	Cricket Field	Boating (Seasonal)	Disc Golf	Dog Park	Fishing	Flower Beds	Garden Plots	Herb Garden	Historic Marker	Horseshoes	Porta Potties (Seasonal)	Open Fields	Path/Trails	Pavilion	Picnic Tables	Playground	Restrooms (Apr-Oct)	Sculpture	Grills	Sledding Hill	Soccer Field	Swimming Pool	Tennis Courts	Volleyball	Water Feature	FREE Wifi	Acreage (Owned & Leased)		
1	AMBUCS	Orange	○							○					○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○									22	
2	Blair	Bronze/Green/Red/Teal	○							○			○	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○			○		○					○	11
3	Busey Woods	Gold/Ruby															○															59	
4	Canaday	Gray/Green	○												○																	5	
5	Carle	Bronze/Green/Red								○			○			○	○		○	○		○			○			○				11	
6	Chief Shemauger	Gold	○	○						○					○	○	○						○									13	
7	Crestview	Green/Red								○			○			○	○	○	○	○			○									6	
8	Crystal Lake	Gold/Gray/Orange				○			○	○			○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	144
9	Perkins Road Park Site/Judge Webber/Dog Park	Gold	○					○							○	○																84	
10	King	Gray/Illini		○						○				○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			○					8	
11	Larson (Wheatfield)	Red								○						○	○										○					5	
12	Leal	Gray/Orange								○			○			○	○						○									3	
13	Lohmann	Green/Red			○		○								○	○									○							15	
14	Meadowbrook	Bronze								○	○	○	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○								130	
15	Patterson Parklett	Gold/Silver																														<1	
16	Prairie	Green	○							○					○	○							○	○	○							20	
17	South Ridge	Red														○	○				○											11	
18	Sunnycrest Tot Lot	Bronze/Red														○					○											1	
19	Victory	Gray/Red		○						○	○					○	○	○	○	○			○				○					5	
20	Weaver (In Development)	Gray/Green														○	○															60	

* Accessible Playground • Accessible Grills ■ With Shelters

Facility		MTD Bus Route	ADA Accessible	Ball Diamonds	Boating (Seasonal)	Basketball	Birthday Parties	Fitness	Flower Beds	FREE Wifi	Nature Store	Offices	Open Fields	Paths/Trails	Picnic Tables	Playground	Rentable Rooms	Sculptures	Soccer Fields	Swimming Pool
21	Anita Purves Nature Center	Gold/Ruby	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Brookens Gym/Fields	Gray/Green	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	CLP Family Aquatic Center	Gold/Ruby	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Lake House	Gray/Gold/Orange	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Phillips Recreation Center	Gold/Silver	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Urbana Indoor Aquatic Center	Gray/Green/Bronze	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Greek Revival Cottage	Gray/Orange	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Planning and Operations	Gold	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	Friendship Grove Nature Playscape	Gold/Ruby	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Outdoor Party Patio

2. Programs

The Park District's program offerings are published three times per year in a printed and digital guide. Programs are mailed to all in-district residents. The Park District's offerings include dozens of free programs annually, as well as in-person and virtual options. In calendar year 2022, the Park District had over 319,000 engagements in program registration, facility visits, and other forms of participation. Park District facilities were rented over 1,700 times, creating over \$107,000 in revenue. 1095 programs were offered.

The Park District offered programs in multiple categories and areas of interest, including:

- **Aquatics**
- **Athletics**
- **Birthday Parties**
- **Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation**
- **Fitness & Wellness**
- **Nature Programs**

- **Summer Camps**
- **Age-Friendly**
- **Arts & Culture**
- **Community Gardening**
- **Community Programs**
- **Teen Programming**
- **Preschool Programs**
- **School Programs**

3. Additional Services

The Park District provided the following additional services to the community.

- The Park District is actively involved in the community through multiple outreach and support projects. Some examples include the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Program, the Natural Areas Committee, Freedom School, and the Community Outreach and Support Program. By participating in these community programs, the District can ensure its programs and offerings are best serving the needs of multiple populations within the community.

4. Other Benefits

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact to the community is multi-faceted and far reaching. For example, the Park District's parks, recreational programming, and other opportunities improve the community's overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing health care costs. School's Out and summer programs offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare options for working families during critical times when school is not in session. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Park District's open space, trees, and bodies of water help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.

X. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. Examples of these fees include grant application fees, audit requirements, stormwater discharge fee, elevator license and inspection, staff background checks, etc. Reduction or elimination of these fees could potentially save the Park District thousands of dollars annually. These fees inhibit the Park District's ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases, the unit of government assessing the fee ultimately benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax or other revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are absolutely necessary, general purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the park district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Park District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees on the Park District not only leads to inefficiency, but it is also shortsighted.

Governmental units should be also discouraged or prohibited from charging more than their out-of-pocket costs associated with the activities covered by a fee that is assessed to another unit of local government with the same taxpayers. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. Eliminating local permit fees is a way to reduce administrative costs without impacting overall public revenue. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. Some communities recognize this and do not charge fees to other units. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

2. Inefficiency of Other Governments

The Park District is also negatively impacted by the inefficiency of the state and other units of local government. Long lead time for grant application and processing leads to longer construction timelines and therefore higher costs. Extended background check times slow-down the hiring process for important programming in the community. Increasing efficiencies at all levels of government will decrease costs overall to the taxpayers and should be prioritized.

3. Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates are another cost driver. While the Park District recognizes that there are benefits to some of these mandates, modifications could help alleviate some of the burden to the park district.

a) Non-resident FOIA Requests. Last year, the park district spent approximately 40 hours to fulfill FOIA requests. Often the individuals/businesses submitting the FOIA requests are from outside of the park district boundaries, or they appear to be serving a specific agenda, rather than assuring better local government.

Under current law, resident taxpayers end up footing the bill for these non-resident or commercial requests. In order to help alleviate the burden for these non-resident requests the law could be amended to: (1) add a requirement that non-residents identify/explain the purpose of the request for information; (2) add a time limit on how far back a non-resident can request information; (3) staff time and costs could be included in the amount that is reimbursable for non-resident and commercial requests; (4) move back the deadline for non-resident requests 10 business days so that the park district does not have to delay services to its residents in order to comply with a non-resident request.

Sunshine laws are supposed to protect taxpayers by allowing them to shed light on any issue that is not exempt from FOIA. However, local government can be burdened by having to drop everything to rearrange priorities to meet FOIA deadlines, particularly if it has limited resources. Since local residents ultimately bear the expense of complying with FOIA, treating resident and non-resident requests differently would be justified.

b) Criminal Background Checks. All park districts are statutorily required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees pursuant to Section 8-23 of the Park District Code. The background checks must be done through the Illinois State Police (ISP). Last fiscal year, the park district spent **\$2,157.00** on criminal background checks. The Park District does not recommend eliminating this mandate because it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of children and other park district patrons. However, the State should explore ways in which it could improve the current system and make it less costly for park districts to comply with the law.

The mandate also raises the fundamental question as to why one layer of government is forced to charge its taxpayers to comply with a State mandate when the State made the determination to impose the mandate. Put another way, if the State has determined that criminal background checks are necessary for public safety, the State should assist with compliance.

The Park District recommends studying whether there can be a more efficient background check process implemented through the ISP to reduce the time and expense it takes for background checks. Another suggestion is for ISP to waive the fee for checks on minors or waive all fees for name checks. If there is a "hit" from a name check, the fee could be charged for the more costly fingerprint check. Since it is a state mandate, perhaps the fee structure for park districts should also be reviewed to determine whether the fee being charged exceeds the actual cost of doing the check and, if so, perhaps the ISP could consider reducing its cost to local governments.

c) Prevailing Wage. One way to reduce burden on local government staff is to limit the prevailing wage requirement to larger capital contracts. This would free up tracking of the paperwork on small repairs and projects. One reason for creating a threshold requirement is the cost of the administrative burden relative to the cost of the actual project. For example, eliminating prevailing wage on smaller projects, e.g., those less than \$50,000, will result in more local bids and decrease the overall cost for these smaller public works projects.

d) Newspaper Publication. Permitting the park district to post the information on its website in lieu of newspaper publications would reduce costs. The newspaper is no longer the most effective way to provide notice, as websites are more cost effective and reach more people.

4. Continue working to ensure Park District hiring documents are accessible digitally and as easy to complete as possible.

5. Opportunities for Increased Transparency

As illustrated above, the Park District is very transparent in its operations. The following are opportunities for increased transparency:

- Reorganize the Park District’s “Documents” section on the website in order to ensure accessing important documents is as easy and streamlined as possible for residents

Dated: November 7, 2023

Signed: _____