

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
OF THE PARK DISTRICT OF LA GRANGE, ILLINOIS
536 EAST AVENUE, LA GRANGE, ILLINOIS**

JULY 10, 2023

Vice President Vear called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M.

PRESENT: Commissioners Lacey, Posey, Chvatal, Vear,

ABSENT: President Opyd

STAFF PRESENT: Executive Director Jenny Bechtold
Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance Blake Ertmanis
Director of Finance & Human Resources Cassandra Todd
Direction of Recreation Kevin Miller
Recording Secretary Linda Muth

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price
Bob Sherman, Kris LaRocco, Becky Lorentzen,
Jody LaVoie, Bud Bach, Marilyn Ferro, Brian Lally,
Caitlin Harrington, Rose Naseef, Mony Chabria,
Molly Price, Kathy Mungo, Maryann Polonowski

Vice President Vear welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any announcements or changes to the agenda and there were none.

Communications, Presentations & Declarations

Public Comments/Participation (Board Manual Section #152)

Vice President Vear stated that he was glad to see the public in attendance and explained that each member of the public would have three minutes to speak.

Bob Sherman, 735 S. Brainard, La Grange, stated he is concerned with the major changes proposed for Waiola Park which would result in loss of needed green space in the middle of the park, loss of the soccer field, and changes to the walking path. The changes are not reflective of the community's input.

Bud Bach, 524 S. Stone, La Grange, stated that the existing smooth surface walking path should remain as it is and removing it is a major concern. It is easy to walk on and well measured around the park and is used by seniors, kids on bikes, and parents with strollers. The focus on baseball in the middle of the park is a major contention as it reduces the open space. Moving the

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

basketball court and adding a gazebo would attract nuisance and people from outside the community. There are kids in the park at 1:00 a.m. and this will not help the situation. He stated that new playground equipment is desirable. The park is surrounded by 25 houses and the changes are not well received, and he is confident we will do the right thing.

Jody Lavoie, 504 S. Stone, La Grange, stated that she heard we may move some of the commemorative trees at the park. There is one in memory of her late husband which gives her peace. She encouraged the District to be sensitive to each individual and contact them directly if their tree would be relocated. She would like screening or landscaping to block the view of the porta potty. Parking is also a problem when there are games. Cars park on both sides of the street creating a safety hazard as only one car can go at a time, and a child was hit. She prefers the parking in Western Springs at Ridge Acres where they have appropriate signage to allow parking on only one side during games.

Caitlin Harrington, 516 S. Stone, La Grange, echoed her neighbors and stated the park is beautiful as is. She walks the path every day and it provides intergenerational connection. She fully supports upgraded playground equipment geared for ages 2-12 and feels the current location is perfect because it separates the big kids at the courts from the younger ones at the playground. The commemorative tree program is wonderful and is like a memorial garden. She recently saw someone laying roses there, and we should keep this in mind in our planning.

Rose Naseef, 911 S. Stone, La Grange, stated she has lived here for over 25 years and has never heard anyone say that this park needs major changes. Trees or canopies are okay and the current walking path has intergenerational use. She questioned where the motivation to develop the park came from and whether Waiola is the sacrificial lamb in our plan to apply for an OSLAD grant. The current park is ideal with soccer, green space, and a safe path. She urged the Board to reconsider the plan and develop another funding mechanism if we cannot afford to maintain the parks, and stated there is a disconnect in pushing the redevelopment.

Brian Lally, 832 S. Spring, La Grange, stated he appreciates that we want to upgrade our parks but likes the green space and walking path. Surrounding communities have better parks and he applauds the effort but questions where upgrades could be best utilized. He has walked all the parks in La Grange, and most are in bad condition but encourages investing in the parks to improve conditions and the basic things needed, which is a better investment.

Kathy Mungo, 525 S. Waiola, La Grange, agrees with what has been said by residents and does not agree with the plan. She stated there has been a lack of transparency and inconsistencies. At the first meeting we said it was all about the residents and they gave their input but we were tone deaf when we came

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

back with this plan. The District said the path and sidewalk is redundant without knowing how it is used. One employee told her if they want to keep the park the way they want it we need to come up with 1 million dollars and another said we just spent \$25,000 on playground parts when we're planning to replace it. She does not understand why there is a line item in our budget for \$500,000 to replace the playground and basketball court and then we want this dollar for dollar grant which seems like a lot more than a half million dollars, and she questions where the cost savings is for the District. The District needs to clear this up and listen to the residents. She has not heard one person say that this plan is a great idea. It is not good to place a pollinator area next to the playground or to put the playground and basketball court together on the corner. The outhouse is not a good idea and neither is moving the backstops to the middle of the park.

Mony Chabria, 911 S. Stone, La Grange, stated that the planning and presentation at the meeting was faulty from the get-go. There was no explanation of the OSLAD grant until the second meeting when residents asked why we are doing this, and we answered that we need to do these big things to get the OSLAD grant so we can move money to other parks. He understands the budget situation, but we are seeking funds to destroy a place that is a respite for the community where he walks every day. We should rethink whether we need OSLAD money or if there are ways to maintain the parks with funds we already have. If OSLAD requires these bells and whistles then something is wrong with the OSLAD grant. This isn't what people want for the park; it is a destruction of Waiola Park.

Becky Lorentzen, 103 E. Cossitt, La Grange, stated that the Park District helped make many needed improvements at the community center on the east side of La Grange which is an area that needs more beautification. She provided an update on the mural project there for which the Community Diversity Group obtained private funding. The tile laying will be in late August and she invited the community to come in with kids 4th grade and older. She brought flyers with information on reserving a slot with sign up genius. Those under 18 years need an adult to cut tiles for safety reasons. She stated it will be a great family event and a chance to meet your neighbors.

Kris LaRocco, 505 S. Waiola, La Grange, seconded everyone's comments regarding the park. She sent a lengthy email, and if we go forward we will be doing a disservice to the community. The people she has talked with at the park are frustrated and opposed to the plan.

Consent Agenda

Vice President Vear asked for a motion to approve Item 3.1 Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of June 12, 2023; Item 3.2 Approval of the Minutes of the Executive Session Meeting of June 12, 2023; Item 3.3 Approval of the Financial Reports dated June 30, 2023; and Item 3.4 Approval

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

of the Consolidated Vouchers for July dated July 10, 2023. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Chvatal, seconded by Commissioner Posey, and passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Chvatal, Posey, Lacey, Vear
NAYES: None
ABSENT: President Opyd

Staff Reports

Executive Director Jenny Bechtold

- Director Bechtold stated that Endless Summerfest is right around the corner. An email went out looking for volunteers and she will send out a link. We are looking for the Board's support at the beer tent on Sunday night from 5pm-10:30 p.m. and will try to team up with the Village again.
- Jenny stated that the first meeting of the local government efficiency committee will be held prior to the board meeting in October or November. We will schedule it when President Opyd is back.
- She reported that there is an end of season meeting with Little League this week and she looks forward to seeing how their season went.
- Jenny explained that we are still working with Sportsfields to try to get the Gordon fields fixed. If they are not fixed after one more action we will go the legal route.
- She stated that we are planning to meet with Babe Ruth to discuss their field use moving forward.

Director of Finance & Human Resources Cassandra Todd

- Director Todd stated she had nothing additional to add to her written report and is looking forward to receiving the first draft of the audit on Friday.

Director of Recreation Kevin Miller

- Director Miller stated that there will be a campfire event at Denning on July 19th and an ice cream social at the community center Tuesday.
- Kevin reported that the recreation department has been busy with summer camps, developing the fall brochure and programs, and preparing for BASE and preschool.
- He stated that he received a resignation from our recreation supervisor and he is interviewing with the goal of a new hire in place by mid-August. We have a great preschool staff and there should be an easy transition.
- He reported that Yoga in the Park went very well with 26 participants during the day.

Director of Parks, Planning & Maintenance Blake Ertmanis

- Director Ertmanis reported that MWRD required a few minor changes to the lot which were approved by the county quickly but we are waiting for Village approval, setting us two weeks behind schedule. The project and

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

landscaping should be complete at the end of September.

- Blake explained that a truck from the business next door ran into our building in June and he is working with PDRMA on the damages.
- He stated that the installation of new flooring in the vestibule and lobby will begin tonight.

Commissioner Vear asked if the truck damage was structural. Blake answered it was not. The truck ran through a recast column but an engineer will come out to assess it.

Attorney Report

Attorney Price stated he had nothing new to add. He reminded the Decennial Committee members that they must complete Open Meetings Act training.

Treasurer Report

Director of Finance Todd stated we received \$2,210 in property tax revenue for June. The county is preparing the agency tax rate report for 2022 which is why there is a lag. She will keep the Board updated.

Action Items

Discussion and/or Approval of Board Policy Manual Updates (Policy Sections 232 & 262)

Director Bechtold explained that as we move forward with the transition to Paycom we have been reviewing how our policies will transition over. We have been discussing our safety incentive program and are now asking to remove it. These programs deter people from reporting an accident. The best protocol is to not provide a reward for no accidents. Under the current policy staff would get 1 or 1 ½ days off, and if the Board approves deleting the policy we would like to offer two floating holidays to replace the safety incentive days which would be available on January 1st and June 1st. Staff would have the option to take off for Juneteenth which is a federal holiday that the District does not observe. If approved this would take effect in January 2024.

Vice President Vear asked for a motion to Approve the Board Policy Manual Updates (Policy Sections 232 & 262). The motion was so moved by Commissioner Lacey, seconded by Commissioner Chvatal, and passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Lacey, Chvatal, Posey, Vear
NAYES: None
ABSENT: President Opyd

Discussion and/or Approval of Amendment No. 1 to License Agreement for Storage Space (Rotary Club of La Grange)

Director Bechtold stated that the current agreement expires on August 31, 2023. The Rotary Club provides holiday gifts for community families. Our new

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

facility and operation manager is getting acclimated and reviewing all our agreements. We are requesting a short extension until February 29, 2024 with minor adjustments for safety issues including volunteer lists, notice of when they will be here, keys issued, and trash disposal. After Dan evaluates how it goes we can proceed with a longer agreement that fits the cycle of when they use the space. We will present the Board with a longer-term agreement at the end of the amendment period.

Commissioner Posey asked for clarification that the approval is for the amendment only. Director Bechtold stated that it was, with a few safety protocols added, and a correction in the square footage of the space which is larger than the 1500 sq. ft. in the agreement.

Vice President Vear asked if any feedback was received from Rotary on the changes. Jenny stated that Cathy Pierson had concerns about carts being available but we will work that out and will meet again for future planning.

Vice President Vear asked for a motion to Approve Amendment No. 1 to the License Agreement for Storage Space for the Rotary Club of La Grange. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Lacey, seconded by Commissioner Posey, and passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Lacey, Posey, Chvatal, Vear
NAYES: None
ABSENT: President Opyd

Discussion and/or Approval of Resolution R23-06, Amending the Joint Agreement with SEASPAR

Director Bechtold explained that we are a member of SEASPAR. They provide a wonderful variety of special recreation programming and they would like to add Willowbrook. The twelve member agencies are the Board and oversee the big picture. This resolution would add Willowbrook effective September 1, 2024, with minor changes on invoice practices and withdrawal notifications, and we recommend moving forward.

Vice President Vear clarified that SEASPAR is a separate organization that helps with services for special needs patrons. Jenny added that we are lucky to be able to provide SEASPAR services to La Grange residents.

Vice President Vear asked for a motion to Approve Resolution R23-06, Amending the Joint Agreement with SEASPAR. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Posey, seconded by Commissioner Lacey, and passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

AYES: Commissioners Posey, Lacey, Chvatal, Vear
NAYES: None
ABSENT: President Opyd

Board Business

Old Business

Discussion and Update on the Waiola OSLAD Grant Application

Director Bechtold thanked the public for coming tonight and displayed the drawing created by Wight after the June 13th community meeting, and she assured the residents that they were heard. She explained that some of the items staff took away from the first meeting were traffic flow and parking concerns. Soccer and baseball bring in more cars which is why we suggested removing soccer, but we interpreted this concern incorrectly. We kept the full loop of the path and were trying to be fiscally responsible by using the sidewalk that surrounded the existing path. Jenny stressed that this is a conceptual drawing and not the final drawing. She added that we hope to not have to remove any or many of the commemorative trees and we would contact any people affected.

Director Bechtold stated that the La Grange village manager reviewed the parking and felt it was not unique to any other street in La Grange and stated that parking on both sides of the street encourages slower driving. The Village manager stated there is no current opportunity to change the parking signs, but the Village is also working on their master plan and will evaluate all parking in La Grange. The Park District does not have control over this.

She explained that the playground was moved off of 48th Street and Waiola in response to safety issues expressed by residents. She addressed the 1 million dollar comment stating that she was not sure what this was referring to, however, we just completed our CMP and want to upgrade our facilities, but we do not want to put in a park that the residents do not want. We do rely on grants to keep up with deferred maintenance, and the CMP is a fluid plan that includes 6 million dollars in deferred maintenance and upkeep.

Regarding relocating park items versus the existing locations, the cost would be the same since all the items are past their useful life. There have been inquiries about providing the costs up front but we normally do not provide costs until a plan is finalized. With all that said, we did explain to residents that we would go back to the drawing board and discuss it with our Board. We would like to make updates but we can leave it the same and move the playground slightly off 48th & Waiola for safety. The playground would be located where the basketball courts are and the pavilion would shift over. The fitness equipment is included in response to our residents indicating that health and wellness is a top priority per our CMP and would allow parents to work out while watching their children in the playground. Gordon Park has fitness equipment but it is on the other side of La Grange.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

Director Bechtold stated that the path can remain as is with a full loop around the park and the T-ball fields back in the corners. The mounds fill a need for nature play as indicated in our CMP and would be small for kids to play on, providing a safe area accessible without crossing 47th Street. As we go through our planning process we are looking to remove the sled hill at Elm Park. The basketball court can remain where it is and the pollinator garden can be relocated away from the playground. We would like to keep the picnic tables but the shelter off of Stone Ave. would be removed. We hear comments on safety and it is our responsibility to move the playground to the safest location. If our Board does not want to make all the improvements we do not have to apply for the OSLAD grant. The Village of La Grange has received many comments about our fields and parks and our leadership team has been working hard to make improvements.

Commissioner Chvatal stated that he attended the first session and couldn't believe all the ideas. Some people wanted a pool and others wanted pickleball. There are differing populations in La Grange and we need to compromise. He appreciates all the feedback and emails and we are making adjustments. We addressed the major concern with the playground location and we contacted the Village about the parking concerns. This is not an opportunity to pass up.

Commissioner Posey stated she attended the second meeting and was happy to see the great public engagement. She stressed that we heard the residents and wanted their thoughts and that this plan is only an idea. She lives nearby and walks through Waiola on a regular basis and passes by every day and likens this park to the front yard of La Grange. She likes that she can drive by at any time and see a different group of people there which is special and unique. She stated our parks are not just for recreation but for community, as they were a safe place to gather during the pandemic. What she heard at the meeting resulted in some of the concepts in the existing plan but she shares concerns with the baseball field placement and encouraged compromise. She stated that we are really a brand new group of people here for two years now that care deeply about the parks and we want to make improvements which we cannot do without your input. She thanked the public for showing up and sharing. It is important for the Board to get feedback to make well-reasoned decisions.

Director Bechtold added that we heard the feedback on green space and staff's vision with the fields in the middle had no fences in order to keep the green space and also provide ADA accessibility.

Vice President Vear stated that he grew up using this park. He played hockey and ice skated there and knows the history of the park. He does not agree with the path change in the first rendition because he knows how the path is used and valued. This is a working document and we can make some revisions, and he hopes we can still go forward with the OSLAD grant to make improvements. Our chances will be reduced with less park improvements. He stated he walked

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

through the park today and there was someone flying a kite among the people there, and he thinks we can do something appealing to all the residents. We are not hiding anything and this is not a preconceived plan to try to get OSLAD money. The residents pay taxes into OSLAD and it is our job to obtain it if we can and create a rendition we all like.

Director Bechtold stated that OSLAD is a matching grant. If we put in \$500,000 then they award us \$500,000. It is difficult to turn this down when we have 6 million in repairs across the District, and these are just repairs, not additions. The rule of thumb is that you need five elements, and it is a very competitive process but we have a good chance since we have not received an OSLAD grant since we improved Gordon Park in 2015. We are trying to plan long term and want to upgrade the whole park at one time. Without OSLAD we would update in bits and pieces. Gordon Park had two phases and we are still waiting to complete phase 2. Updating a park all at one time with additional funding is a great way to do it. Waiola was chosen because all its infrastructure is past its useful life.

Commissioner Chvatal asked what the timeline and next steps would be. Director Bechtold answered that staff feels we should move forward with the grant and make some compromises. There is another community input meeting on July 20th and after obtaining feedback we would like to present another plan to the Board for approval in time for the grant application deadline of August 31st. We would like Board consensus to move forward with an alternate plan. Commissioner Chvatal stated he would like to see a revised plan based on the discussion to present to the community on July 20th and the Board agreed. Director Bechtold reminded the Board that two commissioners can attend the meeting, which will be held at Waiola Park at 5:30 pm. She added that we didn't hit the mark and stressed to the public that we need their feedback.

Vice President Vear stated that this was the first drawing and it's hard to hit the first time, as was the case with the new parking lot. Director Bechtold stated that the parking lot design was changed in response to a resident's suggestion. We want the residents to be happy and enjoy the parks.

New Business

None

Committee Reports

Administration Committee

No report at this time.

Parks and Facilities Committee

No report at this time.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

Recreation & Cultural Programming Committee/ Arts & Cultural Affairs Committee

Commissioner Posey had nothing to report but encouraged all to pick up a flyer for the community center mosaic project and sign up. She and her kids will be participating.

Public Comments (Board Manual Section #152)

Bud Bach, 524 S. Stone, La Grange, stated that the Board took the public's feedback very well tonight. He commented that the safety issue is primarily related to baseball and soccer when parents park on both sides of the street and cars do not slow down. They use it as a cut through street to avoid the light at Brainard and 47th and go fast. If the Village will not do anything to address this, then he would like the Park District to encourage the soccer groups and Little League to park on the park side and not on the residential side. This worked well when Cushing was president and he had Little League families do that. We could stipulate this as part of our relationship with Little League.

Bob Sherman, 735 S. Brainard Ave., La Grange, stated he appreciates the OSLAD information and our perspective and asked if we could steer them to information on OSLAD and the five elements and how the new plan hits those elements. He wants to work together and encourages compromise, and requested we post updates on our website.

Rose Naseef, 911 S. Stone, La Grange, thanked the Board for the changes and the description of Waiola being the front yard park of the community, which is a perfect way to explain it. OSLAD is not the enemy and works well for parks in poor communities but it is trickier with a gorgeous park that is functioning, but they should fund that as well. The Community Park District of La Grange Park is thinking of applying with a conservation aspect and maybe we could do the same thing and be creative. She stated that Waiola may not be the best choice for the grant. The issue is complicated with 6 million in maintenance and she'd like to know more. We got an OSLAD and still have deferred maintenance. Adding elements will require more maintenance and costs in the long term. There is a benefit to retaining natural and environmental areas.

Brian Lally, 832 S. Spring, La Grange, thanked the Board for listening and stated he appreciates us trying to do each park and having a vision. There are some parks that need work and the fields at Gordon are a safety hazard for softball. Given our resources in a community with a healthy tax base it is not acceptable that the fields and courts are not where they should be. He appreciates the ADA thought and added that bathroom accessibility in our parks is terrible with only port-a-lets. At night moms must pass around a flashlight to take kids to them.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

Kathy Mungo, 525 S. Waiola, La Grange, thanked the Board and stated it sounds like they have been heard. She added that nobody at the first meeting said that the playground was not safe. All their concerns were about traffic on the street. The existing guard rail by the playground is plenty as a deterrent. She urged caution not to eat up the green space which works for residents to come and use it to do whatever they want. We are eliminating open space if the playground is moved and the mounds added. There is no compelling reason to change the layout. Elements can be added but the green space is such an asset.

Marilyn Ferro, 520 S. Stone, La Grange, stated that Waiola has been her front yard for 50 years and she sees the park used regularly by residents. It is also used by St. John's for gym classes and track, Gurrie Junior High for running the path and sprinting in the center of the park, and LTHS for track. Placing hills and berms will be a detriment to a student body and a maintenance nightmare to cut grass. She understands we want new lawn equipment and it is laudable since it can do twice as much in less time. Having lived across the street and been married to a park commissioner she is someone that knows what's going on there and urged caution in making a huge mistake by changing the footprint of the park and its character. It is a terrible idea to move the playground. Riverside installed metal barriers after an incident at their park and our children are kept safe by barriers and the trees and bushes there. Adding berms would destroy green space, and the walking path is heavily used. She has asked for the picnic bench to be removed because it encourages the parties that are held there at night and they must often call the police. She appreciates everything the Park District does and stated that Claudia is amazing and the employees do a wonderful job. She cautioned that we be extremely careful not to make changes detrimental to student athletes and felt kids could fall and break an arm on the hills. The park is a dynamic place that allows for best use by everyone with open space to fly a kite without running into a berm.

Maryann Polonowski, 533 S. Waiola, La Grange, stated that she agrees with her neighbors. She commented that baseball and soccer are not played on the same day so there is no need to remove one of them. The map shows one of the wettest areas of the park on the northeast corner and when the safety valve clogs, not so fun things happen. She is curious to know if this will be addressed as we move forward.

Kris LaRocco, 505 S. Waiola, La Grange, stated she has lived across from the park for 18 years and is not aware of any major accidents at the playground. She saw someone playing ball today at the backstop and they hit the ball into a neighbor's yard. If the fields were moved inside, kids would be hitting balls towards the playground which is not safe.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING – JULY 10, 2023

Board Comments

Commissioner Lacey thanked the public for coming out and stated she loves a town that loves its parks. She encouraged the parking concerns be brought to the Village and added that a group like them could get something done.


Commissioner Posey echoed this and thanked the public for caring for the parks and picking up there. They are partners to the Park District and she encouraged them to keep giving us their feedback. She thanked the public for taking the time to be here tonight.

Commissioner Chvatal stated he appreciates everyone's feedback at the previous meetings and tonight and sees their passion for this park. He appreciates staff providing options as a starting point and looks forward to seeing what comes from it.

Vice President Vear thanked Jenny and the staff for trying to move us forward in the most economical way. He thanked the public for coming out and stated the commissioners and staff will work hard to make things right for them.

Adjournment

Commissioner Lacey moved for adjournment at 7:25 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Posey and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.



Brian Opyd, President

Jennifer Bechtold, Board Secretary
Approved August 21, 2023