

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

**FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

**President Vear called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Commissioners O'Brien, Jacobs, Opyd, Vear

ABSENT: Commissioner Lacey

STAFF PRESENT: Executive Director Dean Bissias, Superintendent of Facilities Chris Finn, Superintendent of Recreation Kevin Miller, Superintendent of La Grange Fitness Jenny Bechtold, Assistant Supt. of BASE Melissa Seaberg, Recording Secretary Linda Muth

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price  
Mike Beedle, Rose Naseef, Mary Ellen Penicook  
Present electronically:  
Jeffrey Braun, architect-Cody Braun & Associates  
Todd Abrams, engineer-WT Group  
Ben Youra, environmental consultant-G2 Consulting Group

\*Commissioner Lacey joined the meeting at 7:17 P.M.

President Vear welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any announcements or changes to the agenda.

**Communications, Presentations & Declarations**

*Public Comments/Participation (Board Manual Section #152)*

Mike Beedle, 415 E. Maple, La Grange, stated that he is the spouse of board member Karel Jacobs and has 30 years of environmental experience. A parking lot is a good use of the Nicor parcel but he has some concerns. When a local government acquires property with contamination there could be environmental liability with digging. He has reviewed the NFR letter, G2 report, and Nicor reports. From the history of the property, it appears it may have been part of a manufacturing plant at one time which was at 47<sup>th</sup> & Bluff, and it contaminated the soil with carcinogenic coal tar. The gas manufacturing plant was not addressed in the G2 report phase 1 and it should have been; it was discussed later in the report in section 6-1. As a concerned citizen he does not want to foot the bill for something that is not well-planned. The design should take into

## REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021

account that there is possible contamination and concerns with the ground water table and excavation. The designers should work with environmental people to make sure it is done right. Illinois EPA records indicate that Nicor left contamination behind after the remediation.

Ben Youra explained that section 6-1 of the report is a summation of Nicor's remediation work. G2 reviewed historic resources and aerial photos, and they did look at the Nicor facility to the south and southwest, going back to the early 1900's. Ultimately, the property was remediated to stringent residential levels but there were areas with higher levels of mercury after the dirty soil was dug out. The practical approach to the redevelopment after sampling and remediation will be a health and safety plan to minimize workers' exposure.

Mike Beedle stated that when properties with environmental concerns are purchased the seller can agree to pay for clean-up if you find hazardous waste. We should have this conversation with Nicor since they have a fund to address this type of site. A parking lot is a great use of the property, but the up-front work is very important.

Rose Naseef, 911 S. Stone, La Grange, introduced herself as the chair for the Village of La Grange Environmental Commission and an environmental educator for a non-profit. She agrees that additional parking is warranted but is concerned about health and the environment with the Nicor lot. She is concerned about the size and encourages the District to look closely at the number of spaces we need and not to overcompensate by planning for the maximum which can result in a lot that will not be filled, as often seen at malls and churches. Government is moving away from the practice of setting parking minimums. Before approving the design, she urges us to reapply for a permeable paver grant or State of Illinois grant, look at bio soil for the retention pond, add trees for their natural beauty and absorbency, add vegetation around the perimeter, and include bike racks and pedestrian access to encourage other modes of transportation. When developing the new master plan, we should include how much space is devoted to trees, wetlands, and grasses so we can track how much we gain or lose over time. We should start a green team so that we have the information when things come up and highlight what we do environmentally on our website.

Mary Ellen Penicook, 135 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Ave., La Grange, thanked everyone for being there and the commissioners for giving their time. She stated that she watched the last board meeting online and is familiar with the Nicor project. She went back in her records (as a former commissioner) and the first attempt to acquire the property was in 2014. It was a slow process and at the time the Board clearly said the parcel was for parking and possibly a synthetic soccer field. She understands the need for the retention pond with the flooding issues in the village. She does not agree with asking for a variance for the parking. She has been here many times and witnessed accidents and near misses because of the current parking. We need the parking for the recreation and fitness centers to

## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

be successful. People do not want these facilities in their backyards. She does not think a playground is appropriate for the parcel, and there are nearby playgrounds at the recreation center and Sedgwick Park. The architects might be able to slope the retention area so that it could work for sledding or skating. This would reduce environmental issues because less excavating would be required. Please do not limit the parking. It is needed to keep things running so that the District can make the money required to have nice parks. It is not the building vs. parks, this building funds the parks.

### **Consent Agenda**

Commissioner Jacobs motioned to approve Item 3.1 Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of January 11, 2021; Item 3.2 Approval of the Financial Reports dated January 31, 2021; Item 3.3 Approval of the Consolidated Vouchers for February dated February 8, 2021. Commissioner O'Brien seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Jacobs, O'Brien, Opyd, Lacey, Vear  
NAYES: None  
ABSENT: None

### **Staff Reports**

#### **Director's Report**

- Director Bissias stated that he has nothing to add to his written report. It is budget time and a date for a budget/MBO meeting needs to be set later in the meeting.

### **Staff Comments**

#### **Superintendent of Finance Leynette Kuniej**

- Supt. of Finance Kuniej had nothing to add to her written report.

#### **Assistant Supt. of BASE Melissa Seaberg**

- Assistant Supt. of BASE Seaberg reported that she, Supt. Hartung, and another staff member received the first dose of the COVID vaccine.

#### **Superintendent of La Grange Fitness Jenny Bechtold**

- Superintendent Bechtold stated that while it is presumed that older people make up the majority of lapsed patrons during the pandemic, she included data in her written report indicating that the reduction in fitness center members we have seen is consistent across age groups. Teenagers were the one age group that saw little change. They need somewhere to go, and she is glad the fitness center is here for them.
- Jenny reported that the fitness center currently has 1,595 members with 26 new February memberships through 2/7. She is trying to combat cancellations and believes that by keeping the mask requirement people will feel more comfortable in the facility.

## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

Commissioner Jacobs complimented Jenny and Dean on the good job keeping the fitness center going. She had a great visit there today and it was very clean; she will encourage people that it is safe to return.

### **Superintendent of Recreation Kevin Miller**

- Superintendent Miller stated that today was the first day of preschool registration for fall and it went well with 24 families signing up.

The Board asked about basketball programming, gym capacity, and planning for spring programs.

- Kevin reported that additional families have enrolled for basketball and we are close to fall numbers. There are 17 YDL teams for winter.
- He stated that with capacity limited to 50% in the gymnasium only coaches and players are allowed in the gym; parents cannot stay and have been good about it.
- The 50% capacity will be considered with spring programming. Most classes will have a max of 10 but this could change if restrictions loosen. Yoga has had 18-20 participants in the past, but Zoom has been a popular fitness option during the pandemic.

### **Superintendent of Facilities Chris Finn**

- Superintendent Finn stated that changes to mitigations have moved very quickly over the last 2-3 weeks. It is good to see more people in the facility and programs resuming.
- Chris reported that he is trying to do something different by offering use of the toddler open gym equipment in room 108/109 for individual households. The cost is \$20 for 45 minutes, and the equipment is sanitized after each use. He is also offering discounted fees for gymnasium rentals when there is availability during the day. Little rental time is open later in the day due to our own basketball programs.
- Installation of new lighting in the gymnasium is complete. Energy efficient LED lights were installed with funds from a ComEd grant.

Commissioner Jacobs asked what percentage of facility rentals come from La Grange and if there are out-of-state court rentals. Chris said that room rental customers come from all over, including Brookfield, Hodgkins, and the Midway area. There is a basketball recruiting group based in California that usually rents court space annually, and it draws people from all over the Midwest. That recruiting group rental has generated additional rentals from Chicago area groups. Commissioner Jacobs would like some discussion and data on this during strategic planning. She complimented the wonderful job on keeping the parks plowed; it is great to see people out and walking.

President Vear gave a nod to Kevin on the website data he provided in the packet and stated that Andrea is doing a great job with social media.

**Attorney Report**

Attorney Price stated that there may be some confusion on how the mitigation orders in suburban Cook County apply to units of government. The Cook County limitations do not apply to the Park District as a unit of government in fulfillment of its mission.

**Treasurer Report**

None

**Action Items**

*Discussion and/or Approval of an agreement with Planning Resources for the Creation and Development of a New PDLG Master Plan*

Director Bissias referred the Board to the agreement in the packet and stated that all the changes previously requested have been made, including two extra years of follow-up. Commissioner Opyd stated that he did not see the survey revision adding a digital option, in addition to mail, for the statistically valid survey. President Vear stated that the Board could approve the agreement with the understanding that the digital option will be included.

After Board discussion Commissioner O'Brien motioned for approval of the agreement with Planning Resources for the creation and development of a new PDLG master plan. Commissioner Jacobs seconded the motion which passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners O'Brien, Jacobs, Opyd, Lacey, Vear

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None

*Review of 2021-2022 Budget Timeline to Set Board Meeting Date*

Director Bissias stated that a meeting date needs to be scheduled to discuss the detailed budget and MBO's for the next fiscal year. After Board discussion the special meeting was set for Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

**Board Business**

**New Business**

None

**Old Business**

*Nicor Property Update, Discussion and/or Approval of Design*

*Site Design, MWRD Memo, Environmental Report, etc.*

President Vear stated that there is quite a bit of information in the board packets and discussion will start with environmental issues. Three individuals are in attendance remotely via Zoom to assist in the discussion:

Jeffrey Braun, architect-Cody Braun & Associates; Todd Abrams, engineer-WT Group; and Ben Youra, environmental consultant-G2 Consulting Group.

President Vear asked if we know what the water table depth is. Ben answered that Phase 1 concurs with contaminants found in previous reports but that a

## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

seasonal test still needs to be done to determine this and they will then issue a geotechnical report. Commissioner Jacobs stated that the summary report from January 18<sup>th</sup> is the existing December report she saw last month. We have to let the public know that we have a recognized environmental issue with the site. It is clean to a residential level to 3 feet, but we should avoid digging below that level to avoid coal tar or hot spot areas. Todd Abrams stated that 3 feet of clean soil will be kept on the surface and there is a no further action letter, but it does not certify that everything above 3 feet is clean. Hot spots were dug out and samples indicated elemental mercury which would be from Nicor meters. Commissioner Jacobs stated that the report says we did due diligence, but if we dig further, we need a safety plan. She would like to see Nicor's health and safety plan to help inform our plan which must address the worst-case scenario. Director Bissias will ask Nicor for their plan. Todd explained that it would include soil management best practices. President Vear commented that Nicor's plan would be procedural rather than data driven.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if a landfill would accept the soil if we found problems or if it must go somewhere else as hazardous waste and how this affects cost. Todd Abrams explained that based on the results we have had it would go to a landfill that accepts contaminated soil, which was budgeted for. If more toxic characteristics were found that could be a problem. The goal in the design is to reduce the amount of soil exported as much as possible within the existing constraints. There was discussion on the costs and Director Bissias stated that the latest estimate is \$227,000; 3,250 yards at \$70/yard. Commissioner Opyd stated that the 20% budgeted for soil removal is a large portion of the budget, and we need to minimize it and make the right decisions.

Commissioner Jacobs agrees that we need to close the purchase of the site but proposed that the Board have a special meeting about the site design and environmental conditions, getting public input on options for recreation. Commissioner Lacey stated that we should consider what the people want, especially the ones that are here all the time and need parking.

Commissioner Jacobs motioned that the Board table the vote on accepting the site design to another day. Commissioner Opyd seconded the motion.

Commissioner Opyd stated that he is not against expanding parking. He has talked to quite a few residents about the need for parking, however, we are spending 1.2 million on the lot and he wants it to be sustainable for 30-40 years.

President Vear stated that there will be a loss of income if we postpone this project too long. We need to move at a pace to begin in late fall or we could miss the construction season and be delayed a year. Facility rentals brought in approximately \$300,000 per year pre-COVID and depend on parking, and with the added parking spaces, there is potential for an additional \$100,000 if the pandemic eases. We lose fitness members due to parking issues, and

## REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021

conservatively adding another 500 members would bring in \$150,000/year. A revised design would increase expenses for architectural plans. We know the Village requirements. He is not averse to going for another grant but not necessarily for permeable paver parking; we have gone that route and it will not reduce the detention size for impactful green space. The MWRD can see that we have the space for the detention area and may not award us a grant for pavers. Our previous application came in at 43%, and that was with submission being low due to COVID. There are prior awards in La Grange which affected our rating, and because our existing site was not already constructed MWRD already considers it to be permeable. We are wasting our resources trying to build something here that is exceedingly difficult on a lot that is not perfect; other park spaces could be better developed for green space. We currently have a PARC grant out there to expand the fitness center which will require parking, and a reduction in parking will be averse to the grant. If we miss the construction season due to delays it will impact our bottom line more than any savings we could build into the project, and the Village zoning application specifies that we have 12 months to complete the build from approval date.

Commissioner Opyd stated there was no mention of cost if we dig below 3 feet. He is not asking for a tot lot or park, but financially what is the best solution? We could ask for additional time to figure out what works best for the community. Attorney Price stated that we have until November. Director Bissias stated that the property has been in its current state for 6 years, and the Village wants it done. The project will have to be started soon after the permits are issued. Jeffrey Braun stated that permits will take 2-3 months, and construction will be 4 months, plus or minus.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that the strategic planning process should be considered, and we could offer additional recreation with public input. The initial drawing and size of the lot was done for an OSLAD grant before the environmental studies. We have not discussed facility capacities and could reduce the parking by 25-30 spots. She would like to discuss the site design at another meeting.

Supt. of Finance Kuniej passed out a packet of financial reports. President Vear explained the documents. He stated that currently the capital budget has \$3.145 million in reserves. If all goes as planned, after the land purchase \$812,000 will remain. If we are awarded the PARC grant that we applied for, we will have to match \$500,000, after which would leave \$312,000 in cash reserves. That is not a lot of money to have for unforeseen expenses. There would be additional costs if the project is changed or delayed, and we do not have much more available to spend. Commissioner Opyd agreed with these comments.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that grants are a part of our strategic plan and applying for the MWRD again is a great idea. We almost got it, and they gave

## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

us some pointers. The funds for the Nicor parcel came from the sale of green parkland and we are giving residents a parking lot and detention pond. President Vear stated that there is a motion on the floor to table the vote on approval of the plan as it is. The motion failed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Jacobs, Opyd  
NAYES: Commissioners O'Brien, Lacey, Vear  
ABSENT: None

Commissioner Jacobs stated she has not received answers on why we need so much parking and would like a special meeting to discuss site design and data. She questioned the numbers provided and the parking requirements for warehousing, staff, fitness, recreation, rentals, and the gymnasium. Her calculations do not agree with 780 spots required, and the building is not a warehouse. Jeffrey Braun explained the requirements. Director Bissias stated that our memo of understanding with the Village has expired, and we agreed to meet the parking requirements. Staff added that parking is also required for Secret Santa, and that Alamo (Truck Repair) uses up to 20 spaces. We cannot stop them from using our lot; it is public land. Commissioner Jacobs asked for the capacity of the fitness center, recreation center, and rental rooms and suggested asking for a variance. Supt. of La Grange Fitness Bechtold reported that a conservative number for the fitness center is 207 and she provided a breakdown of the numbers. Supt. of Facilities Finn stated that the recreation center/rentals figure is 390 and the playground would increase that number. Supt. of Recreation Miller stated that the missing element is overlap. You must consider that there could be 200 people in the gymnasium for an activity that is ending at the same time a second group of 200 people are coming in for the following activity.

President Vear stated that the parking requirements and finances have been covered and asked if there was anything else to be discussed. Commissioner Opyd asked if we could reduce the parking and add spots later if they were needed. He understands a subsequent project would have a cost, but he has not had time to digest all the numbers provided tonight. President Vear stated there is a difference of opinion between the commissioners on where to go with this and asked if anyone wanted to vote on the action item tonight.

Commissioner O'Brien motioned to approve the site design as it is today, and Commissioner Lacey seconded the motion.

President Vear stated that the design could be approved with the idea that minor changes may be made. Director Bissias asked Jeffrey Braun if the design could be tweaked, and he responded that it could, as long as it is done prior to construction. It was discussed that a possible 10% reduction in storm (detention) could increase green space. President Vear stated that if we move forward, we are saying that we are going to do this allowing for the possibility of minor changes.



## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

President Vear stated that there has been a motion to vote on the design by Commissioner O'Brien and seconded by Commissioner Lacey. It is for approval of the design as presented with the idea to look at minor changes to the plan to accommodate the possibility of applying for another grant and other ideas as well.

Commissioner Opyd asked how we can tweak the plan if we must go for zoning approval with an approved plan, per Brad Belcaster at last month's meeting. Attorney Price stated that we must have a design and that we could not make a material change, but a minor design change could be handled by the zoning administrator; it depends on what you change. Very minor changes would not require an approval. Director Bissias stated that when we met with the planning commission, they were ecstatic with the plan we presented, which includes their recommendations to move all handicap parking to the front of the recreation center, move the exits, and create a second drop-off area.

The motion to approve the site design for the Nicor property passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners O'Brien, Lacey, Vear  
NAYES: Commissioners Opyd, Jacobs  
ABSENT: None

President Vear stated we should consider liability protection as suggested by Mike Beedle earlier in the meeting. It would entail Nicor offsetting costs related to any unforeseen environmental problems we encounter. Director Bissias understood Mike's comments to mean that Nicor has a liability fund paid for by taxpayers for environmental issues related to their manufacturing gas plants. Todd Abrams said it is covered in the report provided and we should touch base with Phil (attorney Fornaro) regarding the legal issues.

### **Committee Reports**

#### *Administration Committee*

None

#### *Parks and Open Lands*

None

#### *Finance & Capital Project Committee*

None

#### *User Group Committee*

None

#### *Marketing/ Social Media Committee*

Commissioner Opyd thanked the commissioners that have noticed the difference in our social media. Several people have noticed and approached

him with comments and the changes are well-received by the community.

**Public Comments (Board Manual Section #152)**

Mike Beedle stated that he supports his wife and suggested using fire code for determining required parking spots if formulas overestimate.

Mary Ellen Penicook stated that Commissioner Jacobs is mixing apples and oranges. The parking is based on square footage, and it does not matter if the facility is not a warehouse. We should look at the broader picture; when we get back to capacity the lot will not sit idle. The right sizing number is based on the knowledge of the Village, and needling the numbers is not fair. As Kevin said, when there is turnaround in the lot the numbers are higher.

Rose Naseef stated that there are changes in how municipalities are looking at parking lot sizes; the Village will look at the comprehensive plan. Off-site parking should be considered and looking at max capacity is not the sustainable way. Parking is needed, but green space can work like a sponge as drainage for storm water.

**Board Comments**

Commissioner Lacey thanked the visitors for coming and for their comments on the future of the parking lot. She reported that people she has talked with believe that the parks in La Grange should all look alike and Lynn suggested that we find people in the neighborhood to adopt-a-park and keep an eye on things and let us know if they see something. People take ownership when they are involved. She suggested that we pursue a 4-way stop sign on the corner by the community center. She has seen kids run through the intersection during the summer. She has listened to the pros and cons about the parking lot tonight. We are a family and things will work out. We take our jobs seriously and have good commissioners, a good director, and good staff. When people consider moving here, they check out the park district. The fitness center is doing wonderful even though there are other centers in our area. Be safe.

Commissioner Opyd stated that the LED program is great, and we should push it on social media. As a commissioner, it is challenging to balance parking, outdoor space, and the retention area. There were challenges with the vote and he felt rushed with a lot of last-minute information, but to be clear he still supports additional parking.

Commissioner Jacobs stated she is very excited that we are purchasing the lot and getting more parking, but she is disappointed we did not consider alternate designs to give the community more usable green space; tweaking the plan is not the same thing. She wanted to discuss it further to avoid the need for a big detention pond, but she supports the Board's decision. Moving forward we should consider that we have few parks and little green space and that we are not a commercial rental facility; we are a park district.

## **REGULAR BOARD MEETING - FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

Commissioner O'Brien welcomed Lynn back to the Board for tonight's in-person meeting. He appreciates her comments and phenomenal ideas. He also congratulated Kevin on the birth of his baby boy.

President Vear stated that this building was purchased by the District in 2005. The parking lot will not be the last element added but is an important one included in the plan from 16 years ago. It is important to get this done so we can focus less on this property, and we can use it as a source of funds to develop our parks. The vote was not unanimous and was contentious, but it is important. There will be disagreements, but we all want the best for the Village and the Park District. He thanked the Board for their strength and convictions and thanked staff for their patience; it has been a long time coming since 2014. He reported that he spoke to Cathy from the LeaderShop and they would like to do clean-up and planting again in the parks this year.

### **Executive Session**

None

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner O'Brien moved for adjournment at 9:26 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Opyd and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.

---

Robert Vear, President

---

Constantine Bissias, Secretary  
*Approved March 8, 2021*