

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

**JANUARY 11, 2021**

**President Vear called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M.**

The Board President has determined it is not feasible to meet in person under the terms of the Executive Order and therefore the Board will meet remotely as permitted by the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation in response to COVID-19 (COVID-19 Executive Order 5) exempting the requirement of the Open Meetings Act for the physical presence of the Commissioners at the meeting and permitting Commissioner attendance by video, audio, or telephone access.

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Opyd

STAFF PRESENT: Executive Director Dean Bissias, Superintendent of Finance Leynette Kuniej, Superintendent of Facilities Chris Finn, Superintendent of BASE Leanna Hartung, Assistant Supt. of Recreation Teresa Chapman, Superintendent of La Grange Fitness Jenny Bechtold, Recording Secretary Linda Muth

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price, Phil Fornaro, Brad Belcaster, Jeffrey Braun, Lacey Lawrence, William Lanspeary, Jim Boo

President Vear welcomed everyone to the meeting which is being held via Zoom. Instructions to join the meeting and the procedures for public comment were included on the published agenda. He asked for any announcements or changes to the agenda.

**Communications, Presentations & Declarations**

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

None

Commissioner Opyd joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

**Consent Agenda**

Commissioner Jacobs asked that the minutes from the December 14, 2020 board meeting be amended as follows:

On page 3, paragraph 2, Commissioner Jacobs' comment that the huge

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detention pond is extreme should be amended to read *both the huge detention pond and parking lot are extreme*.

Commissioner O'Brien motioned to approve Item 3.1 Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of December 14, 2020 as amended; Item 3.2 Approval of the Financial Reports dated December 31, 2020; Item 3.3 Approval of the Consolidated Vouchers for January dated January 11, 2021; Item 3.4 Approval of Parks and Openlands Committee Discussion Notes dated December 14, 2020. Commissioner Lacey seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

### **Staff Reports**

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

- Director Bissias stated that he had nothing to add to his written board report. With the holiday season many of the staff had time off.

### **Staff Comments**

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

- Superintendent Bechtold reported that she is watching the numbers and waiting for the updated metrics on Friday with hopes that COVID restrictions can be eased.
- Jenny stated that, per her report last month, there was a drop in memberships as expected, and we currently have 1,655 members. Only 50 of the 300 insurance-based memberships were renewed, and there were annual memberships which were not renewed due to the pandemic.
- She stated that despite the reduced memberships the financials are coming around, and the fitness center should be back in the black next month.

Commissioner Jacobs asked how many people have reported positive COVID cases to the fitness center. Jenny answered that only one member has reported a positive test, which was 7-8 days after their last visit. A few staff members have tested positive, but each case was traced to a family member and not the fitness center. Wearing masks at all times is working well.

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

- Superintendent Finn reported that he met with the group planning the June honor field at Denning Park and they are moving forward. It will be a great event for the Park District and the community, and they hope to get LGBA involved for volunteers and sponsors. The safety of volunteers and visitors will be a priority.
- Chris stated that he is waiting for updates on the Governor's rules and hopes for increased leeway to open the rec center, rentals, and programs.

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### **Assistant Superintendent of Recreation Teresa Chapman**

- Asst. Superintendent Chapman reported that she is filling in for Supt. Miller tonight. She offered congratulations to the Miller family on the arrival of their newborn son.
- Teresa stated that they are working on the spring brochure, budgets, and summer camp.
- The rec dept. has an intern starting on Monday.

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

- Supt. of Finance Kuniej stated that last week was extremely busy with changing over payroll for the year-end, W2's, 1099's, and new tax rates.
- Leynette reported that the fitness center is taking a turn for the black and she thinks they will break even by the fiscal year-end.
- She stated that we continue to watch our numbers and spending carefully and believes we should hit the figures she previously provided.

### **Superintendent of BASE Leanna Hartung**

- Superintendent Hartung stated that nine families have returned to the BASE program.
- School District 102 continues to offer students hybrid and at-home learning options, and Leanna has not been informed of any pending changes. She keeps in contact with their Superintendent.

### **Attorney Report**

Attorney Price reported that there is a lot of intelligence coming through about the coming weeks through January 24<sup>th</sup>. We should be prepared that parks could be the center for demonstrations. The District is not responsible for providing security but should reach out to the La Grange Police Dept. if needed. He also recommends reviewing our facility permit requirements.

### **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 asked if the Board had time to review the contract and suggested that the Board delay voting on this item until next month. He received it Friday and has not had time to study it or discuss it with Attorney Price.

Commissioner Opyd reviewed the contract and stated that the section on intergovernmental agreements should include the lease with the Village for the community center. The contract should also include the execution of a digital survey. He recommended allocating \$100-\$200 in the marketing budget to advertise the survey. He stated that we need to reach more than current users

to understand why some people are not engaged. The intermediate stage of the process, when results are shared, will be an interesting point to think about strategies and our general direction prior to the final plan.

Commissioner Jacobs asked about the timeline and plan follow-up. Director Bissias stated that PRI agreed to include the survey, as well as additional follow-up, and the project timeline is six months. He will meet with PRI and asked that the Board review the contract and provide their questions or comments to him a week prior to the February board meeting.

## **Board Business**

### **New Business**

#### *Nicor Property Update and Discussion*

President Vear stated that realtor Brad Belcaster, attorney Phil Fornaro and architect Jeff Braun are in attendance to assist with the discussion of the Nicor property. Director Bissias stated that the 'real estate' closing is January 31<sup>st</sup>, and the final zoning is February 8<sup>th</sup>, and he is bringing this to the Board because the Village is overriding the MWRD recommendations with more stringent requirements for a larger detention pond as depicted in the new drawings.

Jeff Braun explained the site drawing. The detention pond holds 1.28-acre feet of volume and is approximately 6 feet deep. It forms a shape like a 7 on the west and south sides, with a retaining wall to raise the lot above the pond. This is the most economical option and reducing the size of the pond would be very costly. The 6,000 cubic yards of excavated soil must be assumed to be contaminated. Half of it will be safely taken off site. The Village was concerned about back-up into the street when cars pull in, so a new concrete drop-off area has been created with space for three cars near the building. Cars must pull in before dropping someone off, and the access is an entrance only. The new drive lines up with Saylor Street, and there will be trees in the area.

Commissioner Opyd stated that, based on the drawing, it looks like the area will be a big hole. The money from the Gordon Park land sale was supposed to get us some green space, and now there is only room for a parking lot. Our first goal is to get the rezoning approval, but then we should consider an alternate plan that makes the land more pleasing instead of all asphalt and detention pond. He agrees that we need more parking, and we should purchase the property, but questioned the parking requirements and whether the plan could be revised after the zoning approval.

Dean explained that the original plan for our facility required 295 parking spaces: 200 for the building, 20 for administration, 21 for maintenance, and 54 for tournaments. Currently we only have 30 indoor and 114 exterior spaces. The spaces added on the Nicor property would bring it up to 299.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that she consulted with an engineer who has

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worked with other park districts, and she is opposed to the design. Ideally, we should avoid digging below 3 feet, which requires a hazardous waste safety plan. The site is clean to 3 feet for residential use, and a shallow pond would be 18 inches. She has not seen a report detailing a parking needs assessment or a cost/benefit analysis. Large banquet or tournament rentals requiring more parking can use the Sedgwick Park shuttle. We need a more thoughtful process for the community and should apply for another MWRD grant for permeable pavers so that a detention pond is not required.

President Vear stated that we know the cost of this project and that the Village requires us to have a total of 295 parking spots. The question is whether we can get around that.

Jeff Braun explained that 295 spots is based on the type of facility, its use, capacity, and square footage. It follows the municipal codes and variables are calculated. The Sedgwick parking lot is not included. Supt. Finn clarified that we have never used the Sedgwick lot as overflow parking for rentals, and we do not provide shuttle service. Commissioner Jacobs stated that she will accept that we need 295 parking spots when she sees an assessment and that the three acres will be a goose pond and parking. It is a lot of money to do nothing else with the space and we need data.

Brad Belcaster stated that, from a real estate perspective, you see the same thing at malls and stores. Formulas are used to calculate parking requirements, and sometimes those lots are half-full, but they are full during the holidays. We also need to consider that the District could develop additional space in our building and loading dock area and that our future needs should enter into the discussion. Commissioner Opyd stated that this parcel is land-locked, and we could wait until the first phase of the master plan is done to execute plans for the lot.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if the District could request a variance to the Village parking code. The Village Environmental Quality Commission supports sustainability and additional use of the land could be a great thing. Phil Fornaro answered that we could ask, and the Village Board and Planning Commission would have to approve it. Commissioner Lacey suggested that we see what the Village says, and also issue a brief online community survey for feedback.

President Vear stated he is hesitant to keep delaying this project. He is not happy about the large detention pond, but we need the parking, and we close on the 31<sup>st</sup>. He would love to see something different, but our current finances do not allow it. Once COVID passes there will be demand for our facility. Commissioner Opyd stated he appreciates all the work done to push for the zoning change but would like time to validate the plan in the next month or two.

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Director Bissias stated that a reduction in parking spaces on the property will not reduce the size of the detention area very much, and Jeffrey Braun concurred. Supt. of La Grange Fitness Bechtold asked that the Board consider that we have applied for a PARC grant to build into the dock area and expand the fitness center, which is still outstanding. If we are awarded the grant, then we are committed to it.

President Vear stated that a lot of ground was covered tonight. We are not happy with the detention area but there are not many alternatives, given that our MWRD grant application was rejected. This year was our best chance for the grant, and he is not confident we would be successful if we apply again next year. Commissioner Lacey agreed but suggested seeking community input.

Commissioner Jacobs stated she wants to purchase the land but would like community input and design revisions. A parking area greater than 50% of our property could potentially reduce future OSLAD funding. She asked if we received any feedback on why we did not receive the MWRD grant, and Director Bissias answered that other entities demonstrated greater need.

Supt. of Facilities Chris Finn requested that the current users of the recreation center, fitness center, preschool and programs be included in any surveys. The community at large will have a lot of ideas, but our current patrons often complain and have expressed the need for parking. The lack of parking makes them late for classes, preschool drop-off is difficult, and crossing East Avenue can be challenging. Supt. of Finance Kuniej added that these are our revenue generators. Chris stated that we lose income on rental space because we lack parking on busy Saturday mornings and during events. If we include amenities to attract people to the new property, then they will also need parking.

Commissioner Opyd stated that he appreciates Chris' comments, but he is concerned about the Board's focus on the building and generating revenue in the last two years. That is not all a park district does and we need to look beyond the building. We should proceed with closing the land purchase and have additional discussions later.

Phil Fornaro stated that we are at the tail end of due diligence which expires on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and we are in good shape. He met with the title company, is ensuring the environmental is finalized, and sent engineering the plan. The fee for the safety action plan is \$5,000, and there is a COVID provision in the agreement. Brad Belcaster stated that the zoning meeting is coming up and you do not go for zoning with a general discussion; you go in with an approved plan to present for zoning approval. A decision should be made, or we may have to push off the whole zoning question to later. President Vear asked if the Board must have an approved plan prior to zoning. Phil said that for purposes of zoning we provide a use requirement. We asked for a parking lot, so parking requirements will be important to their decision. If we ask for a variance we

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would have to start over, but we can discuss it with them. The first zoning phase is to match the 536 property zoning.

Brad Belcaster stated that given all the layers and issues, we have a plan, and the Village will look to it for our intent. Nicor has an easement for a pump and access in the back corner, there are railroad issues on the back side, and foundation issues with the current building. They have looked at all options within the confines we have to work with, and this is about as good as it gets. If we reduce the parking to change the plan, we will have to change our zoning request.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that if we use permeable pavers, we can include a path and a playground, and she asked if Nicor would allow a path around their easement. Jeff answered that the plan already includes a path that is not on the easement. Phil added that Nicor will not allow a permanent walking path on their easement; they may need to dig there in the future. The easement can have grass and shallow shrubs. Director Bissias stated that an outdoor playground at the recreation center would deter people from paying to use the indoor playground.

Commissioner Lacey stated that the pond will bring geese, which will require clean-up. Director Bissias answered that there is no pond at Sedgwick Park, and we have issues with geese on all the fields there. Jeff stated that the pond will only hold water when there is a storm, otherwise it will be dry. Supt. Finn added that it will be the same type of site that we currently have at Denning Park. There is a pond on the east side there and it is a grassy area that only contains water when it storms. Commissioner Jacobs asked about safety and Brad reported that there are grading requirements, but a fence was not included in the plans.

Phil Fornaro explained the drawing which depicts the easements and stated that IDOT will have a temporary easement to install a sidewalk. IDOT has a major project planned for East Avenue & 47<sup>th</sup> Street which will include a sidewalk, probably 3-5 years down the road.

President Vear asked Brad and Phil if we could share this current plan for zoning and revise it in the future. Phil said that we could run with this and mention that there may be some changes but that a change would be more costly. Commissioner Jacobs asked that we let the Village know we are discussing size and may apply for a MWRD grant for permeable pavers. We should not assume that we will not be awarded a grant because we did not get it the first time. Brad responded that contractor pricing may not be extended, and this would impact the budget. President Vear added that a new grant application would put us back a year and he does not want to wait that long. Commissioner O'Brien agreed and asked what the timeframe from the Village is for us to proceed. Phil replied that they will be anxious for us to proceed. Brad stated that the Village will not allow the property to sit there as an empty lot if

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we delay. The Village previously mandated to Nicor that they put two feet of black dirt in the lot and plant grass to beautify the lot. The Village agreed that if we close the purchase and redevelop the land, they will waive this requirement, which could cost \$100,000-\$200,000. This issue could come back if we delay the redevelopment, and Phil concurred. Commissioner O'Brien stated that it is in our best interest to begin the project within a few months. Commissioner Jacobs stated that maybe we could put gravel in instead of grass.

President Vear stated that we could put up a poster-sized plan at the rec center for the public to view and comment on and possibly post it on our website. Director Bissias said that if we post it online there will have to be a lot of explanation with the drawing, and it will take time to put together. President Vear stated that it is an imperfect situation, and it has been covered tonight.

### **Old Business**

*None*

### **Committee Reports**

#### *Administration Committee*

*None*

President Vear suggested that the Board discuss the committees at the next meeting since former commissioner Dan Collins left the Board and previously led this committee.

#### *Parks and Open Lands*

*None*

#### *Finance & Capital Project Committee*

*None*

#### *User Group Committee*

Commissioner O'Brien stated that they will start meeting with soccer and Little League groups to talk about an April or May start for them.

#### *Marketing/Social Media Committee*

Commissioner Opyd reported that Kevin and the team are working on social media templates for standard brands to push our presence out there. Andrea is taking on some duties for the group.

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

Lacey Lawrence stated that she would like to see other recreation options and a variance for the parking pursued for the lot south of the community (rec) center. She agrees with putting out a survey to the community regarding the property and recommends an online survey if we cannot wait.

William Lanspeary agreed with the last comments. He stated he appreciates



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the considerations going into the land for the parking lot, and it may be worthwhile to get public feedback and consider increasing green space. The thoughtfulness put into this project is incredible.

### **Board Comments**

President Vear stated that Zoom meetings are not his favorite. He appreciates everyone's patience as we go through all these items and knows it can go longer than expected. He congratulated Kevin on the new baby, and Jenny for the success in the fitness center.

Commissioner O'Brien stated that he appreciates all the hard work done by Brad Belcaster, Phil Fornaro and Jeff Braun regarding the new property. He is excited to meet baby Miller.

Commissioner Jacobs appreciates all the work done as well, and the thoughtful discourse which is so important to serve the community. Each of us works in the best interest of our community. She congratulated Claudia and Dean on the successful tree grant; grants are in our strategic plan. She also thanked the visitors that came to the meeting; we are listening.

Commissioner Opyd thanked Jim Boo, Lacey Lawrence, and William Lanspeary for coming; their comments are appreciated. Given the (national) events of this week, he appreciates working with this Board and sharing ideas. We are all respectful and he thanked the commissioners for making it a good meeting.

Commissioner Lacey appreciates the update on the new property. When it first started it was just going to be a parking lot, and she appreciates all the comments and discussion. We will work through COVID and when it is over, we will need those parking spaces. She offers a handclap to the staff.

### **Executive Session**

None

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Opyd moved for adjournment at 8:47 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lacey and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.

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Robert Vear, President

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Constantine Bissias, Secretary  
*Approved 2/08/2021*