

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

JANUARY 22, 2024

President Opyd called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Commissioners Vear, Chvatal, Opyd

ABSENT: Commissioners Lacey and Posey

STAFF PRESENT: Executive Director Jenny Bechtold
Director of Recreation Kevin Miller
Director of Parks Maintenance Eric Krueger
Recording Secretary Linda Muth

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price
Becky Lorentzen

* Commissioner Posey arrived at 6:04 P.M.

President Opyd welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any announcements or changes to the agenda and there were none. He thanked Becky Lorentzen for coming out with the bad night on the roads.

Communications, Presentations & Declarations

Public Comments

Becky Lorentzen, 103 E. Cossitt, La Grange, provided information on the 4th annual community building conference which will be held at LTHS and has co-sponsors including the LeaderShop. Attendees can hear a keynote speaker and then attend two workshops. She encouraged everyone to check it out and spread the word. She also announced that the Community Diversity Group's annual scholarship dinner is coming up to raise funds for their summer camp scholarship program for children up to 8th grade. Donations are appreciated and can be made on their website.

Consent Agenda

President Opyd asked for a motion to approve Item 3.1 Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of December 11, 2023; Item 3.2 Approval of the Minutes of the Truth in Taxation Public Hearing of December 11, 2023; Item 3.3 Approval of the Financial Reports dated December 31, 2023; and Item 3.4 Approval of the Consolidated Vouchers for January dated January 22, 2024.

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The motion was so moved by Commissioner Vear, seconded by Commissioner Chvatal, and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

Staff Reports

Executive Director Jenny Bechtold

- Director Bechtold reported that she is excited to welcome our new director of parks maintenance, Eric Kreuger. Eric studied ornamental horticulture at the University of Wisconsin, and his history includes working at the Waukegan Park District and the City of Lake Forest. He recently obtained a Masters in Recreation and Tourism from the University of Illinois. He has done a great job during his first week with snow removal.
- Jenny stated that we hope to hear a decision on the OSLAD grant next week.
- She stated that the upcoming legislative breakfast is on February 16th at Tinley Park and is a great way to get in front of our legislators and let them know how unfunded mandates affect us.
- Jenny reported that she will be attending the IAPD conference this week.
- She stated that Little League received a \$20,000 donation and approached us regarding naming rights. Staff discussed it and agreed that fields and large items should be reserved for the District but we are comfortable allowing them to name their scoreboard, which Babe Ruth previously did. There would be an agreement that the naming right would expire after the life of the scoreboard. Jenny provided copies of the current policy on naming rights.

Commissioners Vear and Chvatal agreed that naming a scoreboard was acceptable, but not a field. Commissioner Vear asked if the \$20,000 was allocated to anything specific, and Director Bechtold replied that it was invested back into the park.

Commissioner Posey stated that even though the scoreboard is owned by and paid for by Little League it is on park land and would be subject to park policy. We must be careful authorizing naming rights even for items stuck on parks. We should evaluate it according to our policy which states in cases where individuals have provided exceptional contributions or service to the District the Board can use discretion to name a facility or an area within a park. We should consider whether this person meets those criteria. Director Bechtold stated that the policy has not been updated since 2001 and we can explore what other districts are doing and update it with Ancel Glink. Commissioner Posey stated she is comfortable with that but we have to be consistent with our policies. Commissioner Chvatal asked if anybody was vetting the person and

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President Opyd added that the Board would like some brief information from Little League on the person. There was Board consensus for Director Bechtold to obtain this information, update the policy, and present it at next month's meeting.

There was a brief discussion of the naming of the Bissias Clubhouse and a field that Babe Ruth previously named, which we have no history on how it came about. Director Bechtold stated that this is an example of why we need to evaluate the policy going forward.

- Director Bechtold reported that Countryside has not responded to us regarding the IGA. We approached them because the current IGA is not working for us, and they do not want any changes made to it. We receive feedback that the fields are bad, and Countryside asserts that the conditions are due to excessive wear and tear and will not fix them. Jenny stated her concern is that they will bill us for excessive wear and tear. There are references in the 2013 IGA that Countryside is responsible for repairs but we will reimburse them for anything beyond normal wear and tear. Our options are to leave things the same which will keep us in the same vicious cycle, or we can develop an addendum stating that if they do not want to take the accountability to monitor and close the fields PDLG is not responsible for their repair. The third option is to move away from the IGA.

President Opyd inquired about our liability if an affiliate's player is injured due to a hole in the field since we take the requests to rent Countryside's fields. Attorney Price answered that we have immunity for recreation purposes through the District. Commissioner Vear questioned our liability for reimbursing Countryside for excess use. Director Bechtold answered that we would be liable for wear that exceeds normal use, which they consider to be playing on wet turf, but it could be our affiliates or residents of Countryside doing it. We don't know because they do not monitor and close their fields. Currently it is up to the affiliates' discretion to close the fields. This is why an addendum is necessary. Director Miller stated that the issue lies with Countryside not having the manpower to close the fields and take liability. With our property we are proactive and close fields; we do not have that authority with Countryside. Jenny added that it is not our property, and we do not want to take that responsibility.

President Opyd stated that the intent is to create a mutually beneficial relationship, and he does not see that in this discussion and is struggling with what benefit we get from doing this at all. If Countryside will not maintain the fields we may not want to be a part of that. Commissioner Vear stated that we receive fees for field use, and Director Bechtold replied that it is almost a wash with the reduced fees we provide Countryside residents.

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Commissioner Posey questioned where the affiliates fit in and if they have been invited to talk and whether there are other places to put them. Director Miller stated that he and Zach are having prescheduling discussions with the three soccer groups. Based on staff input, it is difficult to fit them in smaller spaces and if we use green space that is not athletic space it will put a strain on the parks. Director Bechtold added that the affiliates do not understand the IGA and have expressed concerns that they pay us to use bad fields. The Celtics indicated they would prefer to go directly through Countryside. There are fields in surrounding towns but some affiliates have stopped working with them completely because they consider their fields unusable and prefer our spaces.

President Opyd asked if further discussions with the three groups will provide a consensus to move forward. Director Miller stated he hoped it would and added that we plan to redo the affiliate agreements in 2025 where travel play pays a premium versus recreational leagues. Director Bechtold stated there is a bigger picture with the pre-referendum and the potential change in amenities in that plan. Her preference is to get through spring with an addendum to the IGA stating the requirements for Countryside to repair the fields if they will not close them. This is the first step and then we can talk to the affiliates and move forward from there.

Attorney Price stated that we do not have control over the fields nor the resources and power to close them, and Countryside is not on board with the changes. He questioned the effectiveness of an addendum when the affiliates can say it was not raining when they played and suggested we may want to get out of the middle. There was discussion that we receive fees of \$10,000-\$15,000 for field rentals which is a wash with the discounts we provide them. Attorney Price stated that that is the offset, and it makes financial sense to get out of the middle. President Opyd stated that since the affiliates sign an agreement with us they think that we are the problem. He added that our taxpayers should not pay for us to monitor or repair fields in another community. Director Bechtold stressed that we cannot get out of the middle until fall and an addendum will protect the District from bills that Countryside may issue for excessive wear and get us through spring.

President Opyd asked what the exit clause states and its effect on the affiliates' fall season. If we do it, it should be in a way that is as painless as possible for all involved. Director Bechtold stated we have to give a 90-day notice and would prefer to let them know as soon as possible, but no later than the end of their spring season.

Commissioner Chvatal asked if the extent of the field conditions put kids or the District at risk. Attorney Price answered that we have tort immunity, but we do not want to be the ones scheduling subpar fields. Residents ask what their taxes pay for, and it is quality of service that does not allow us to control the product. Commissioner Posey stated that it is not our product. We only

schedule the fields and we are adding value to our affiliates. We could set aside the discounted fees we give them, which are negligible, and continue to be good neighbors. We are talking about whether we continue to be the scheduler of fields that are not ours. If they want to bill us then we say no, they are not our fields, and call their bluff. If Countryside requires us to pay for their fields' repair there is no deal. President Opyd agreed with Commissioner Posey, but stated that there is a reputational cost to us if it goes viral and the people playing there do not understand the agreement. Commissioner Posey stated that people understand it is Countryside Park and not ours. She never thought she was taking her kids to a La Grange park when they played there. If there is a viral post that parks in La Grange are terrible, they are not talking about Countryside.

Director Miller encouraged that we keep in mind that the way the current affiliate agreement is written AYSO has first dibs on all fields because of their Tier 1 status. If we exit the IGA, that guarantees that the Celtics will not have field space since Countryside does not want to take rentals. If Countryside agreed to close a field all they would need to do is call us, and we would send out the communications. Commissioner Posey suggested telling them that as part of scheduling without the authority to close fields, we could use our expertise to advise affiliates when the fields are not playable and then bill them for staff time to do this. Jenny stated that we do not have the staff available to do this. President Opyd stated that the issue is very complex and the solution may be to get out of it. Commissioner Chvatal suggested we go back firm and say we are happy to schedule but be firm on what we need and end the debate. He prefers not to terminate with a neighbor.

Attorney Price stated that the parties have to agree on what excessive use is. To the extent the cost exceeds normal wear and tear, if Countryside chooses not to close the fields during rain, then it is normal wear and tear. If they feel otherwise then they should propose something else. We can begin here and see where it gets us and use it for leverage with an addendum if needed.

President Opyd asked the Board if they want to consider this IGA moving forward. Commissioner Vear stated he would as long as the cost liability is removed. Director Miller stated that he has meetings coming up with the affiliate groups for discussion. Based on this President Opyd and the Board agreed to table the discussion tonight and revisit it at the next board meeting in three weeks.

- Director Bechtold continued her report. She stated that we are still navigating the Babe Ruth agreement and they have the redlined agreement in their hands.
- She stated that staff are working on the budget and trying to get something on the books for the administration committee.
- Jenny stated that she is debating on whether to make a public statement

on Endless Summerfest and has mixed feelings. It opens us up to the media, but not saying anything puts answering questions in the hands of our part-time staff, and it may be best to have something out there. LGBA would like a statement to be issued.

Commissioner Posey stated that she is a member of LGBA and they are receiving inquiries and would like to issue a statement. We know there will be a public perception and she questioned what we are waiting for. The decision was made and bands are starting to book elsewhere.

Commissioner Chvatal asked if the District had an alternate event planned yet and stated it would be nice to provide that information in the press release. President Opyd stated we should be ready to communicate that we are proactively planning for a new event. Commissioner Posey stated that the statement will be coming from both parties, and we will not be moving forward with a joint event. She added that there is an obligation to the other organization and urged the Board to allow the District to proceed with a joint public statement. Doing this early does not prevent the Park District from publicizing and creating a new event. Director Bechtold said that the statement will read in part “thank you for your understanding and we hope to find new ways to create vibrant and safe community experiences in the future.” When the media reaches out afterward we can let them know that the District is working on an alternative event. The Board agreed and President Opyd stated there was consensus to move forward with a statement.

- Director Bechtold reminded everyone that the Decennial Committee will meet at 5:30 P.M. prior to the February and March board meetings.
- Jenny stated that the first task force meeting is coming up. She has been working with Beyond Your Base on the first presentation, and we have 27 residents on a task force that have committed to attending the three meetings. Commissioners Vear and Posey are attending the first meeting.

Director of Recreation Kevin Miller

- Director Miller reported that they are working on BASE registration, which is tentatively scheduled for April 16th – April 26th. It is spread out to accommodate online registration with days allocated for each site.
- Kevin stated they are prepping for the preschool open house and registration in February.
- He stated that summer camp registration will begin March 4th. Based on feedback from last year we will begin with a week of resident registration only and start non-resident registration on March 11th.
- He stated that the end of season report for fall indicates a very successful season. It is great to see the record numbers in some areas, and we want to work to retain the foot traffic.

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President Opyd stated he was excited to see the impressive senior numbers for the recent event. He saw the remote opportunities online offered for a French class and asked about the numbers. Kevin stated that Brandon offered French, Italian, and sign language with remote options, but unfortunately they were cancelled due to low enrollment. They are working with Katie on a new plan for marketing.

Commissioner Vear asked if there was success in finding a dance program. Kevin answered that it will be moved in-house for fall 2024 with part-time staff. Contractual companies were not interested because we are too small or located too far away.

Director of Parks Maintenance Eric Krueger

- Director Bechtold indicated that she wrote the report this month and stated that Eric has been getting to know his staff and touring our parks. Eric stated he is excited to see everything we are dealing with when the snow melts.
- Jenny reported that we are still working on the punch list for the parking lot. We received the deficiency list from Baxter Woodman and are waiting for the as-builts from Abbey Paving, and then Cody Braun will develop a punch list. We need to close out permits and hope to have everything wrapped up in the spring.

Attorney Report

Attorney Price stated that the bad news is that Cook County will not help (with the Paid Leave Act). The unions are pushing back hard and are trying to go to Springfield to get it undone down there for park districts and school districts. The District is prepared because Jenny got ready and put a policy in place. Jenny stated it could cost approximately \$20,000 annually, but it is difficult to estimate because of the stipulations which say time cannot be taken in the first 90 days and allows roll-overs with reinstatement if the employee leaves and comes back within 12 months. Attorney Price stated it is bad legislation and does not give us operational control and will likely lead to early closure of programs like summer camps and facilities which depend on seasonal staff. They can take off without notice and we cannot ask why or for documentation. When we close programs and parents have no care because staff is on paid leave it will be thanks to Cook County. They have talked to four county commissioners who thought it was identical to the State and didn't realize it is not. They did not understand that seasonal staff will reach the 90 days with training time and facilities. Jenny added that many executive directors have been trying to speak to commissioners, and they are not even returning calls. We may have to consider condensing camps and accepting less enrollees to protect ourselves.

Treasurer Report

Director Bechtold stated that there were no updates.

Action Items

Ratify the First Amendment to Grant Temporary Access and Construction License for ComEd

Director Bechtold stated that it was discussed last month that ComEd requested extra time. They have since performed work outside of the dates and created turf damage that will need to be fixed, but we still need to ratify this item. They ripped the edges all along the soccer field because they plowed the snow on the turf. Attorney Price added that they are obligated to fix it.

President Opyd asked for a motion to Ratify the First Amendment to Grant Temporary Access and Construction License for ComEd. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Vear, seconded by Commissioner Chvatal, and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Vear, Chvatal, Posey, Opyd

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Commissioner Lacey

Discussion and/or Approval of Updated Policies

Director Bechtold stated that we did not include the personal leave because we had hoped it would not pass, but it will be added and state that part-time staff get 1 hour off for every 40 hours worked annually, and it will roll over if they do not use it. We currently offer personal days for part-time IMRF staff, and this will replace that policy and it will give them more time off starting next year. She will email the policy to the Board tomorrow. We have no choice but to pass it.

Jenny stated that Section 236/Insurance is a policy for the new Transportation Benefit Act and provides a pretax commuter benefit. Bereavement leave has been updated to provide a maximum of six weeks of unpaid leave for the loss of a child by suicide or homicide in accordance with a new law effective January 1st. The VESSA (Victims' Economic Safety and Security Act) policy has also been updated for the new year to provide two work weeks of unpaid time off if a family or household member is killed in a crime of violence.

The last policy update is Section 278/Telecommuting which is included in the packet. We are updating this policy to remain competitive. The policy details a trial period and the number of days staff at different levels can work from home, which can range from 1-3 days per month. Other districts are doing this, as well as the for-profit world, and we are trying to make ourselves more competitive.

President Opyd asked for a motion to approve the updates to Policy Sections 234, 236, 244, 251 and 278. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Posey, seconded by Commissioner Vear, and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

Board Business

Old Business

Discussion and/or Approval of Board Policy Section 632, Sponsorships and Advertising

Director Bechtold stated that this is not a policy that we have to implement but staff needs to know if the Board would like us to accept political sponsorships moving forward.

Commissioner Chvatal stated that he recently attended State Senator Porfirio's senior event at the park district in Summit and questioned if this would be banned under this policy. Attorney Price stated that we cannot do anything about a rental for politic purposes. He clarified that a sponsorship is a sign somewhere saying an event or facility is sponsored by someone and the individual being named as such. Commissioner Vear questioned the sponsorship signage posted by Little League and Babe Ruth. Director Bechtold stated that Little League was responsible for their signs, which really should have gone through the Park District, and we need to remind them of that. Babe Ruth will fall under the District.

President Opyd stated that aside from the money issue, the consideration is whether we want to publicize the political sponsor's name or logo at an event and on our social media. Attorney Price agreed that this is about political advertising in our literature, flyers, and website. Director Bechtold stated there will be requests coming in, and if the Board says this is fine then we know we can collect dollars but are not giving our endorsement. Commissioner Chvatal pointed out that we are not endorsing College Hunks as movers when they are a sponsor, and he does not see that we are endorsing political sponsors. Attorney Price stated that the difference is our mission. We are forbidden by law to take a political position but some people may see it as stepping over the line. Legally, a sponsorship is not the Park District taking a position because the opponent has the opportunity to do the same. The issue is a policy question and whether we want to do this.

Commissioner Chvatal stated that other districts raise more money and we have trouble obtaining sponsorships so he does not see why we would turn away free money. Commissioner Posey encouraged the Board to make a decision and keep it simple so that staff does not have to interpret requests.

Attorney Price clarified that this discussion is not about political or religious discussions or campaigning. That can happen anyway, and we must have a designated free speech area for a forum at our events. They must stay in that

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area and cannot walk around. That is a different problem than that one, where we decide if we are okay with flyers and signage stating that our Easter event is brought to you by Joe Smith, candidate for office. Director Bechtold further explained that under this policy, a political candidate may pass out candy at their table at our Trunk or Treat event, but to ask for political signatures they would need to move to the designated public forum area.

After an additional brief discussion on political versus religious sponsorships there was Board consensus to strike item A from the policy, which prohibits sponsorships that are political or religious in nature. The Board agreed it could be changed later if there are problems.

Commissioner Chvatal motioned to approve Section 632 with the removal of section A. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vear and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

Discussion and/or Approval of Updated Mission Statement, New Vision Statement and New Core Values

Director Bechtold stated that once the CMP was completed, we engaged staff and the Board on developing a revised mission statement and new vision statement and core values. Our current mission statement is long and dated and reads: Our mission is to provide quality recreation programs, facilities and parks that enhance the health, happiness and quality of life residents and program participants. Staff had several meetings with homework in between and we had a very good discussion on where we see the Park District going. Based on the feedback from these meetings, the CMP, community surveys, and feedback from the Board, we developed the updated mission statement. We also developed a vision statement and core values which we did not have previously. We would like to begin promoting these as well as the new diversity, equity, and inclusion statement.

Commissioner Vear stated that they all sound good. President Opyd stated it was well put together and he supports it. It will help the Board make decisions and direct what they do.

Commissioner Posey moved to approve the Updated Mission Statement, New Vision Statement, New Core Values, and New Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vear and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

New Business

Discussion and/or Approval of Enhancing Support in the Finance Department

Director Bechtold explained that we are struggling to replace the Director of Finance & HR. We have had some interviews with candidates that were not going to work out. Based on our pay grades the salary range is \$85,000-\$109,00. There are currently postings from other park districts for similar positions at higher rates including:

Palatine, finance director, \$120-\$140,000
Downers Grove, second in charge, \$98,000
Glenview, finance director, \$135-\$155,000
Glenview, assistant director, \$95-\$105,000
Bensenville, finance director, \$125-\$165,000
Village of Oak Terrace, \$115-\$145,000
Village of Wheeling, deputy director, \$110-\$155,000

She stated that these are all open now, and we are struggling to draw candidates, and our location does not help us. She and Linda are working hard to keep administration, as well as finance afloat, but need more support. A part-time position for a Business Services Coordinator has been posted to ease part of the burden. Selden Fox is providing some support, but not all that we need. Engaging Robert Half or Lauterbach to come in, in addition to or instead of Selden Fox would be between \$100-\$200 per hour. The cost of finance personnel is high right now. Robert Half interviewed someone for \$103 per hour, and they were not qualified. We are still working to fill the position but would like approval to hire an additional consulting firm for up to 16 hours per week at a maximum of \$200 per hour. This is needed especially with it being budget time.

Attorney Price stated that many firms have exited the market and finance directors have retired. Their ability to return to work is limited by IMRF and social security. This is why you see the high salary numbers which are influenced by a very small pool for government work.

Commissioner Vear asked if the budget would allow for this. Director Bechtold answered that we have the funds since we have not had someone in the position. She stated that she has an interview next week and is bringing in Selden Fox for their help in assessing the candidate. They do not have the qualifications but we can train them. Otherwise, we may need to evaluate the overall pay grades but she would like to avoid paying that much. President Opyd stated that he was okay with the extra support as a temporary solution, but that we should think hard about our pay grades if the market is higher and address the real issue, which is a salary problem we continue to struggle with. We want to hire and retain a person that will stay with our organization. Jenny stated that the grades could be evaluated in March at budget time.

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Commissioner Posey stressed that it is important to have finance support, especially with the upcoming referendum.

Jenny clarified that we already have Selden Fox providing approximately 25 hours per month of support at \$135 per hour with a max of \$4,300, and tonight's approval would be for additional support. Commissioner Chvatal recommended removing the time limit because it is a necessity that will not go away until the position is filled. Commissioner Posey agreed but recommended a periodic check-in with the Board. Commissioner Chvatal also inquired about hiring a firm to do a search. Jenny stated that she contacted GovHR and Robert Half, and their fees are between \$25,000-\$30,000. She knows of districts that hired GovHR and if they come in they would tell us to raise the salary range.

President Opyd asked for a motion to approve hiring an additional accounting support resource at up to \$200 per hour not to exceed 16 hours per week through the end of the fiscal year April 30, 2024. The motion was so moved by Commissioner Vear, seconded by Commissioner Chvatal, and passed by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

Committee Reports

Administration Committee

No report at this time.

Parks and Facilities Committee

No report at this time.

Recreation & Cultural Programming Committee/ Arts & Cultural Affairs Committee

Commissioner Posey stated that her dream is to bring the midnight circus to La Grange and she sent some emails and Instagram messaging to see if they would be interested. That is her goal for this year.

Public Comments (Board Manual Section #152)

None

Board Comments

Commissioner Posey thanked staff for working through the change in personnel. She welcomed Eric aboard and stated she looks forward to working with him.

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Commissioner Chvatal stated that he experienced the basketball league when he was in the building this past weekend. There were tons of kids and everyone looked to be having a great time. The program is well put together.

Commissioner Vear welcomed Eric; he is sure he will be doing great things. He commended Kevin for the great success rates, and he thanked Jenny for all the hard work she is doing while being short-handed. He stated that he has had requests that we consider extending the fitness center weekend hours.

President Opyd expressed appreciation for everyone pitching in to get things done. He continues to hear positive feedback on the parking lot and is happy that it is done and is there for our residents.

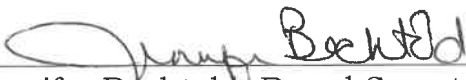
President Opyd announced that there is no executive session tonight and asked for a motion to adjourn.

Adjournment

Commissioner Chvatal moved for adjournment at 7:35 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vear and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.



Brian Opyd, President



Jennifer Bechtold, Board Secretary
Approved February 12, 2024