

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

JULY 12, 2021

Vice President O'Brien called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M.

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

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Interim Executive Director Jenny Bechtold
Superintendent of Finance Leynette Kuniej
Superintendent of Facilities Chris Finn
Superintendent of Recreation Kevin Miller
Superintendent of BASE Leanna Hartung
Park Foreman Claudia Galla
Recording Secretary Linda Muth

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price
Darrell Garrison from Planning Resources Inc.
Steven Halberg from Planning Resources Inc.
Ray Ochromowitz from Executive Decisions
Marlene Schemmel, Nancy Bramson, Becky Lorentzen
Harold Gibson, Lacey Lawrence

Vice President O'Brien welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any announcements or changes to the agenda.

Public Comments (Board Manual Section #152)

None

Comprehensive Master Plan – PDLG Board of Commissioners Stakeholder Meeting with Planning Resources Inc.

Director Bechtold stated that we have been going through the process for the comprehensive master plan and that Planning Resources is in attendance to go through it with the Board.

Darrell Garrison introduced himself as the planning consultant for the master plan and Steven Halberg, who is the project manager. Darrell explained that they have met with six other stakeholders in focus groups and would now like to get the impressions and opinions of the Board. The Board leads the Park District and he would like them to be candid and honest with their thoughts.

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He will ask the same questions that he asked the other focus groups to form a baseline.

As a board member providing leadership, how would you rate the parks in the last 3-5 years?

Commissioner Opyd gave a grade of C. Staff does the best they can with available resources, but we need to work on maintaining and improving the parks so things last.

President Vear stated that we grew a lot and with that growth came the necessity to skimp on some areas and push funds to make projects work within our resources. He gave a grade of B and stated that the parks need attention in many areas. We have been getting by with what we can do.

Commissioner O'Brien gave a passing B and agreed that the parks need attention.

Commissioner Lacey gave a grade of C- and stated that each park needs to look and be maintained the same, regardless of its location.

Commissioner Jacobs gave a grade of C and stated that funds have been prioritized in other areas, and after so many years we are seeing the result in the parks.

How would you rate program services?

President Vear stated that rec programs have done well but we have failed on some where the percentage of cancellations is high. He gives a B-.

Commissioner O'Brien gave an A grade. Our programs are geared toward the community, and as it changes, we adapt.

Commissioner Lacey stated the programs we have are good and gave a B grade. She sees many happy people at the rec center which tells you a lot. We could use some additional programs, and the community would like a pool, but we cannot provide one at this time.

Commissioner Jacobs stated we have a good variety of programs and we try to reach multiple demographics, but we have missed environmental and nature-based programming. The fitness center offers great opportunities for health and wellness. She gave a grade of B but would like to see A++.

Commissioner Opyd stated that there is a high utilization rate on children's programs, such as BASE and camps. He has heard in the neighborhood that we could offer more programs for athletic dads that want to play competitive sports. Nature programs would be great and possibly expanding the community garden to other parks. Each demographic segment has to be looked at separately.

What are the District's greatest strengths?

Commissioner O'Brien answered that it is the staff. They listen to the Board and prioritize residents' requests and that goes a long way.

President Vear stated that our financials are both a strength and weakness. We are good at providing services with what we have, but we are limited by funds, and apply for grants when we can. Our programs and the fitness center are assets, and our building has a lot of potential for expansion.

Commissioner Opyd stated that the Board's dynamics between members and with staff is good compared to other elected boards. There are good conversations to find solutions and he respects everyone here. Our children's sports are great, and he sees the parks packed on weekends with happy people.

Commissioner Jacobs agreed with the other commissioners' comments. We have a terrific community with varied interests that want a great park district, and we try to give it to them.

Commissioner Lacey commended staff.

What are the District's weaknesses?

President Vear stated that staff is great and works hard, but there are a lot of demands from citizens, and we could use more volunteers. The budget also creates limitations.

Commissioner O'Brien agreed with the financials. The money is not there to update fields and parks.

Commissioner Lacey also agreed. She stated that staff is great and always helpful.

Commissioner Opyd would like to see improvements with marketing and communications with the community. We reach those that are already engaged, but we need to do more to reach those that we do not resonate with. We are challenged with bringing in a new director, and there may be some surprises from the community on what they want in a new master plan. Things are shifting and the Board's strategy needs to evolve to a new future in a positive way. He added that he has seen staff working to engage in outdoor events and we should expand them to other parks in the community to be equitable.

Commissioner Jacobs stated we need to work on marketing, public relations, and community outreach. There are many that do not know about the master plan process going on. Our parks and green space are limited, and we should better use what we have for outdoor programming. She encouraged volunteer programs, stronger partnerships, and grants.

Are there any opportunities the District should consider exploring?

Commissioner O'Brien stated that grants and partnerships are very important.

Commissioner Lacey stated that the partnership with Countryside has been good, but we can go further with the Village and local businesses.

Commissioner Opyd said that we have looked at sharing programming, but we should consider whether capital investments could be shared. We do not have a lot of land but could look to a nearby community to develop something that benefits both of us. We should not use ingrained thinking to keep doing the same things and be open minded with feedback from patrons.

Commissioner Jacobs would like us to be more welcoming and understanding of our diverse population and find ways to be inclusive. We do good things with SEASPAR, but we should evaluate further and work to make all our park paths ADA compliant.

President Vear stated that our land is limited but there are opportunities in our parks to more efficiently use the space and cited the recent flag event at Denning Park. We should build on the Park Pride event with more volunteers and partner more with the LeaderShop and other groups, such as LGBA.

Commissioner Lacey stated that we should do more events for the community similar to the ones with Pillars where we provided health resources and eyeglasses. She also suggested back to school programs.

Are there any threats that you foresee the Park District facing?

President Vear stated that there is always competition. We try to serve the populace as a whole and if a group comes in to serve just one segment, such as yoga, it is harder to compete. There are security threats such as graffiti in the parks, and the effects of COVID.

Commissioner Opyd stated it is a challenge to be relevant with the materialistic culture where people buy their own basketball hoops and have playgrounds in their yards. We should consider what we can offer that does not compete with mom and dad, and offer more without overdeveloping.

Commissioner Lacey agreed with the comments made.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that with challenges ahead we should note changing demographics and utilize updated census information. We should consider if there are more empty nesters and whether they are staying in La Grange, and if younger families are moving in. She stressed the importance of obtaining a high number of survey responses.

Darrell Garrison stated that his questions are concluded. He discussed the community survey process for the statistical valid and open surveys and the

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next steps in the planning process. There will be one more opportunity for residents to provide input next Monday at the Community Center.

Ray Ochromowiz explained that his role in the comprehensive master plan is to evaluate programming. He asked the Board the following questions.

In terms of programming trends, do you consider PDLG on the leading edge or trailing edge of programming?

President Vear stated that we are toward the middle, leaning to the front. Our advantage is we engage the community, and our patrons are not just customers.

Commissioner O'Brien stated that we are at the front and has seen staff offer many different programs.

Commissioner Opyd stated we are slightly below midpoint and that there are two phases. Prior to the pandemic we were not as fresh. The pandemic forced staff to think differently and bring new ideas to the table, and he commends them for it.

Commissioner Lacey stated we do all those things and more, and she has compared us to other districts.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that we have multiple buildings and wonders if there are unique ways to use other facilities, perhaps for childcare, and thinks we are a safe place.

Who do you see yourself on par with or aspire to be?

Commissioner Opyd stated there is a lot of competition nearby. Western Springs has a new splash pad and a sponge surface playground. Countryside has a park with wooden trains and a skate park. Harvester Park in Burr Ridge is popular, and many residents drive there to use it.

President Vear stated that we are unique because we are so landlocked, and La Grange is not a big town. We are different than our neighbors which makes comparisons difficult. We do a good job with what we have. Commissioner Lacey agreed.

Darrell closed the session and thanked the Board for their input and referenced the update memo he provided.

Public Comments (Board Manual Section #152)

Becky Lorentzen, 103 E. Cossitt, La Grange, stated she is a member of the Community Diversity Group and encouraged us to let residents on the east side of La Grange know about the effort and survey. Some people have tried to get changes and not been successful and think their voices are not heard. It is important to get the word out and suggested we distribute flyers to houses and

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place a poster outside the Community Center.

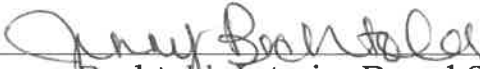
Commissioner Jacobs stated that many people in our community do not know the master plan is happening. She would like virtual input at the next meeting and questionnaires sent to stakeholders that missed previous meetings.

Adjournment

President Vear moved for adjournment at 7:09 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Opyd and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.



Robert Vear, President



Jenny Bechtold, Interim Board Secretary

Approved August 16, 2021