

**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**

**DECEMBER 14, 2020**

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

President Vear stated that 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, Jacobs, Opyd, Lacey, Vear

ABSENT: None

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney Derke Price, Phil Fornaro, David Bryant

Lynn Lacey took the oath of office and was sworn in as a commissioner of the Park District of La Grange by Director Bissias.

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)*

None

**Consent Agenda**

Commissioner Opyd motioned to approve Item 3.1 Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of November 9, 2020; Item 3.2 Approval of the Minutes of the Executive Session Meeting on November 9, 2020; Item 3.3 Approval of the Financial Reports dated November 30, 2020; Item 3.4 Approval of the Consolidated Vouchers for December dated December 14, 2020.

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Commissioner O'Brien seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

### **Staff Reports**

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

- Director Bissias stated that attorney Phil Fornaro was in attendance to update the Board on the environmental issues regarding the Nicor property.

Attorney Fornaro reported that the zoning and environmental processes are moving forward, and the due diligence period has been extended through January 18<sup>th</sup>. Nicor went through their environmental process and issued an NFR letter in October 2019 and prepared all the necessary documents to get the process moving. The Park District does not have to do any remediation of the property. The District retained their own expert and they reviewed all the Nicor information, did their own due diligence, and issued a Phase I report on the property conditions indicating the property is sufficient for a parking lot. The engineering is underway now and it will be reviewed by the environmental consultant.

Commissioner Opyd asked if there would be any issues with including a small green space or if kids could play soccer on the property. Phil stated that it is impossible to remove all contaminants, but Nicor's remediation removed contamination to levels below those considered problematic. He added that when we dig or do work that destroys soil, we will follow the NFR protocols.

Commissioner Jacobs asked for confirmation that G2's environmental due diligence work includes reviewing the Nicor paperwork, and whether we have a copy of Nicor's safety plan or must pay for a new one if we dig on the property. Phil stated that they are reviewing Nicor's paperwork as well as the work done by the District's prior consultant, and G2 is impressed with the extent and high quality of work done. He stated that we have all Nicor's reports, which benefits us, but that our safety plan will be different than Nicor's plan. The project does include digging, and our safety plan will be project-driven. We will provide project details to the environmental company and it will be developed during the engineering process working with the architect and will include any remediation and transport necessary.

Commissioner Opyd asked if the final drawings were approved. Director Bissias stated that the plan was previously approved, but we can modify it if we choose to do so. The plan was required to authorize engineering work and begin due diligence and zoning work. Director Bissias also reported that, regretfully, he learned late today that the District was not awarded the MWRD

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grant for this project. As a result, permeable pavers will not be installed, and digging will not be as extreme. Commissioner Jacobs said that the drawings indicate we should avoid digging in areas of contamination. Dean explained that we are working with the Village and they have requirements on where things must be located. Entrances must be moved to the south, and part of the detention pond will have to be in an area that requires digging. We also must work around several easements. The original area for the detention pond has been remediated by Nicor, and the depth is only a couple of feet. We can tweak the drawings as we go. Phil added that Nicor removed a lot of dirt from the site and remediated it; they did a ton of work that makes our lives easier.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that there has not been a thorough discussion of the plans, and we should consider that the MWRD grant is annual. She is glad due diligence is being done but the report makes it clear that any digging requires a health and safety plan and digging should be avoided. The drawings were approved by consensus only, the huge detention pond is extreme, and a parking study has not been done. We are not in a rush to build a parking lot during COVID and it should be done right.

Director Bissias replied that the size of the detention pond is dictated by MWRD requirements and the engineers are working on it now. Attorney Fornaro stated that the drawings were preliminary to allow for zoning, and there will be more specificity later and additional discussion on the drawings. He added that the architect completed a study related to parking requirements which he can share, and that the analysis has been done. The permits will allow us to build within a year, and the Village would like to see it move forward.

President Vear asked what the zoning will be, when the next zoning meetings will be held, and the cost. Phil answered that the rezoning will be to IB (industrial business) which matches the zoning of our 536 property. The La Grange Plan Commission is supportive of the plan's efficient parking and they recommended that their board approve the plan. Phil must let them know if we want to seek their board's approval during due diligence or after closing. We proceeded this way to take the pulse of the Village and help the process. The (commission) work is done and the (rezoning) cost will be minimal. There will be zoning meetings in January and February, and the (property purchase) closing is scheduled for the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Commissioner Jacobs asked which zone type we are pursuing, how many parking spots are in the current drawing, and if recreation would be possible on the site, such as a perimeter trail, pavilion, courts, or outdoor fitness programs. Phil answered that 154 parking spots are included, and whatever is allowed on the recreation center property will be allowed on the new property. We cannot interfere with easement access, and traffic will be coming in and out on the east side of the property. We can work with the Village on any issues. Dean stated that the current drawing does include a path around the area. The Village is pleased with the number of parking spots, and we may move all

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handicap parking to the front of the recreation center to open up space in the new lot. Commissioner Jacobs stated that she would like the Board to discuss this further, and whether we need a Jewel-Osco (sized) parking lot is not clear. Phil stated he would be happy to come back again if the Board would like him to (do so).

Director Bissias continued his report.

- Director Bissias stated that programming is at a standstill due to the Governor's orders.
- Dean reported that the fitness center is still operating and is our revenue maker. There have been a couple of COVID cases among the staff, but we are doing our due diligence and contact tracing, and the center is kept very clean.
- The BASE program is operating.
- We do not want to increase salary expense now, so the Rec Dept. will not hire for the two open positions until possibly early next year.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if there is a vision to keep people coming to our parks as a safe place during COVID with novel winter programming, and whether there will be increased maintenance and the paths kept clear. The Sedgwick path has divots in need of repair. Dean stated that staff maintains the parks and paths as part of our regular maintenance work.

### ***Staff Comments***

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

- Superintendent Finn stated that a couple groups are doing one-on-one basketball training in the gym, which is all the current COVID restrictions allow. One of the groups has been renting space with us since the spring and changes its format based on the fluctuating guidelines.
- Chris reported that AYSO, Celtics and lacrosse have continued using the fields when the weather allows. If they are willing to rent, and field conditions permit use without damage to the turf, he will allow rentals. They know the guidelines limit them to 10 people, and they must wear masks.
- He worked with Claudia on the design for the Gordon Park sign on Ogden Avenue. It will be oval shaped landscape bricks, 3-5 bricks high with a lid on top of it. The picture included in his report is from a park in Tinley Park, and ours will look similar. As shown in the drawing, there will be gray landscape bricks at the base approximately 15-17 inches high to go with the gray posts on the sign and will be approximately 132" at its widest point. A small evergreen type bush will be planted at each end to add some green color year-round. Claudia will do additional low plantings that will not block the sign. The exact location on Ogden Avenue must meet Village requirements so there is no obstructed view at the stoplight.
- Chris met with Operation Support Our Troops regarding an Honor Field

at Denning Park. The group would like to honor veterans and sell flags there from June 6<sup>th</sup> through June 14<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with Flag Day, with the involvement of the VFW, Boy Scouts, and other community groups. Flags would be displayed all throughout the east main field and people will have the opportunity to purchase a flag. They will do all the work, marketing, and pay for 24/7 security to keep the park patrolled. The District will only provide garbage and maintenance service, along with use of the field and park shelter. They previously ran this event in Naperville and want to run it again further east, bringing more people and business to the La Grange area.

President Vear asked if the event would interfere with soccer groups and if the southwest field on Willow Spring Road might offer them better exposure. Chris said he would give user groups advance notice, and it would only affect one weekend. Soccer only holds practices there, as most games have been moved to Gordon Park. He will talk to them about possibly switching the event to the southwest Denning field.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if the air exchange rate for the fitness center has been determined. Chris stated that air is always circulating in and out. He obtained the data for the ACH (air change per hour) and in the main area of the fitness center 100% fresh air is exchanged every hour. The exchange rate for the locker rooms is 8 times per hour, room 113 is almost 4 times per hour, and room 115 is almost 5 times per hour. Commissioner Jacobs said this sounds good to her, and knowing this will make people comfortable about being there.

Commissioner Opyd stated that he saw the plan for resting fields next summer and asked if we could get a little more wear and tear out of the fields so people can access the outdoors during COVID. Chris said the plan began in 2016 and there are only two fields that have not been rested since the start of the process. We always make sure there are fields available and we will not close too much green space at any one park. Commissioner Opyd stated that some Sedgewick Park tennis players told him that the tennis ball is hard to pick up now at the courts while facing the new condos. He asked that we consider putting in some wind screens or plants.

**Superintendent of La Grange Fitness Jenny Bechtold**

- Superintendent Bechtold reported that the fitness center is doing well and making money. November was another good month despite moving to Tier 3, which reduces capacity to 25% and requires that masks be worn at all times, even while exercising. We lost some members due to the mask requirement and are trying to encourage face shields as an option. There are currently 2,087 members including 27 student memberships and 26 new December memberships.
- Jenny stated that January will see a bit of a dip in memberships. Insurance-based memberships expire at the end of the year and only active ones will be renewed, which number approximately 75. There are

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also some annuals expiring which will not be renewed.

- She reported that the fitness center can only allow 32 people in at one time and has transitioned to a reservation system. They began with phone reservations but implemented a new online reservation system today and members seem happy with it. Members that prefer not to book online can call the fitness center and staff will book it for them. There is also an option to book through an app.
- *La Grange Living* magazine interviewed Jenny, and the fitness center will be featured in an issue coming out at the beginning of January. She requested a copy from anyone that might receive it.

President Vear asked how far in advance members can book a reservation, and how many Silver Sneaker members are coming in. Jenny stated that reservations can be made 3 days in advance, and 15-20 Silver Sneaker members have been coming in. They struggle with wearing a mask while exercising.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if Jenny was running any programming outdoors. She replied that she was not at this time. It did not take off when offered previously in the parking lot, but she will investigate it for the spring when the weather is better.

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

- Superintendent Hartung stated that the only update to her written report is that she submitted the completed renewal packets to DCFS and AFC, which allows the District to maintain its license-exempt status. This process is required every two years.

Commissioner Opyd asked if any BASE employees are participating in the coronavirus saliva testing being done at District 102. Leanna replied that nine staff members are tested weekly at the various schools.

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

- Superintendent Miller reported that the Donuts with Santa event was held in the rec center parking lot on 12/6 with 10 families registered. The event went well, and the families were appreciative. Andrea did a great job with this event.
- Kevin thanked the Y Men's Club for donating 10 trees, which were decorated by families and businesses for the Waiola Park tree lighting. The event was streamed live on Facebook and went well.
- He and Teresa are closing out fall programs and preparing for winter classes. He is working with contractors to develop virtual options to avoid cancelling classes. All Star Sports, karate, and dance classes will meet virtually in January. He is also investigating unique outdoor options and weekly pop-up programs.
- One-on-one basketball training is the only basketball running in

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December due to Tier 3 mandates.

Commissioner Jacobs said the tree lighting was fun and thanked Kevin. She encouraged new outdoor program ideas because residents want to get out.

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

- Supt. of Finance Kuniej stated that there is a new financial report in the board packets this month which includes a prior year comparison by fund. The reports provide an idea of where we are and where we are headed.
- Leynette stated that we started the fiscal year with some nice fund balances. All funds are in the positive except for fitness and BASE. The fitness center is starting to come in positive monthly, and she thinks it will break even or make a small profit at the end of the fiscal year. The BASE program will not make up its loss, but the fund balance from prior years was good, and we need to continue to offer BASE as a service to the community. The recreation fund is taking a hit since we cannot currently offer programs, but the fund balance is good. She thinks we will end the fiscal year in a positive situation. We have the cash to make the payments that are required, and we need to be sure to stick to the revised budget.
- She is asking the Board to approve four ordinances tonight, including the tax levy as discussed at last month's meeting. She would also like approval to pay an additional \$25,000 into the IMRF fund. This payment was already budgeted, and the money is sitting in the retirement fund. Taxes were levied for it last year, and we told Moody's this payment would be made.

Commissioner Opyd stated that the reports indicate that contractual programs, the front desk, and maintenance expenses are under budget and under prior year spending and asked if this would continue. Leynette answered that it would because of the lay-offs and cancelled programs.

### **Attorney Report**

Attorney Price reported that nothing will change with the Governor's Tier 3 order until January 9<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. One exception to be aware of is that after December, religious and spiritual activities will be exempt from the restrictions as decided by the US Supreme Court. The Governor can make recommendations, but it is not binding. A church renting space or a yoga program with a spiritual element can use the exemption, and if that happens, we should get out of the way. Derke also stated that today is the first day for election filing.

President Vear asked how the court ruling would affect a high school church basketball league and whether it would be considered a religious entity. Attorney Price answered that how people gather for fellowship and worship is up to them. Commissioner Jacobs asked if the ruling affected the District's

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ability to charge rental fees. Derke stated it did not; they would pay rental fees like anyone else, but they may opt out of the Governor's restrictions. Justice Amy Coney Barrett went out of her way to make that clear. Commissioner Opyd asked if staff has any recourse if they feel there is a safety issue. Derke said no, that we must leave it to the group to determine how they worship. He has seen some difficult situations at other park districts with this ruling.

### **Treasurer Report**

None

### **Action Items**

Attorney Price stated that a number of the Action Items could be passed together in an omnibus vote.

Director Bissias stated that Item 7.1 has been approved by the SEASPAR board to allow a change in their fiscal year, but it also requires approval from all the park district boards. The Board had no objections to Action Items 7.1 through 7.5.

Attorney Price asked for a motion to entertain the use of the Omnibus method for Action Items 7.1 through 7.5 as follows:

- Item 7.1     *Approval of Resolution 20-03 an Amendment to the Joint Agreement for the Southeast Association for Special Parks and Recreation (SEASPAR)*
- Item 7.2     *Approval of Ordinance 20-09 an Ordinance Levying and Assessing Taxes of the Park District of La Grange, Cook County, Illinois for the 2020 Tax Levy Year*
- Item 7.3     *Approval of Ordinance 20-10 an Ordinance Directing the Cook County Clerk to Reduce the Park District of La Grange's Real Estate Tax Levy Year 2020*
- Item 7.4     *Approval of Ordinance 20-11 an Ordinance Abating the Taxes Heretofore Levied for the Year 2020 to Pay the Principal of and Interest on \$1,590,000 General Obligation Park Bonds (Alternate Revenue Source) Series 2016, of the Park District of La Grange, Cook County, Illinois*
- Item 7.5     *Approval of Ordinance 20-12 an Ordinance Abating the Taxes Heretofore Levied for the Year 2020 to Pay the Principal of and Interest on \$2,505,000 General Obligation Park Bonds (Alternate Revenue Source) Series 2020A, of the Park District of La Grange, Cook County, Illinois*

Commissioner Lacey so moved for approval of the Omnibus method which was seconded by Commissioner Jacobs. President Vear entertained any Board discussion and there was none. The Omnibus Motion was established unanimously by Roll Call vote as follows:

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



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NAYES: None

ABSENT: None

President Vear motioned to approve the Omnibus Motion for Action Items 7.1 through 7.5 and Commissioner O'Brian seconded the motion. There was no Board discussion, and the Omnibus Motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None

### **Item 7.6**

#### *Discussion and/or Possible Vote on Board Meeting Dates for 2021*

Commissioner Jacobs motioned to approve the board meeting dates for 2021 and Commissioner O'Brien seconded the motion. Commissioner Lacey asked for confirmation that all meeting dates are on Mondays. The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None

### **Item 7.7**

#### *Discussion and/or Possible Vote on Authorization of Additional Payment to IMRF for 2020*

Director Bissias stated that an additional payment has already been budgeted for and accounted in last year's tax levy.

Commissioner Opyd motioned to authorize an additional IMRF payment in the amount of \$25,000 for 2020 and Commissioner O'Brien seconded the motion which passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote as follows:

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

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None

## **Board Business**

### **New Business**

Director Bissias announced that former commissioner Dan Collins was married yesterday.

### **Old Business**

*None*

## **Committee Reports**

### *Administration Committee*

None

This committee, which was headed by former commissioner Dan Collins, will

be discussed in the future.

*Parks and Open Lands*

Commissioner Jacobs explained that this committee was expanded to include residents of La Grange and they attend the meetings, which are about four times per year, and offer input on our parks and outdoor spaces. She has some comments to share specific to COVID and the importance that our parks are maintained at their best at this time. After families at the Waiola tree lighting talked about how glad they were to have something to do, she asked her committee members for their ideas to facilitate the community's use of the parks. Discussion notes were emailed to Recording Secretary Linda Muth, and she would like them included with the minutes.

The committee discussed novel outdoor programming and events to bring the community together safely. They include a Winterfest, fests at parks with bonfires and cocoa, Saturday evening events in cooperation with the La Grange business district, a fire pit near the rec center, snowman contests, caroling, health walks/runs, and nature talks. We could also involve residents in park clean-up and planting, recycling, pre-spring planting preparation, invasive species removal, and try a pop-up dog park with a local business to sponsor the cost of fencing.

They also suggest making sure paths are clear of snow, the repair of any walking path cracks or potholes, and repair of the outdoor basketball courts.

*Finance & Capital Project Committee*

President Vear reported that he met with Director Dean Bissias and Supt. of Finance Leynette Kuniej today to review our numbers. He directed the Board to the prior year financial report in Section 3 of the board packet. The variants are in the last column, and in regard to income/expense, anything positive (or less negative in regard to expenses) is a positive number. Some income is down dramatically, but expenditures have also been reduced. Some programs are now expenses, such as BASE, but BASE will most likely make money in the long term. Currently BASE is a service, but it is a good program to continue into the future. Some programs are able to break even while others are not. We can function like this for a short period of time going forward, but we cannot spend money where we do not have it. The finances should be sufficient to last six months should COVID restrictions persist. Staff has done a great job reducing expenses.

Commissioner Jacobs stated that the information is helpful to answer the community's questions. Property tax revenue has not changed but everything else did. She asked how interest income is doing. Leynette stated that interest income is down \$100,000 this year. While we have money in the bank, the interest rates are way down since last year, and we cannot earn more and keep the funds secure. Commissioner Jacobs also stated that certain things must be done and kept functioning and asked if maintaining the safety and ADA

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compliance of paths and trails is in the budget. Leynette commented that we are keeping properties up to par and have also eliminated as much as possible on the administration side. President Vear stated that for the most part, funds are allocated and cannot be shifted to other projects. Dean added that we cannot touch the funds for the new property, and the general/recreation/fitness funds are the only ones that can be touched. Emergency repairs to paths are covered in maintenance and/or ADA.

### *User Group Committee*

None

### *Marketing/ Social Media Committee*

Commissioner Opyd reported that they will meet later this week with a focus on online marketing and virtual options. He will bring information back to the Board on how the public is engaging with the Park District.

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

None

### **Board Comments**

Commissioner O'Brien stated that former commissioner Dan Collins got married, loves Florida, and his kids are settling in. He thanked Chris and staff for programming the Waiola Park lights to go on at 5am, which allows people to use the walking path in the early morning; it has made a world of difference. He also thanked Kevin for the tree lighting event; it was fun and great to get out and see people. Merry Christmas to everyone.

Commissioner Opyd welcomed Commissioner Lacey and her expertise back to the Board. He thanked staff for doing their best to keep finances under control and is glad to hear about the virtual classes coming. He also thanked District 102 for allowing our BASE staff to participate in their COVID testing; it is a great partnership. Merry Christmas and stay safe.

Commissioner Jacobs welcomed Commissioner Lacey and stated it will be nice to get her perspective on the Board again. She reported that three board members are slated and running in the election. She enjoyed the Waiola tree lighting, and it is great that she continues to see a lot of people in the parks. She appreciates the rec and fitness programs. A light is coming with the vaccine, but life has changed, and the District will change with new activities in the parks. She thanked Leynette for reworking the numbers; it is helpful in explaining to our community how careful we are being. She also thanked Bob and Dean and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah.

Commissioner Lacey thanked everyone for the vote of confidence in her. As she sat back during the meeting, she felt proud to be a part of this Board. She can see by looking at the parks that staff continues to do a great job, and our parks bring people to the community, especially young parents and their children.

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She cannot say enough about the Park District and Dean. Dean and the staff do a great job, and it is a pleasure to be greeted at the Park District. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, stay positive, peaceful, and joyful during the holiday.

President Vear stated it was great to see Commissioner Lacey and her positivity. The tree lighting was a cool event to hold during quarantine, and the music, fire truck and trolley can make this a tradition to build on. As the trolley and truck passed, people were looking out their windows to see what was going on. He stated that Leynette's new reports are awesome for the Board and staff. He thanked staff and prior Boards for getting us to where we are today and hopes we can maintain it all during COVID. The fact that we are acquiring the property and we can weather this storm is a credit to Dean. Thank you to Derke for introducing the omnibus approval. Unfortunately, he will miss seeing Lynn and her husband at this year's convention. Next month's meeting will be via Zoom.  
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

### **Executive Session**

None

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Lacey moved for adjournment at 8:49 P.M. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jacobs and passed unanimously by Voice Vote.

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Robert Vear, President

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Constantine Bissias, Secretary  
*Approved 1/11/2021*