

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE
ROCKFORD PARK DISTRICT**

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS on October 22, 2024

ON BEHALF
OF THE ROCKFORD PARK DISTRICT'S COMMITTEE ON
LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY



**ROCKFORD
PARK DISTRICT**

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I. Purpose

The Rockford Park District ("Park District") formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 23, 2023 with Resolution 2024-R-06: A Resolution Forming a Committee on Local Government Efficiency. The Committee's purpose was to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1 et seq. (the "Committee").

II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

- Martesha Brown, Park Board President and Committee Chairperson
- Rudy Valdez, Park Board Vice President
- Owen Carter, Park Board Secretary
- Jack Armstrong, Park Board Commissioner
- Tyler Smith, Park Board Commissioner
- Mike Robinson, Public Resident Member
- Eldridge (Skip) Gilbert, Public Resident Member
- Jay Sandine, Executive Director

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time & Place
Tuesday, April 23, 2024	4:00 p.m. at the Park District Administration Building at 401 South Main Street, Rockford, Illinois
Tuesday, June 11, 2024	4:00 p.m. at the Park District Administration Building at 401 South Main Street, Rockford, Illinois
Tuesday, August 27, 2024	4:00 p.m. at the Park District Administration Building at 401 South Main Street, Rockford, Illinois
Report Approval on Tuesday, October 22, 2024	5:00 p.m. at the Park District Administration Building at 401 South Main Street, Rockford, Illinois

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's Board meeting website (BoardDocs – here: <https://go.boarddocs.com/il/rpd/Board.nsf/vpublic?open> under the Library tab) or upon request at the Park District's administrative office.

IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers and Jurisdiction

The Rockford Park District was established by referendum initiated and approved by the citizens of the Park District in 1909. The Rockford Park District is governed by the *Park District Code*, 70 ILCS 1205/1 et seq. Citizens throughout the Rockford Park District and the surrounding region enjoy proximity to parks and open spaces, miles of trails and paths, state of the art facilities, and arts and cultural events throughout the year.

According to the most recent information available, the Park District:

- Serves Cherry Valley, Loves Park, New Milford, Rockford and unincorporated areas of Winnebago and Boone County, Illinois
- Manages approximately 5000 acres of land including more than 75 miles of paths and trails
- Operates 177 parks and facilities
- Serves more than 30,000 youth annually through lessons, leagues, programs and services

Having a separate and distinct taxing body for parks, recreation and conservation within the local community, which operates apart from general purpose governments is extremely beneficial to the citizens we serve for many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated Board.** The Rockford Park District is governed by a Board of five Commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the Park District and are elected at the Consolidated Elections in odd-numbered years. Pursuant to state law, Commissioners are non-partisan and serve without compensation.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Having a Board of Commissioners dedicated to overseeing the essential facilities, programs and services that are provided to the community by the Park District allows for increased access to their elected representatives and allows those representatives to remain focused on the needs of the District. This is in contrast to general purpose governments such as under the purview of City Council or County Board members who are responsible for broad oversight of a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight and allocation, and meeting the specific needs of the citizens we serve as determined by direct feedback from Park District constituents.
- **Increased transparency.** Having dedicated elected officials who directly represent citizens allows for improved relationships between Commissioners and residents and benefits residents with openness and transparency related to Board and Park District operations. Detailed agendas and action items allow taxpayers to be better informed about their local Park District and allows for access and input into decisions being made. Additionally, programming and budget decisions are more detailed, responsive and flexible than would be the case if the Park District were included in a larger, multi-purpose governmental entity with a multitude of departments.

- **Protection of revenues.** Because the Park District is a separate unit of local government, the revenues it generates can only be used for Park District purposes. This assurance is in contrast to the general-purpose governments like cities, villages and counties that provide a multitude of services such as police, fire, public works, economic development, etc., where revenues generated by parks and recreation can be expended on other services with limited, if any, input from voters. In general-purpose governments, there are many services and departments competing for available funding. All funds generated for parks and recreation are used solely for those purposes.

The Rockford Park District is committed to fiscal responsibility and assuring that funds available for parks and recreation are properly managed to provide our citizens with access to quality programs and opportunities that recreation provides. The Park District offers access to diverse and quality programs, activities and facilities for all people, while our staff are mindful of the responsibility of balancing costs. Park District policy requires us to adopt a balanced operating budget each year. Under normal conditions, operating expenditures are less than the non-debt related real estate taxes and fees for services. Accumulated surpluses from operating expenditures are used to fund capital needs after meeting the Park District's fund balance requirement.

- **Protection of assets.** Public parks and real property owned by the Park District is held in trust for the residents of the District, and is subject to very limited exceptions which allow property to be sold or transferred. Residents must approve the sale of any land over 2.99 acres by referendum, or in some cases, special legislation is needed. This protection of land and real estate assets is in contrast to general purpose units of government, which have authority to sell or dispose of property by a vote of the governing board. The Rockford Park District regularly updates and maintains its records of personal and real property owned by the District and the Park District Foundation to assure the protection of these assets. Major capital assets including recreational facilities, open recreation venues and vehicle fleets are reviewed annually for necessary repairs and development of long-term plans for renovation or expansion. In addition to this the District is the protector of historically significant sites such as Native American effigy sites, state protected historic prairie areas, and land that once belonged to the former Camp Grant used in WWI and WWII. The preservation of such areas are of utmost importance to the District, and our efforts include connecting with local experts to provide insight into the needs for sustaining and preserving these areas for generations to come.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Park District does more with fewer funding options than other local units of government that receive direct state funding, and income, sales, use, marijuana, gaming, motor fuel and other numerous taxes.

The Park District's only sources of income come from a modest portion of the overall local property tax bill, and revenues generated from fees and other sales of merchandise, interest, grants, sponsorships and donations.

The Park District's highest priority is to provide the community with a high return on their investment of property taxes and other sources of funding. In 2023, only 13.3% of governmental fund expenditures were categorized as General (Administrative), resulting in 86.7% of expenditures being invested directly back into the community for programs, facilities, safety, maintenance and capital projects.

Regarding user fees, the District charges fees for recreation activities and lessons, and subscribes to a policy of varied fees based on resident or non-resident status. Program and activity fees are reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary to meet changing operating costs and/or market conditions, keeping in mind that we want to provide services at a rate that is affordable to everyone in our community, as well as staying competitive with like service providers rates. Free and low fee programs and recreational opportunities are a priority for the District to assist the diverse community we serve.

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the Park District has adopted the following governance system:

- **Priority Results.** The role of the Board of Commissioner in governance of the Park District is oversight, insight, and planning for the District. This is assisted by regular feedback from our citizens through community wide surveys, facility and program surveys, community meetings, and other direct feedback from our citizens. Based on the responses gathered, the Board is responsible for the long-term vision for the best use of Park District assets and finances to provide the desired services to the people of the community, and at the proper cost. Board Priority Results are updated approximately every 5 years and are accompanied by a Strategic Plan for execution of the Priorities of the Board.
- **Strategic Plan.** The Executive Director and staff use the Priorities given by the Board to develop a strategic plan to chart a course to achieve the directives of the Board over the period of time assigned. The strategic plan roadmap gives direction to staff in providing services and programs that meet and exceed the expectations of our citizens with short and long-term planning, operational initiatives, and land and program planning. The strategic plan as well as the Park District's Priority Results, District Value Statement, Vision and Mission are accessible to Park District staff and the public on the District's website, as is the regular reporting on the achievement of the Priority Results.
- **Action Plan.** The District's Action Plan is a compilation of tasks to be completed to support the Strategic Plan and the goals and initiatives prescribed in the Priority Results. Action Plans help to direct individual and departmental work plans to ensure that the daily efforts of individuals and departments work in unison to meet the goals and objectives provided by the Board's Priorities and the Strategic Plan.
- **Master Planning.** Regional Parks and facilities often benefit from the work of an Advisory Committee that consists of staff, subject experts and local citizens that are brought together to develop Master Plans for specific parks or facilities. The work of the District staff is assisted by the feedback and knowledge of these local citizens who share in the development of overall plans for places and spaces for which they have personal ties or civic connections. Several of these Advisory Committees are currently underway working with citizens to re-imagine parks, programs, natural areas and facilities for the District, such as the Levings Park Master Plan, the Dahlquist Park Master Plan, Blackhawk Park Master Plan, and the District's Land Management Master Plan.

- **Capital Plan.** The Park District's 5-year Capital Plan is reviewed throughout the year by staff and the Board to ensure that critical repairs, replacements, facility projects and park improvements are identified and funded. Staff and Board work to maintain long-term funding models that ensure resources exist to maintain current facilities, and continuously identify the need for essential resources to provide for the facilities and programs that are so loved and valued by the community. This process along with the feedback gathered through community input further directs items in the Capital Plan.
- **Governing Policies.** The governing policies of the Board of Commissioners of the District define and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Executive Director and establish the hierarchy of responsibility and control. The Board's role is to govern the District on behalf of the citizens who elect them and is responsible for ensuring that the Executive Director drives achievement of the results they have set forth, within the limits established by the Board. The Executive Director is directed to produce outcomes within the boundaries given in the Management Limitation policies. Achievement of the Priority Results is verified through periodic written monitoring reports which are submitted based on a schedule established by the Board. As part of best practices prescribed by accreditation, these Policies are reviewed and revised as needed on an annual basis.
- **Departmental Policies.** Departmental policies are in place where beneficial for the knowledge and information of District staff. Examples of these policies include Human Resources Department policies, Maintenance Department policies, Police Department Policies, and Sustainability Policies, which provide specific direction for day-to-day operations of specific departments.
- **Code of Ordinances.** The Code of Ordinances is a collection of laws and ordinances providing for the regulations and restrictions governing the use of the Rockford Park District park system in a single compilation for the government of business operations, the use of parks, the policing of them and other facilities of the District, and rules affecting personal conduct of patrons and employees by the District. As part of best practices prescribed by accreditation, Park District Ordinances are reviewed and revised as needed on an annual basis.
- **Safety Procedures and Emergency Response Guides.** A manual for safety procedures exists to provide staff with rules, behavior expectations and best practices to assure that all staff remain safe in performing their duties and monitor their work situations and interactions with the public to ensure safety for everyone involved. Guidance and training on safety updates and first aid procedures are in place for all staff members, as well as a comprehensive system to report accidents and injuries as they occur in our facilities and programs. Trainings on the use of first aid, CPR, AED, personal protective equipment ergonomics, hazardous materials, slip trip and fall prevention, communicable disease prevention, vehicle safety and weather-related safety are provided to the staff on a regular and recurring basis. Emergency Response Guides are facility specific resources that provide staff with guidance and direction on handling a variety of emergencies in a quick reference guide format. Onsite Emergency Coordinators designated by the plan act as coordinators and are responsible for communicating with emergency personnel and initiating the Crisis Management Plan when necessary.

V. Shared Services and Partnerships

The Rockford Park District has always had a strong culture of collaboration. We do what we do best, help others do what they do best, and together we serve and advocate for those in our community. This has been and will continue to be the philosophy of the organization.

The community's tax dollars are allocated by the Park District to areas that result in the greatest overall public/community benefit. Through community engagement and feedback, citizens have consistently requested their tax dollars go to areas like neighborhood parks, paths, open space, community events, youth programs, and other areas that have a greater impact on the entire community.

Partnerships with other recreational providers and municipalities result in leveraging those tax dollars to bring increased efficiencies. Partnerships with local school districts, community centers, libraries, recreational providers and other local not-for-profit agencies create opportunities for kids and families to share services and improve student's skills, physical and mental health, and educational outcomes, which in turn can help kids and youth find positive alternatives and lead to reduced youth crime while create positive futures.

A list of our recreational partners can be found here: <https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/partners>. Examples of organizations and entities where strategic partnerships exist that benefit our community and provide residents with additional or higher quality recreational services are:

Examples of existing strategic Rockford Park District partnerships and shared services with local organizations

Rock River Valley YMCA
Rockford Boys and Girls Clubs
Local Community Centers (Northwest, Kenrock, St. Elizabeths, Harlem, Patriots Gateway)
United Way of Rockford
Rockford Regional Health Council
Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (RACVB)
Rockford Museum Partners (Burpee Natural History Museum, Discovery Center, Midway Village Museum, Tinker Swiss Cottage and the Rockford Museum Park)
Rockford NAACP
Eliminate Racism 815
Rockford Public Schools (RPS205)
Rockford University
Rock Valley College
RAMP Center for Independent Living
Rosecrance
Northern Illinois Food Bank
Northern Illinois Center For Nonprofit Excellence
Winnebago County Community Health Council
Alignment Rockford
Rockford Area Arts Council
Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Chicago Bears
 Chicago Blackhawks and Rockford Icehogs
 Northwest Special Recreation Association (NWSRA)
 Rockford BMX
 Gymnastics Academy of Rockford
 Raptors Soccer Club and Youth Soccer League
 Rockford Ice Hogs
 Rockford Hockey Club
 Rockford Figure Skating Club
 Rockford Amateur Astronomers
 Rockford Volleyball Club
 Club Fusion Volleyball
 Ski Broncs
 Northern Illinois Pickleball
 Rock Valley RC Flyers
 Rockford Ravens Football
 Rockford Ponyball at Royle Gayle
 Rockford Road Runners
 Rockford Wildcats

Strategic partnerships with other municipalities and governmental entities and others that exist result in entities working together to leverage tax dollars and increase efficiencies, while assisting each other with support for operations at many levels. The District aggressively and creatively pursues any and all beneficial partnerships/cost sharing partnerships, joint purchasing and cooperative funding or resource use to achieve the greatest impact of the use of tax payer resources to benefit the community:

Local Municipalities – City of Rockford City of Loves Park, County of Winnebago; State of Illinois	Maintenance, Capital, joint purchasing and other efficiencies with local City and County governments; radio equipment, rolling stock and cell phones through state contracts
Rockford Public Schools	Joint Purchasing, shared programming for students, shared recreational spaces and cooperative agreements and funding for creation/maintenance of playgrounds near or on school properties; tennis courts, facility use, etc.
Winnebago County Regional Tourism Facility Board including eight municipalities, RACVB and the Park District	Entities combined funding and hotel tax revenue resources to provide capital for construction of Reclaiming First facilities and continued funding for maintenance, tourism promotion for tournaments, and use of the facilities serving as an economic driver for local communities including hotels, restaurants and other retail outlets
Consortiums such as Northshore Coop, Sourcewell, etc.	Turf chemicals, janitorial supplies, concession equipment, playground equipment, ADA drinking fountains and elevator maintenance

Intergovernmental Agreements with City of Rockford	RPD mowing and some landscape maintenance of COR properties in return for hay production on City owned land to feed animals at Lockwood Park; COR provides support for RPD maintenance with pot hole filling, emergency storm clean up, tree care service and equipment sharing with RPD.
Intergovernmental Agreements with City of Loves Park	COLP provides annual hotel tax operational funding of facilities located in Loves Park; maintenance assistance, salt supply for RPD snow removal; provided assistance with Korean War Memorial parking lot construction; Shorewood Park shoreline and park improvements, DCEO grant assistance as fiscal agent for grants to benefit parks and recreational spaces in Loves Park
County of Winnebago	County Highway Department staff provide bridge inspections for RPD; assists with paving paths; equipment sharing with maintenance and storm clean up assistance when needed;
Joint Policing assistance in City of Rockford, City of Loves Park and County of Winnebago	The Rockford Park District Police work in tandem with COR, COLP and County Police and Sheriff's departments to provide assistance and backup and to streamline technology and services for better communication among these entities, leading to a better prepared and safer community. These agreements include increased jurisdictional agreements for Park District Police; joint records systems for inter-agency collaboration for 911 calls; radio equipment that provides seamless communication with other area law enforcement agencies, GPS systems with other entities that provide a municipality discount for the joint purchase; Flock cameras in network with other municipalities and dash cameras using the AXON system that allow for compatible usage among the local law enforcement agencies

Strategic partnerships with other community organizations provide our residents with additional services through increased resources and decreases workload for the agencies involved. Some examples of those are:

- RPD Museum Partners - Burpee Museum, Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Discovery Center Museum, Rockford Art Museum, Midway Village Museum and the Rockford Museum Park
- Rockford Area Arts Council
- Rockford Regional Health Council
- Rockford University
- Rock Valley College
- Gymnastics Academy of Rockford
- Tommy Coral Memorial Foundation
- Youth Build
- LIAM Foundation
- 815 Minority Academic Achievement Gap (M.A.A.G.)
- LZ Peace Memorial
- Rosecrance and KP Counseling
- Northern Illinois Food Bank
- Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence (NICNE)

Other Collaborative Associations that provide efficiencies:

Park District Risk Management Agency PDRMA (self-insurance pool)	PDRMA is the premier risk pool for park districts that provides insurance coverage and industry experts who are committed to service and stability for districts. Coverages for property loss and casualty claims, claims management and legal assistance is provided through this member owned and governed organization.
Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF)	IMRF pension fund serves employers including cities, villages, counties, schools, townships and park districts to name few. IMRF provides a sound and efficient system for the payment of retirement, disability and death benefits of its members.

VI. Benefits Provided to the Community

We believe that play can build unity among all citizens of our region. The Park District connects people from all walks of life through the common love of play by providing active and passive places for sports, life-long skills development, arts and cultural programs, music, and opportunities to share food and fun.

Direct benefits to the Community:

As a result of the high-quality programs and services offered to our community, the Park District contributes to the vitality of the region and promotes the mental, and physical health of those we serve in invaluable ways:

- **Parks and playgrounds** - The Park District maintains approximately 5000 total park acres including 85 parks as both neighborhood parks and large regional parks, offering playgrounds, walking and biking paths, court areas for tennis, pickleball, basketball and more, golf courses, dog parks, sports fields, skate parks, music performance areas, pavilions and shelters, and more.
- **Protecting the Environment and Natural areas** - There are over 75 miles of paths and trails as well as public gardens and natural preservation areas for rare and endangered prairie plants, animals and insect species. Outdoor education, preservation of vital prairie and other distinctly unique habitat areas is of utmost importance to our community and to the Park District as we provide oversight and maintenance of these green spaces, trees, and waterways that filter the environment around us, provide wetland areas for flood relief, and provide much needed mental wellness support through outdoor access for both passive and active use.
- **Afterschool programs, childhood enrichment programs, Day Camps and Summer Camps** – the Park District works in cooperation with our local School District, YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, and local community centers to provide programs that include education-based learning, exposure to arts and cultural opportunities, STEAM, out of school hours opportunities, and free and low-fee day camps for kids in the community during the summer months. Working in collaboration with the local food banks and other like organizations allows meals to be provided during these camps and after school programs to help meet the nutritional needs of program participants.
- **Lessons and other programs** – Lessons and programs teach life-long sports skills and lead to healthy choices and habits early in life. Participants are also provided with coaches, mentors and life skill opportunities through these programs. Adults also participate in recreational sports leagues, coaching opportunities and personal development.

Economic development

The Park District protects the environment, employs thousands of area teens for the first time, drives sports tourism and recreational tourism in the region, and brings the community together to enjoy life! Residents love their Park District not only because of their individual involvement, but because they also understand the critical role parks and recreation play in our region.

- **Employment** - Employer of thousands of adults and youth throughout the year through full-time, part-time and seasonal employment opportunities. Many of these are first-time job opportunities for young people during the summer months.
- **Economic Development and Impact** - The construction and operation of parks and facilities that provide spaces for large sports tournaments and other tourism in the region promote not only day-of economic impact, but also bring continued economic development around those facilities including additional hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses creating considerable benefits to local economies.
- **Focused on Intervention and Prevention** -The Park District remains focused on intervention and prevention opportunities for youth and teens to keep young people active and engaged through lessons, mentoring and coaching, first job opportunities, volunteer programs, and team sports experiences. Early intervention can provide positive experiences and outcomes for young people in the community.

Increased property values -

The Rockford Park District believes it successfully provides places where people can gather to recreate, relax and connect with nature and others through welcoming and abundant green spaces throughout our community. The beauty of the region and the availability of quality outdoor recreational spaces, trails, paths and amenities, music, arts and cultural programs are valued by residents and tax payers, and by those who visit the area for sports and personal recreational tourism reasons.

- Parks and facilities can ignite redevelopment, revitalization and investment into our community. A vibrant park system attracts new homeowners and businesses.
- Research shows that a home located near a well-maintained park has an increased property value, and people want to live and work in a place where they have access to world-class places where they can play and recreate.
- In May of 2024, US News and World Report shared a study that ranked Rockford 133 out of 150 for best places to live in American attributing the quality of life in the area as one of the main factors in that ranking.
- Tax dollars allocated to the Park District provide for all of these things and more, bringing a tremendous return on the tax investment of our citizens.

Opportunities exist for donations and volunteers which provide more efficient operations, additional services to the community, and reduce required manhours from RPD employees

Residents have opportunities to be involved in their Park District and understand the critical role parks and recreation play in our region. Countless hours are provided by volunteers in every area of the Park District supporting operations and programs, advocating for the District, and expanding the services we provide. Individual volunteers provided over 3,000 hours of service to the community through the Rockford Park District in 2023, and provided park cleanup and beautification of community spaces by groups and volunteer projects that directly benefit the people in our region.

The Rockford Park District Foundation raises funding every year to assist the Park District with capital and programming costs. The RPD Foundation also serves the community by helping other community foundations and serving as fiscal agent for community groups when needed

Greater advocacy, partnerships, volunteers, advisory committees, donations, and sponsorships are all examples of how our community values the Park District.

- **Confidence of Donors** in the Park District is evident through personal giving and local charitable organizations, private companies and individuals that assist the Park District with advocacy, provide additional funding to meet the needs of the community, and complement the resources and outreach of the Park District. Much of what the community enjoys today is possible because of the generosity of the citizens of Rockford, who have over the years given millions of dollars of land, funds, stocks, in-kind gifts, and volunteer time. 40% of the approximately 5000 acres the Park District owns was donated.
- **Donations** - The Rockford Park District Foundation provides funding to offset operational and capital related expenses. In 2023, the Foundation provided \$913,285.76 in operational support and \$2,675,722.90 in capital support.
- **Help Me Play Program** - This program is administered and funded through the Rockford Park District Foundation and provides financial support to our community members who need assistance with fees and other costs related to participating in Rockford Park District programs and lessons. Help Me Play provides funds for youth programs, playgrounds, fee assistance and discounted registration and assists with equipment needs for activities to ensure that all youth can experience the lifelong benefits of play through the Park District.

VII. Transparency to the Community

Transparency:

The Park District offers residents many opportunities for access to information and to provide feedback.

- Customers can contact us by **phone** or **text line** at (815) 987-8000
- **Customer service locations** are available at **Carlson Ice Arena, UW Health Sports Factory, Mercyhealth Sportscore 2** or at the **Administrative Offices** of the District at the Webbs Norman Center
- The District **website can be accessed 24/7 at rockfordparkdistrict.org**
<https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/>

Information available on the website: <https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/>

- Registration for Programs
- Upcoming Events and Alerts
- Locations and Parks Directory
- Career Opportunities

Financial reporting including:

- Annual Budget
- Annual Report to the Community
- Annual Comprehensive Financial Report
- Total Compensation Package Information
- IMRF Employer Cost and Participation Information

The Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is available in tentative form at least 30 days prior to its adoption at an open meeting of the Park District Board. Additionally, at least one public hearing is held prior to the final action, notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week prior to the hearing, and information is also provided in the Board packet which is available on the District website here: <https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/board>

The annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Board in accordance with the OMA requirements. The Park District follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law prior to the adoption of this annual tax levy, which is also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Law.

Board of commissioner information:

The Board of Commissioners meets bi-monthly throughout the year. Residents may provide comments at each meeting at two public speaking opportunities that are offered at each regularly scheduled meeting. The Park District website also provides the following information on our Board members:

- Contact info
- Board agenda items, minutes and calendars
- Information about elections and vacancies when applicable
- Information on opportunities to address the Board with concerns
- Priority Results reporting on the achievement of the Board's priorities

Other information that is available at the RPD website: (<https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/>)

Accessibility and accessibility grievances information

Capital improvements

Code of conduct for participants and spectators, and eligibility requirements for RPD programming

Culture – Who we are

Executive Leadership information and contact opportunity

FOIA requests

Inclusion Services

Park Police Information

Governing Policies

Code of Ordinances

Board Priorities and opportunities for Community feedback

Privacy Policies

Purchasing and Vendor Information

Sponsorship Information

Sustainability Policy and Information

Volunteer Opportunities

Contact Information and ways to share feedback with the District

In the past several years, there have been continuous opportunities for public engagement to provide feedback in general or on specific topics:

- Community-wide survey 2018
- Community-wide survey 2024
- Facility and program surveys for users – ongoing and following each program/lesson
- Community meetings at park and playground sites to gather feedback on wants and needs for neighborhood parks and playgrounds
- Public hearings for budget and tax levy annually
- Community feedback sessions on development of amenities and programs
- Community Advisory Committees for specific parks and projects of the District

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

Awards and recognitions serve as benchmarks for excellence and encourage continuous improvement. Awards and recognitions also contribute to building a positive image of the Park District as an industry leader, boosting the community's confidence in the Park District, and promotes attracting the best talent to the organization.

The Park District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways including:

Recognized Industry Leader:

- Three-time National Gold Medal Park District – Awarded by NRPA in 1989, 1995, and 2012
- National Gold Medal Finalist in the following years: 1985, 86, 87, 88, 93, 94, 2011 and 12
- Illinois Association of Park District (APD) Distinguished Agency Awards from 2008-2019
- IAPD Exceptional Workplace Awards - 2014 and 2019

Financial Awards:

- Government Financial Affairs Association – Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting – Received annually by the District from 1982 through current reporting year of 2023
- Government Financial Affairs Association – Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting – Received annually by the District from 2008 through current reporting year of 2023

Other:

- Interactive Health's – Healthiest Companies in America – Awarded from 2014 - 2019

- Community level recognitions for partnerships and support for programs such as NAACP, Booker Washington Community Center, YMCA, YWCA and others.

IX. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

An opportunity for efficiency among governmental agencies would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other governmental entities that lead to inefficiencies in the use of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases the unit of government assessing the fee ultimately benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax, or other revenues that will be generated. Fees charged to the Park District for things such as permitting, state and local liquor licenses, elevator licensing and inspections, construction permits, building inspections, background checks among others, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the Park District's ability to provide services to our citizens at the least possible cost.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited from profiting by taxing another. Local governments serve our citizens best when we cooperate with one another and work together. While some communities recognize this, all should be encouraged to follow this model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

State Grant Funding Reporting Requirements

While state grant funding is vital to the Park District and is a very necessary part of the programs and facilities provided by the Park District, the reporting requirements are cumbersome and these processes have the potential to be streamlined to create a more efficient system of reporting required information.

Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates are another cost driver for public agencies. While the Park District recognizes that there are benefits to some of these mandates, modifications could help alleviate some of the burden to park districts.

- **Non-Resident FOIA Requests** - Under current law, resident taxpayers foot the bill for non-resident or commercial FOIA requests. In order to help alleviate the burden for these non-resident requests, the law could be amended to require non-residents identify/explain the purpose of the request for information; add a time limit on how far back a non-resident can request information; include staff time and costs in the amount that is reimbursable for non-resident and commercial requests; and move the deadline for non-resident requests to 10 business days so the Park District does not have to delay services provided to residents to comply with non-resident requests.
- **Criminal Background Checks** – All park districts are statutorily required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees pursuant to Park District Code, and while the Park District does not recommend eliminating this mandate because it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of children and other park patrons, we believe the state should explore ways to improve the current system and make it less costly for park districts to comply with the law. The District recommends studying whether there can be more efficient background check processes to reduce the time and expense needed for background checks currently. Another suggestion would be to ask Illinois State Police to waive the fees for checks on minors or waive all fees for name checks. A fee could be charged for more costly needs such as fingerprinting, etc. As this is a state

mandate, the fee structure for park districts could also be reviewed to determine if the fee charged exceeds the actual cost of doing the check, and if so, consideration could be given to reducing costs to local governmental entities.

- **Newspaper Publications** - The newspaper is no longer the most effective way to provide public notices. Websites are cheaper, readily available, and reach more people. Permitting the Park District to post information on its website in lieu of required newspaper publications would reduce annual costs for park districts.

Other Internal / Agency Efficiencies (Being Added and/or Improvements to be Made)

- The District website is and will continue to be updated on a regular basis to improve the user's experience and make information easier to find
- Accessibility and language translations being made available through website and printed materials
- A Rockford Park District app has been developed and is now available to downloaded to personal devices for registration, information, messaging and all other aspects of the District. We are working to make our public aware of the app and to encourage its use.
- Continuous improvements in reporting data being made available to the public
- Master planning is underway to improve the management of specific areas of the District including parks, physical assets and natural assets and land to provide Board, staff and citizen feedback and director on the care and maintenance and of these critical assets of our community. Currently, Master Planning is taking place for Dahlquist Park, Levings Lake Park, Blackhawk Park, and the District's Land Management Policy.

Dated: October 22, 2024

Signed: 
Jay Sandine, Executive Director

Signed: 
Martesha Brown, Board President

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners

Dr. Rudy Valdez, Vice President
Mr. Owen Carter, Secretary
Mr. Jack Armstrong, Board Member
Mr. Tyler Smith, Board Member



