



Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan Update

May 12, 2004 Update

The Oak Park Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan is taking shape. Over the past six months the Park District Citizen Committee (PDCC) and Leisure Vision, a consultant hired jointly by the Village and the Park District, have been hard at work. In addition to evaluating customer satisfaction with Park District programs and facilities and appropriate operating and capital funding levels, PDCC members are learning important information and skills to develop a long-range vision for parks and recreation in the community.

In order to make informed recommendations, the Committee has used many tools to reveal community priorities, best practices and current conditions including the following:

- Community-wide survey to determine current and future program needs;
- Benchmarking survey of parks and recreation programs and facilities in communities similar to Oak Park;
- Specific assessment of existing indoor facilities to determine how well they can support program needs identified in the community survey; and
- Assessment of the current, unique, split-responsibility intergovernmental agreement between the Village and the Park District that governs the management and funding of the neighborhood community centers and many of the current programs.

In addition to the PDCC members and Village and Park District staff, many community members have provided insights and offered their time and talents. Significant issues affecting parks and recreation in Oak Park for the next 30 years are on the table for discussion. As separate elements of study are being completed, the following picture is beginning to emerge:

- The results of a statistically valid community survey (more than 800 respondents) indicate that residents place high importance on parks and recreation facilities, especially the neighborhood parks, the Conservatory and the pools. While most residents are reasonably satisfied with the condition of facilities, they generally are aware that all are showing the results of years of deferred maintenance and need to be improved. The survey also indicates several areas of unmet needs, including indoor exercise and fitness facilities, indoor swimming pools/water parks and gymnasiums.
- Benchmarking surveys of 14 communities similar to Oak Park reveal that the Village has less parkland and more/smaller facilities than most, and is conspicuous in the absence of a capital improvement plan and budget.

- While the PDCC assessment of the adequacy of indoor recreation space in the community is not yet complete, the Leisure Vision review has pointed out what they feel is disproportionately high spending on the seven neighborhood centers when community usage and survey results point to other priorities. In their view (and in comparison with other communities and national trends) Oak Park's system of seven neighborhood centers is outdated, inefficient and requires heavy tax subsidy. Additionally, the local survey indicates a need for larger facilities to support programs not currently offered by the Park District and not available elsewhere in the community.
- The evaluation of intergovernmental agreements and various governance models is nearing completion and in the next several weeks the PDCC expects to be able to recommend the governance structure that best addresses the delivery of parks and recreation programs to the community.

As the critical phase in the Comprehensive Master Plan approaches, the PDCC is urging everyone with an interest in the future of parks and recreation in Oak Park to understand the decision-making process and know what is being learned as efforts move toward a final report and recommendations that will affect the community for the next generation.

In effort to get information out to the community more rapidly, an e-mail *list serve* is being investigated as a method to provide periodic updates on key findings and important steps in the process. More information should be available within the next few weeks, including the details of how to subscribe.

Any questions about this project should be direct to Gary Balling at 725.2020 or Craig Failor at or 358.5418, or email parkmasterplan@oak-park.us.

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