

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE  
PLAINFIELD PARK DISTRICT**



**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON AUGUST 14, 2024**



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**Purpose**

The Plainfield Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 10, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the “Committee”).

### **Committee Membership**

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

William Thoman, Board President

Heath Wright, Commissioner

Syed Abedi, Commissioner

Nuhie Faheem, Commissioner

Debra Narducci, Commissioner

Colette Safford, Commissioner

Tracee Steele, Commissioner

Mark Ferry, Resident Member

Ridgley Ann "Mimi" Poling, Resident Member

Carlo Capalbo, Executive Director

**Committee Meetings**

The Committee met as follows:

**Meeting Date**

**Meeting Time and Place**

October 4, 2023

5:00 p.m. at The Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC)

April 10, 2024

5:30 p.m. at the Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC)

August 14, 2024

5:30 p.m. at the Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC)

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's website or upon request at the Park District's administrative office.

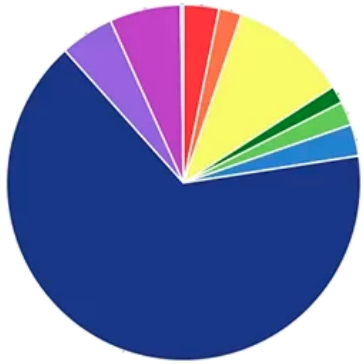
## General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1966. All Illinois park districts, including the Park District, are governed by the Park District Code, 70 ILCS 1205/1 *et seq.*

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 community for many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Park District is governed by a board of seven commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the park district and are elected at the Consolidated Election in odd-numbered years. Pursuant to state law, commissioners are non-partisan and serve without compensation.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Having a dedicated board to oversee these essential facilities, programs, and services provides the community with increased access to their elected representatives and allows those elected representatives to remain focused solely on those facilities, programs, and services. This is contrasted with general purpose governments where elected representatives are responsible for broad oversight on a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.
- **Increased transparency.** Having a dedicated unit of local government to provide park and recreation services also improves the relationship between the park district and its residents because of the transparency and openness related to the board and park district operations. Having detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual units of government are responsible for providing specified services like park districts, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed. Additionally, these items and budgetary decisions are subject to more scrutiny by locally elected officials than is the case with larger, multi-purpose governments 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 contrasted with general purpose governments like cities, villages, and counties that provide a multitude of services such as fire, police, public works, economic development, etc., where revenues that are generated specifically for parks and recreation can be expended on these other services with limited, if any, input from voters.
- **Protection of assets.** Public parks and other real property owned by the park district is held in trust for the residents of the park district, and, subject to very limited exceptions, can only be sold or transferred if residents approve of the sale or transfer by a referendum. This is contrasted with general purpose units of government, which have authority to sell or dispose of property by a vote of the governing board.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Park District does more with much fewer funding options. Unlike other units of local government that receive direct state funding, and income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel and other numerous taxes, the Park District's only tax revenues come from a modest portion of a resident's overall property tax bill. In fact, despite its limited funding options, the Park District share is only 2.87% of the local tax bill [www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/).

## Tax Data



### Tax Allocation Plainfield Park District Resident in Village of Plainfield

Community College District 525	3.38%
Forest Preserve	2.14%
Plainfield Fire District	10.88%
Plainfield Township Town/Road	1.57%
Plainfield Library District	2.17%
Plainfield Township Park District	2.87%
Unit School District 202	64.36%
Village of Plainfield	5.27%
Will County	6.75%
Will County Building Community	.63%

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the Park District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures (may also be found on the Plainfield Park District website):

- **Administrative Policy Manual** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)
- **Board of Commissioners General Practices Policy Manual** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)
- **Conduct Ordinance Number 2023-06** [www.plfdparks.org/parks-facilities/park-rules/](http://www.plfdparks.org/parks-facilities/park-rules/)
- **Risk Management Policy and Procedure Manual** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)
- **Employee Policy Manual** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)
- **Comprehensive Master Plan 2021-2025** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)
- **Annual Comprehensive Financial Report 2023** [www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/)
- **Annual Report 2023** [www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/financials/)
- **Annual District Goals 2024** [www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/](http://www.plfdparks.org/about/policies/)

## List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Park District works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at the least possible cost. One of the many ways the Park District achieves this goal is by partnering with neighboring park districts, school districts, other units of local government within or near the community, the State, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Park District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

### 1. Membership in SRA

**Note:** [www.nwcsra.org/who-we-are/member-districts/](http://www.nwcsra.org/who-we-are/member-districts/) SRA bi-laws can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under "Library," "General," "Decennial Committees on Local Government"

The Park District is part of the ***Northern Will County Special Recreation Association ("SRA")***. Special recreation associations are a form of intergovernmental cooperation among units of local government that are authorized under the Illinois Constitution, the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, the Park District Code, and the Municipal Code. Their formation is rooted in a fundamental belief and recognition that "Recreation is for Everyone." They are shining examples of local government efficiency.

By partnering together, local communities are able to effectively and efficiently deliver more successful program opportunities to community members who have special needs. Furthermore, by participating in the SRA, the Park District networks with three other local governments to provide many more program opportunities for our community members who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in the SRA's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

The Park District and the SRA also achieve efficiency by utilizing existing facilities that are owned and operated by the SRA's members, including the Park District. Utilizing these existing facilities allows the SRA to deliver services to its member communities at a lower cost. Currently the Park District provides the SRA access to the following facilities for their program offerings:

- **Gregory B. Bott Park**
- **The Plainfield Township Community Center (PTCC)**
- **The Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC)**

The SRA also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for the Park District programs or inclusive programming. The SRA collects information on the registered participant and determines what support is needed for that participant to be successful in this inclusive setting or the Park District program. This could include additional training of the supervisory staff, additional support staff, the use of adaptive equipment, behavior management, and/or other measures that will assist in the successful participation of this individual in the Park District program. Although success may not look the same for everyone, the SRA works with the Park District's staff to ensure the best possible results for all the participants in the program. The Park District's cost of providing these services would be much greater without its participation and partnership in the SRA.

In 2023, the SRA successfully served 110 participants with inclusive programs that were provided in collaboration with the members of the SRA.

The Park District is very proud of the ongoing collaboration with the SRA. By working cooperatively with other local governments, not only are we better able to collectively serve all citizens within our communities, including persons with disabilities, but we are able to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible.



## **2. Intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under “Library” “General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Will County Forest Preserve – Intergovernmental Agreement – DuPage River Trail Development
- Will County Forest Preserve – Intergovernmental Agreement – Conservation Easement
- Conservation Foundation – Bentley Real Estate & Purchase Agreement

## **3. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under “Library” “General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Plainfield School District 202 – Intergovernmental Agreement
- PTCC (Plainfield Township Community Center) – Senior Center
- Plainfield Township Road Division – Old Renwick Bridge
- Plainfield Township Road Division – Assistance with Equipment and Personnel
- City of Joliet; County of Will – Intergovernmental Agreement – Police Services
- Village of Plainfield; Counties of Will & Kendall – Intergovernmental Agreement – Police Services
- Plainfield Public Library – Intergovernmental Agreement – Facility Usage
- Village of Romeoville – Intergovernmental Agreement – Rotary Park
- Village of Romeoville – Intergovernmental Agreement – Budler Park
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Mutual Assistance
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Bike & Pedestrian Trail
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Development of 143<sup>rd</sup> Street Steiner & Ridge Road.
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Rt. 30 TIF
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Shared Path Improvements
- Village of Plainfield – Intergovernmental Agreement – Permanent Easement Indian Boundary Road
- Will County – Intergovernmental Agreement – Geographic Information System Program (GIS program)

## **4. Intergovernmental agreements with the State of Illinois**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under “Library” “General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Illinois Department of Natural Resources – Cooperative Fishery Management Agreement
- Illinois Department of Transportation – Flood Prone Property Acquisition Project

## **5. Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under “Library” “General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Plainfield Athletic Club (PAC) – Intergovernmental Agreement – Field Use
- Plainfield Junior Cats (PJC)– Intergovernmental Agreement – Field Use
- Plainfield Soccer Association (PSA) – Intergovernmental Agreement – Field Use
- Wheatland Athletic Association (WAA) – Intergovernmental Agreement – Field Use

## **6. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs@ Pro](#) under “Library” “General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Plainfield Shorewood Area Chamber of Commerce (PSACC) – License Agreement – Village Green Harvest 5K

- South Suburban Park and Recreation Professional Associations (SSPRPA) – Disaster Response Program
- Plainfield Riverfront Foundation – License Agreement – Plainfield Fest

#### **7. Partnerships with for profit organizations**

**NOTE:** All files can be found at [General Library - Plainfield Park District BoardDocs® Pro](#) under “Library”

“General” “Decennial Committees on Local Government”

- Plainfield River Tubing – License Agreement – Land Usage
- Brew Avenue Events – License Agreement – Food Trucks
- Tivity Health Services LLC – Silver Sneakers Health Membership Program

#### Sponsorship Agreements

- Chicago Billboards
- Edward Jones
- D'Arcy Buick GMC
- Orthodontic Experts
- TR Miller

## **Other Examples of Efficient Operations**

**Use of volunteers.** One way in which the Park District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through the use of volunteers. Last year, approximately 300 individuals volunteered 4,500 hours of service to the Park District.

**Youth employment.** The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed 50 youth. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workforce.

**Joint purchasing.** The Park District participates in joint purchasing cooperatives pursuant to the Governmental Joint Purchasing Act (30 ILCS 525/0.01 *et seq.*) thereby saving taxpayer dollars through economies of scale. These purchasing networks are used to purchase items such as equipment, park amenities, vehicles, and more.

**Friends of the Plainfield Park District Foundation.** Last year the Foundation supported the Park District with \$3,159.80 for scholarships. They also sponsored spring egg hunts for a grand total of \$5,395 in 2023.

**Collaboration with other park districts on best practices.** Because park districts are not in competition with one another, they are more willing than the private sector to share best practices. These best practices help to avoid unnecessary costs and deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

**Creation of standards and sustainability movement.** The Plainfield Park District has improved efficiency by eliminating paper board packets, reducing the size of the Oak Leaf publication, and implementing paperless registration and receipts. These initiatives not only reduce our carbon footprint and promote sustainability but also enhance financial efficiency, accelerate communication, improve public accessibility to information, and strengthen cybersecurity measures.

**Efforts to “Go Green”.** The district continues its ongoing efforts to go green. The Green Team Committee was established to enable staff to research trends and find ongoing ways to promote sustainability.

**Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue.** Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Park District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Park District is an economic engine for the community and generates much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, our Park District does not receive any of these revenues. Our Park District also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or General State Aid (GSA) that these same cities, villages, counties, and school districts receive through the State budget. Instead, the Park District provides all of the programs, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from **non-tax sources** such as memberships, program registrations, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

## Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Park District may be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

<b>Document</b>	<b>Location(s) Available (website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)</b>
• Annual Tax Levy	Website, Administration Office
• Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance	Website, Administration Office
• Board Meeting Agendas and Minutes	Website, Administration Office
• Annual Audit	Website, Administration Office
• Monthly Financial Warrant	Website, Administration Office
• Goals & Objectives	Website, Administration Office
• Conduct Ordinance	Website, Administration Office
• Comprehensive Master Plan	Website, Administration Office
• Indoor Facility Feasibility Study	Website, Administration Office
• Capital Improvement Plan	Website, Administration Office
• ADA Transition Plan	Website, Administration Office
• Municipal Directory	Website, Administration Office
• Bids and Requests for Proposals	Website, Administration Office

The Park District offers residents many opportunities to provide feedback. These include:

- The board of commissioners meets once each month. Residents may provide public comment at every meeting.
- The Park District's 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 final action, and notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week prior to the hearing.
- The Park District's annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Park District board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. 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. The Park District's annual levy is also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 815-436-8812 or email at [questservices@plfdparks.org](mailto:questservices@plfdparks.org)
- Additionally, the Park District has solicited community input through the following:

- 2016 Indoor Facility Feasibility Study
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Online survey to present various projects to gather resident feedback
- The Park District sends surveys out after every program completion.

## **District Awards and Recognition**

The District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

### **GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association) – Distinguished Budget Presentation Award**

The Plainfield Park District received the GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its budget. The award represents a significant achievement by the entity. It reflects the commitment of the governing body and staff to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting. This is the seventh straight year the Park District has earned the distinction.

### **GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association) – Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting**

The Plainfield Park District finance department's comprehensive annual financial report was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by GFOA. This is the 18th straight year the Park District has earned the distinction.

### **NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association) – CAPRA (Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies) Accreditation in 2022**

The Plainfield Park District became one of nine park & recreation agencies in Illinois to be accredited. CAPRA delivers quality assurance and improvement to accredited park and recreation departments throughout the United States. This operational management system improves infrastructures; increases efficiency in all activities; and demonstrates accountability within communities.

### **(IAPD) Illinois Association of Park Districts & (IPRA) Illinois Park and Recreation Association – Distinguished Agency Accreditation in 2017 (Reaccreditation achieved in 2023)**

Staff completed a rigorous assessment process that resulted in the District receiving Illinois Distinguished Accreditation. The accreditation process focuses on efficient and effective operational practices and the implementation of professional standards.

### **Herald News Best of Will County**

The Plainfield Park District was chosen as the best park district in the 2023 Herald-News Best of Will County Readers' Choice Awards. The District was also chosen as one of the best in family recreation.

### **(AAPRA) American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and in partnership with the (NRPA) National Recreation and Park Association – National Gold Medal Award Finalist**

The Plainfield Park District was named a finalist for the 2023 and 2024 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management.

### **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation – Net Zero**

The Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC) is the first recreation center in the State of Illinois designed within Net Zero parameters. It received its Passive House certification in the fall of 2019 and its Net Zero Energy certification for the 2023 calendar year.

### **IPRA (Illinois Park & Recreation Association) – Exceptional Workplace Award in 2016 and 2021**

The Plainfield Park District was honored with IPRA's 2016 and 2021 Exceptional Workplace Awards. These awards consisted of 48 weighted questions pertaining to the District's operations as well as developed wellness and diversity policies. Upon being awarded, the District is now recognized as an Exceptional Workplace through 2026.

## **Benefits and Services**

The Park District serves the entire community from the youngest child to the oldest adult and all ages in between. It does so in a variety of ways.

### **1. Facilities**

The Park District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

#### **Normantown Equestrian Center**

The Plainfield Park District offers a variety of equestrian lessons and activities at the Normantown Equestrian Center, a 6-acre facility which features a large 78x180 – foot indoor riding arena with a heated observation area, a small indoor riding arena, two large outdoor riding arenas, and five paddocks. The stable has 48 11x12 – foot stalls and includes a renovated indoor wash rack, as well as a club room/classroom.

#### **Ottawa Street Pool (May-August)**

The Ottawa Street Pool is located across from the Recreation/Administration Center near downtown Plainfield. The 278,000-gallon, L-shaped outdoor pool is equipped with high and low diving boards and contains lap lanes. The facility also has deck chairs for sunbathing, a 3,000-gallon enclosed tot wading pool, and a picnic area for patrons.

#### **Plainfield Township Community Center**

The 11,375-square-foot building is a multi-use facility but primarily serves as a senior citizens center. A variety of active adult programs are held at the facility.

#### **Prairie Activity & Recreation Center**

The Prairie Activity & Recreation Center (PARC) is a 40,000-square-foot recreation facility. PARC is the first recreation center in the State of Illinois with a Net-Zero certification, having received its Passive House Certification in the fall of 2019.

#### **Recreation Administration Center**

Opened in 1988, the Recreation/Administration Center houses the Park District's administrative functions, including the offices of the Executive Director, as well as the finance, human resources, information technology, planning and marketing departments.

#### **Streams Recreation Center**

Opened in the fall of 2005. Streams Recreation Center is located in the Streams subdivision, just south of the intersection of Route 59 and Fraser Road. The 3,000-square-foot facility features dance rooms and an outdoor playground area.

### **2. Parks**

The Plainfield Park District has 100 park sites encompassing 1600 acres with 70 playground structures and multiple athletic fields including:

- Gregory B. Bott Park
- Van Horn Woods
- Clow Stephens
- Eaton Preserve
- Wheatland Park
- Tamarack Settlement Park

- Village Green Park
- Electric Park

### **3. Programs**

The Park District offered 1,527 programs with 18,483 participants in 2023 with 3,554 active households utilizing the District's parks & facilities.

### **4. Additional Services**

The Park District provided the following additional services to the community:

- Food drives to benefit local food banks
- Arbor Day tree-sapling giveaway to the community
- Community-wide senior fair

### **5. Other Benefits**

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact on the community is multi-faceted and far reaching. For example, the Park District's parks, recreational programming, and other opportunities improve the community's overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing health care costs. Year-round programs offer safe, and convenient options for working families during critical times when school is not in session. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Park District's open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.



## Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

### 1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. By way of example, below are amounts that other units of local government charge the Park District even though the Park District's taxpayers are also taxpayers of these other units of local government. Such fees and charges, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the park district's ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

- Local Sewer Taps
- State and Local Liquor Licenses
- Elevator License and Inspection
- Fire Inspections
- Illinois State Police Background Checks
- Illinois Department of Health Pool Permits
- Will County Food Service Inspections
- Illinois Department Public Health Inspections

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure 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 revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are absolutely necessary, general purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the park district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited from charging more than their out-of-pocket costs associated with the activities covered by a fee that is assessed to another unit of local government with the same taxpayers. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. Eliminating local permit fees is a way to reduce administrative costs without impacting overall public revenue. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. Some communities recognize this and do not charge fees to other units. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

### 2. Inefficiency of Other Governments

The Park District is also negatively impacted by the inefficiency of the state and other units of local government.

State grants are often overly complicated to apply for and staff at the state level are not routinely available to answer questions or provide guidance, which causes delays for the Park District attempting to apply for grant funds. Once grant funding is obtained, cumbersome and time-consuming reports are due on a monthly or quarterly basis. **Note:** Further details such as the financial burden the district has incurred are available upon request.

### 3. Unfunded Mandates

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

- a) Non-resident FOIA Requests.** Last year, the park district spent numerous hours in staff time and legal fees to fulfill FOIA requests. Often the individuals/businesses submitting the FOIA requests are from outside of the park district boundaries, and they appear to be serving a specific agenda, rather than assuring better local government.

Under current law, resident taxpayers end up footing the bill for these non-resident or commercial requests. In order to help alleviate the burden for these non-resident requests the law could be amended to: (1) add a requirement that non-residents identify/explain the purpose of the request

for information; (2) add a time limit on how far back a non-resident can request information; (3) staff time and costs could be included in the amount that is reimbursable for non-resident and commercial requests; (4) move back the deadline for non-resident requests 10 business days so that the park district does not have to delay services to its residents in order to comply with a non-resident request.

Sunshine laws are supposed to protect taxpayers by allowing them to shed light on any issue that is not exempt from FOIA. However, local government can be burdened by having to drop everything to rearrange priorities to meet FOIA deadlines, particularly if it has limited resources. Since local residents ultimately bear the expense of complying with FOIA, treating resident and non-resident requests differently would be justified.

- b) **Criminal Background Checks.** All park districts are statutorily required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees pursuant to Section 8-23 of the Park District Code. The background checks must be done through the Illinois State Police (ISP). Last year, the park district spent \$3,370 for criminal background checks. 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 district patrons. However, the State should explore ways in which it could improve the current system and make it less costly for park districts to comply with the law.

The mandate also raises the fundamental question as to why one layer of government is forced to charge its taxpayers to comply with a State mandate when the State made the determination to impose the mandate. Put another way, if the State has determined that criminal background checks are necessary for public safety, the State should assist with compliance.

The Park District recommends studying whether there can be a more efficient background check process implemented through the ISP to reduce the time and expense it takes for background checks. Another suggestion is for ISP to waive the fee for checks on minors or waive all fees for name checks. If there is a "hit" from a name check, the fee could be charged for the more costly fingerprint check. Since it is a state mandate, perhaps the fee structure for park districts should also be reviewed to determine whether the fee being charged exceeds the actual cost of doing the check and, if so, perhaps the ISP could consider reducing its cost to local governments.

- c) **Newspaper Publication.** The newspaper is no longer the most effective way to provide notice. Websites are cheaper and reach more people. Permitting the park district to post the information on its website in lieu of newspaper publications would reduce costs.

Dated: 8/14/2024  
08/14/2024

Signed:   
William Thoman, Plainfield Park District Board President