



PARK DISTRICT OF OAK PARK & DISTRICT 200 JOINT BOARD MEETING



MEETING MINUTES

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Call to Order and Roll Call

A joint board meeting between Oak Park and River Forest District 200 (D200) and the Park District of Oak Park (PDOP) was held on Wednesday, June 1, 2022. D200 Board President Tom Cofsky and the PDOP Board Vice-President Jake Worley-Hood called the meeting to order at 6:15 pm.

District 200 Board members present were: Fred Arkin, Tom Cofsky, Gina Harris, and Sara Dixon Spivy.

PDOP Board members present were: Sandy Lentz, David Wick, Jake Worley-Hood, Chris Wollmuth

Present too: Dr. Gregory T. Johnson, D200 Superintendent; Gail Kalmerton and Lisa Evans, D200 Executive Assistants/Clerk of the Board of Education.

Also present: Ronald Anderson, D200 Executive Director of Operations; Jan Arnold, CPRE/PDOP Executive Director; Nicole Ebsen, D200 Athletic Director; Maureen McCarthy, PDOP Superintendent of Recreation; Cyndi Sidor, D200 Chief Financial Officer; Karin Sullivan, D200 Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations; Chris Thieme, D200 Executive Director of Education Technology

Visitors: Lynn Kamensita

Public Comments

No public Comments

D200/PDOP Field Collaboration

Dr. Gregory Johnson, District 200 Superintendent, began the conversation by thanking Ms. Nicole Ebsen (D200 Athletic Director) and Ms. Maureen McCarthy (PDOP Superintendent of Recreation) for playing a massive role in getting through some of the behind-the-scenes detail that made this collaboration possible. Dr. Johnson stated that the conversations about sharing fields have been going on since January 2022, when D200 and PDOP first connected and began to hatch the idea of finding a way to resolve some challenges while also figuring out ways to work together to fit their needs. Many logistical obstacles have been identified and overcome along the way; most importantly, trying to figure out how potential schedules could work. Moving forward, D200 and PDOP have identified a significant final hurdle that needs to be cleared and is specific to the light ordinance on the current South field (Lake Street field). This field has been utilized at the high school for several events throughout the past several years. The need to extend the availability hours for these fields has become apparent to satisfy the displacement from current practices. A displacement occurs due to collaboration with the Park District and the softball program largely using Ridgeland Commons for events, practices, and games. Dr. Johnson stated that this topic was already brought to the attention of the Village (both the Village Manager and their Board), and it is expected to bring a formal conversation with them later this summer.



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Ms. Jan Arnold, PDOP Executive Director, stated that the intent of tonight's conversation and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was created for both entities to determine whether this could be a viable solution; to support not only both entities but also the community. Ms. Arnold stated that in conversations with Ms. Ebsen and Ms. McCarthy, they have found that there is enough asset to go around as long as there are enough hours in the day; that's where the lights come to play. It's not playing on just the South (Lake Street) field but also utilizing the new turf field inside the track. At the same time, while it is unclear how long the fields will be used, they would like to reassure both Boards that there is enough capacity to make it happen if the hours can be extended on the South (Lake Street) field until 10 pm. Dr. Johnson added that in earlier conversations with PDOP, they discussed a potential timeline of having an IGA finalized sometime in early June. Due to scheduling needs, the IGA cannot be finalized until they know exactly how the lighting ordinance situation can be resolved. Once that is done, both entities anticipate bringing the IGA to both Boards for approval.

Mr. David Wick, PDOP Treasurer, asked that once the Village agrees with the extended hours, from that point, what is the timeline for completion and to have everything up and running for both D200 and PDOP regarding the fields? Dr. Johnson stated that assuming the light situation gets resolved sometime this summer; the plan would be to finalize the IGA quickly. The construction timeline would be roughly a four-to-five-month window with the summer months in the dead center of it, and then go on either side for completion; probably beginning construction sometime as early as mid-to-late April 2023 and a little into the fall semester. Mr. Wick also asked if the Park District could start the field work without worrying about District 200 completing it. Does it have to go together simultaneously, or can one be done while waiting on the other? Mr. Arnold stated that, from a logistic standpoint, what needs to be done is to figure out how there is the least impact, and by having the least impact, they don't want everything down simultaneously. A staggered schedule could be created, whether leaving Ridgeland Common until the track area gets taken care of, then coming in and addressing it at the end of the year. Depending on the weather, that plan hasn't been made yet. The goal is to not take everything out at the same and to do that transfer of turf, which is about a two-week project. Dr. Johnson added that there is so much more flexibility with handling Ridgeland Commons and the South (Lake Street) field; you're just returving something that's already there with some other minor changes.

Ms. Sandy Lentz, PDOP Board Commissioner, asked if there would be some financial advantages to laying the turf in both places at the same time or close to the same time. Dr. Johnson stated that he was unsure, and they were still talking about nailing down exactly what the cost would be; it depends in some ways on the timing. Both entities want to make sure they handle it all in the most efficient way possible, and there are a lot of unpredictable qualities to construction costs right now, particularly when you project out past a few months (or a year) from now. Dr. Johnson added that it's a volatile situation, so they won't know until this is calculated.

Mr. Fred Arkin, District 200 Board member, stated that in transferring programming from the current fields to the South (Lake Street) field, D200 would be gaining amenities in that space. They will not be taking a step back from where the district stands now. It should provide OPRFHS teams with at least what they currently have. Ms. Ebsen stated that the season started with softball playing only two games and baseball playing just three games; having the ability to play games when neighboring schools don't have that luxury will benefit the school. As far as the rest of the amenities, they will be comparable if not better than what the school currently has. Ms. Ebsen stated that she has discussed with both the baseball and softball coaches, and they have agreed to the initial plans.



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Ms. Gina Harris, District 200 Board member, asked for clarification if the amenities will be comparable for softball and baseball for the players and the families with this transition. Ms. Ebsen stated that the only question right now is the structure of the dugouts and what that would entail. Otherwise, it would be similar to what they currently have but upgraded as far as newer batting cages and pitcher areas. Ms. Harris also asked about family viewing spaces; Ms. Ebsen answered by saying that, in her opinion, it would be way more beneficial than what the school currently has. Ms. Harris asked when the information related to the timeline would be available. Ms. Ebsen stated that scheduling would be completed dependent on what the timeframe for the turf would look like. The athletic department will probably have to frontload their schedule and be on the road towards the end of the season; they would have to find other locations and make some partnerships with some of the local competitors to try and figure out what the school is going to do with that. Dr. Johnson added that if the Village changes the light ordinance this summer, the district will know what to bid on possibly in October. That gives the district the space between the light ordinance being shifted and getting that done in October to bring the IGA to D200 Board, then the costs associated with the project and the timeline. Ms. Harris asked when they would know about the light ordinance. Dr. Johnson stated that he has been in communication with the new Village Manager, Mr. Kevin Jackson, and currently does not have an exact date for when that will be; as of this morning, it was late June or early July.

Ms. Arnold stated that the Village understand that it is essential to start having those conversations, and it would be great if both board members would also begin to have those conversations with their peers so that they understand where they are. Ms. Arnold stated that she had the opportunity to see in normal situations where it's been brought up, and the reaction has been positive. Ms. Arnold added that in regards to what she knows from the community, it is that they want to collaborate. Board members speaking to other board members and adding this topic to their agenda for approval is the next step that needs to take place. Ms. Harris asked if the Village could attend this meeting. Ms. Arnold stated that the Village was not invited to this meeting because of a timing perspective; the Village requirement is that they will need to change the ordinance, which was adopted 20 years ago. Dr. Johnson stated that when this meeting was scheduled, scheduling between Ms. McCarthy and Ms. Ebsen had not been completed, so they did not know that the current light ordinance was in place.

Mr. Arkin stated that he had a question about extending the lights to 10 pm. Will the current lighting be in place, or will the lighting system be upgraded? Ms. Ebsen stated that they are looking into more LED efficient lights; the technology is more advanced than 20 years ago. Dr. Johnson added that there would be shorter light bulbs because of that efficiency; it's not just better, more targeted LED lights, it's shorter poles that even if you have the same lights, you have less spillage.

Mr. Jake Worley-Hood, PDOP Board Vice President, asked while the district is having conversations with Village trustees around that information if there is an idea on when PDOP will have something they can share. Dr. Johnson stated that they are in the final stages of these conversations. Ms. Lentz noted while having these spillage discussions, the conversation should include the impact of the lights on birds and other creatures; that would be something that environmentalists would be interested in. It's a factor that needs to be paid attention to, and then when it is, the community will know that this has been done.

Ms. Sara Dixon Spivy, D200 Board member, stated that she had some tentative conversations with Village Board members. They have been very enthusiastic about assisting D200 with this partnership; all the encouragement would be great. Ms. Spivy stated that she feels fairly



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confident that the Village would be hugely supportive of these efforts knowing that this will help the school, the park district, and the entire community, making this a space for everyone. Ms. Spivy added that it is very important that there is parity between the sports. For example, because we have control of the space, baseball ends up with something that looks very different from what is available for softball; this would send the wrong message to the community and the students. Ms. Ebsen stated that the process they are using now is throwing out different options, so they, at the moment, have not landed on what that would look like. Currently, there are options for open versus closed dugouts, usage of brick, heated or not heated, etc.; nothing has been finalized, but there have been many conversations about the various options available. Ms. Harris asked if these options would be the same for both sports or different based on the space? If there are going to be differences, what will those differences look like? If there are not going to be differences, this will be important to express this to the community. Dr. Johnson stated that the key difference is ground-up construction on the South (Lake Street) field for the varsity baseball fields. The dugouts on Ridgeland Commons are intact; they will be there as they currently are. Both fields aren't being built from the ground up with different decision-making rules for one versus the other. There is something existing that will not be torn down or reconstructed, and there is something that, by definition, must be constructed. To answer the question of how parallel we can make both fields is right now a challenge. Ms. Harris added that since there will be no building, is exactly the reason why there is a need to make sure that there is equity about that statement. Ms. Ebsen stated that those two structures could be reviewed later and will not impact the overall decision for turf and space. Ms. Harris asked if these fields will only be utilized by baseball/softball or will other teams utilize them as well? If so, what other sports and community aspects will be able to use the space? Ms. Ebsen stated that the fields would be used on a rotational basis based on seasons. In the fall, nothing will change on that Lake Street field; it will have lines for field hockey and soccer. Ridgeland Commons will have the same lines they currently have (soccer and softball). They can provide space, so the only thing that would be different would be a complete turf space and the color in transitions which would not have any bearing on a soccer or field hockey game. In the spring, it could also be open to lacrosse, baseball, and softball; there will be a variety of things to be explored and done with the turf space. Ms. Arnold stated that the park district currently utilizes the space for lacrosse, Frisbee, soccer, and baseball/softball (both adult and youth leagues); those will continue. There are three different base packs on the field for three different lengths for youth and adult baseball and softball. Ms. Arnold added that there are also portable mounds that come in because those are used for baseball but not for softball (youth or adult). What has been discussed in regards to the ability to make this work is that some of the fields that are diamond sports, the sports that are with the park district affiliate groups, may shift to a later time, or they may shift over the South (Lake Street) field, depending on the time of day. Similarly, there are some multi-field programs, like soccer or lacrosse, which may shift; instead of in the spring being at Ridgeland Commons or the South (Lake Street) field, they may go to the turf field within the track or the football field. There is some flexibility, but none of the fields are single-use. Mr. Chris Wollmuth, PDOP Board Secretary, stated that he is the liaison to Oak Park Youth Baseball Softball (OPYBS) and American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) programs and has built relationships with Edge, Alliance, and other programs. Soon after the MOA was signed, there were conversations with those groups, asking for input about their touchpoints and concerns. Mr. Wollmuth added that Ms. McCarthy invited all PDOP partner groups and asked for the same input. There were a few minor concerns, but the general tone was very supportive; the concerns were understanding the details of how the schedule will work. It came to a point where maybe baseball and softball were one of the touchpoints that needed reconciliation, and that's where the lighting issue comes from. Mr. Wollmuth noted that it hasn't just happened at the park district Board or staff level, but they have been reaching out to the community to get their input, which has been overwhelmingly supportive.



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Mr. Arkin asked what the West field utilization would be from the school, the park district, and the community. Ms. Ebsen stated that the current space has some major drainage issues, so this would need to be addressed without the turf; this would allow the teams to play more games and open up the space for the community to use. The feeder schools have also been looking for a location to host their track meets and comparable regional competition. Ms. Ebsen stated that she has reached out to other Athletic Directors at other schools who do not have a track at their facility to try to find another space, but it would be nice to say they have a home here at OPRFHS. Mr. Arkin asked what this would mean for the current physical education curriculum versus what the school will do. Ms. Ebsen stated that the physical education class space usage depends on the weather. Currently, physical education classes use Ridgeland Commons from 8 am to 3 pm. The returfing of the field would open up a second space outside which would be huge, especially as they are looking at the challenges with some indoor spaces.

Mr. Arkin asked what kind of use the park district would get from the West field renovations. Ms. Arnold stated that part of that depends on how they would allocate the field hours for Ridgeland Commons, which is currently used to allow the girls' softball to stay there later. They would even have to redirect those to either a diamond field or the multipurpose field; lacrosse, Frisbee, or soccer will be the groups that would utilize those fields. Currently, the park district uses the South (Lake Street) field on Sundays for adult soccer; they are not looking to reduce any but maneuver them. Ms. Arnold also added that she believes there's an opportunity for middle school to use this field for track competition. Ms. McCarthy stated that there is a waitlist for every youth sports program because of limited access to their fields due to the affiliated group's usage. If the park district did have access to those fields, when the school and affiliate groups are not using them, they could offer the space to other youth and adult programs.

Mr. Cofsky asked if any other arrangements would be similar to this one (one entity is funding what will be assets on another entity's property)? Ms. Arnold stated that PDOP had done this several times with District 97 properties. PDOP paid for half of the Irving sports field when it was constructed in 2013 and maintained it as well as an agreement from a replacement standpoint; PDOP is putting funds on a different field. When the middle school fields were redone, PDOP invested about \$1.3M into those two fields, including lights at Julian. District 97 contributed \$300K, PDOP's affiliate groups contributed \$150K, and a not-for-profit group contributed \$100K. Mr. Cofsky asked, in that situation, who owns the asset. Ms. Arnold stated that District 97 owns the asset because it's their property field. Mr. Cofsky asked that in this situation, Ridgeland Common would be owned by PDOP (Ms. Arnold confirmed).

Mr. Cofsky stated that Ms. Arnold mentioned contributions from not-for-profit organizations and wondered whether third-party funding (whether through a foundation or other park districts). Ms. Arnold said that PDOP has partnered with several entities to fundraise for the projects. For example, when PDOP did the middle school field, an MOU was created between District 97 and PDOP that stated that those fields needed to be enhanced. PDOP was looking to add one more synthetic turf field to its portfolio to maximize the needs of its affiliate groups. District 97 Board returned and said that PDOP could not invest in just one of their fields; it had to be both fields. PDOP did not have enough funding to returf both fields, so they had to look to some of their partners to invest. Ms. Arnold added that PDOP met with several of their affiliate groups and expressed the need and importance of this project as a community asset; the affiliate groups brought funding to the table to assist. PDOP put in most of the budget (\$1.3M), which was a part of their capital improvement plan, which they had planned for that additional support.



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Mr. Cofsky asked that since District 200 is part of an entity that is Oak Park and River Forest, how does this fit in terms of asset use? Ms. Arnold stated that the only parallel for that is using the school's pool; whenever a River Forest resident signs up for a swim lesson program at D200, they pay the resident rates. If the same River Forest resident signs up for a swim lesson at Ridgeland Common, they will pay the non-resident rate; it's not a resource from their property taxes. Mr. Cofsky stated that there is a need to make sure that River Forest residents are aware that they are getting the benefits of their resources. Dr. Johnson wanted to clarify that this applies to park district programming here on the school's campus, not students of OPRFHS who are River Forest residents who need to use Ridgeland Commons for high school purposes.

Mr. Worley-Hood stated that this is an agreement for PDOP to use D200 fields and D200 usage of PDOP fields; both assets are being shared. Mr. Worley-Hood asked for clarification on what Mr. Cofsky was trying to "dig into" regarding how this agreement would work. Mr. Cofsky stated that there are different entities, and it's good to collaborate; there needs to be clarity on how it is structured and what precedent exists. Mr. Worley-Hood stated that River Forest is getting access to the high school to these fields through OPRFHS, which is being worked out in exchange for those fields. Mr. Worley-Hood asked what is the timeframe and how will this work out for the agreement's longevity? Dr. Johnson stated that there is a current IGA with PDOP that expires in 2026. D200 would want to extend the duration of that IGA but currently does not have that part worked out between the two entities. Ms. Arnold asked what D200 is looking for in regards to the longevity of the agreement (10, 20, or 25 years). Ms. Arnold stated that she understands that D200 is looking for some level of comfort but does not believe that the two entities would want to commit people for 50 years from now. Ms. Ebsen stated that maybe something to consider is the agreement should be the life of the turf (generally 10 years). Dr. Johnson noted that D200 would like to have an agreement that would last for at least two turf cycles; that takes them automatically to the 16-20 years range. Dr. Johnson added that he believes a long-term arrangement could benefit everyone.

Mr. Worley-Hood stated that one concern for PDOP is that they budget for the turf for at least 10 years before putting it in. Mr. Worley-Hood asked how long in advance would PDOP need to start budgeting turf and how to make those things line up. He completely understands that D200 does not want to be paying for turf they do not use, but PDOP doesn't want to be faced with D200 finding another location for their programs and coming up with the rest of the money. Ms. Arnold stated that the initial MOU calls for the scoreboard to be one-time inflation; something that needs to be discussed is heating the dugouts, which is not currently included. PDOP budgeted \$8-12M for the turf replacement, depending on the maintenance and care for the turf. Ms. Spivy suggested that something could be built into the agreement to assure that if the district decides to terminate the agreement early, there could be some potential financial penalty. Ms. Arnold stated that she does not believe that PDOP was looking for a penalty but more transparency; giving them a "heads up" (i.e., three years ahead), the district would want to terminate the agreement. Mr. Cofsky stated that he is hearing more of a longer exit process, not six months before the end of the contract, but a couple of years before deciding whether to extend or terminate the agreement. Ms. Arnold added that besides the monies necessary for PDOP to do the turf replacement, they would need a few years to build that budget. Mr. Wollmuth stated that maybe the two entities could create an escrow account. PDOP contributes certain funds every year, and if D200 contributes a percentage based on that, then when the agreement is terminated, those monies would shift over to PDOP as a necessary part of the contribution of net worth. Mr. Arnold said they should work on the budget and have that part of the IGA.



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Mr. Wollmuth stated they would love to maintain grass fields throughout their facilities. Still, the reality is that the usage is so intense because they are so landlocked that this transition from the grass field to turf at very strategic locations it's hugely beneficial. One of the early discussions about changing to turf at some of the diamond fields that PDOP had was that there would be a lot of hesitance on the baseball/softball side; they were wholeheartedly behind it because of the lack of games that they played this year. Ms. Harris asked if some offsets could be done or considered with the environmental agencies in Oak Park. Mr. Wollmuth stated that they would like to think of turf as being very natural, but it's far from this. Grass is probably better than turf, but there is a cost to all the things that go into maintaining it. Turf has a negative side with some of the materials that go into it, but those are continuously improving. Mr. Wollmuth added that he is not sure there is a one-to-one environmental comparison because grass and turf have positive and negative sides. Ms. Harris stated that her question was related to the overall project, not just with the turf but the lighting and other aspects (i.e., heated dugouts). Ms. Harris added that she does not know the necessity nor the cost of this type of thing, so she would like to know what that looks like environmentally and include this aspect in this conversation or have some oversight from environmentalists in the development of this project. Dr. Johnson stated that at one of the sustainability meetings at the school, Gary Cuneen, Founder and Executive Director of Seven Generations Ahead, indicated that it's not a one-to-one correlation and the adverse effects of maintaining lawns, much less getting a high school field prepared for competition. Dr. Johnson added that he appreciated Ms. Harris's conversation regarding the new focus on the environmental impact of turf versus grass. As both entities bring forward the final details of this project cost, they can work with FGM Architect about what this could look like. Ms. Arnold stated that recycled materials could be looked at (such as brine and cooling agents). Ms. Arnold added while building their community recreation center, they looked into minority one-on-one business from a bidding perspective for an overall equity perspective. Ms. McCarthy stated that they could also calculate the amount of efficient lights that will be used and work with bio swells; a lot can be done around the project to help make it more environmentally friendly. Ms. Lentz stated that something else that a similar comparison is a cost of maintaining a grass field (seed, mowing, watering) versus the maintenance of a turf field. In that comparison, Ms. Lentz stated that she believes it would find that the turf fields generate a lot less environmental impact and pollution than the grass.

Ms. Harris asked that since the community uses that track in the South (Lake Street) field quite a bit, would the West field track be available to the community with similar hours and access? Ms. Ebsen confirmed that the West field would be open to the community but does not yet know the availability. Ms. Harris asked when will scheduling be a part of the conversation. Dr. Johnson stated that scheduling would not be discussed at a Board level; that could shift yearly based on how the teams work. Ms. Harris clarified that she was asking about the scheduling usage for both entities. Dr. Johnson stated that the overall impact would be available when they "nail down" the IGA.

Dr. Johnson stated that the track availability question came up on May 4 during a public conversation and within the community and that what is being discussed about the track in the back fields is substantively different. When that track is not used for competition or practices, this would be available to the public. The South (Lake Street) field walking track is not functional for the school's sports programs, but this new track will be. Therefore, it's going to be used differently as a result. This isn't a perfect one-to-one correlation because the purpose of this track is for student use. Ms. Harris added that this is a great point to make to the community because the people want to understand the difference with that track usage since it is widely used.



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Next Steps

Ms. Arnold stated that conversations with the Village of Oak Park Trustees need to continue and that she and Dr. Johnson will talk to Mr. Kevin Jackson, Village Manager, about when this can get on their Board's agenda for review. If they get the "green light," Dr. Johnson and Ms. Arnold will finalize a draft of the IGA to be brought to PDOP and D200 Board for discussion and approval, hopefully, this summer. Dr. Johnson stated that this discussion could be brought to the D200 Special Board meeting in July; if not, it could be discussed in August. Ms. Arnold added that PDOP does not have a Committee of the Whole meeting in August but could bring something forward for discussion in July.

Adjournment

At 7:10 pm on Thursday, June 1, 2022, Mr. Worley-Hood moved to adjourn the Joint Board meeting, seconded by Ms. Lentz. Mr. Cofsky moved to adjourn the Joint Board meeting, seconded by Mr. Arkin. A voice vote resulted in motion carried.

*Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Evans
Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board
Oak Park & River Forest HS*