



PARK DISTRICT
of OAK PARK

**Park District of Oak Park
Regular Park Board Meeting
John Hedges Administrative Center
218 Madison Street
Oak Park, Illinois 60302**

Thursday, January 15, 2026

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Lentz, Wick, Wollmuth, Worley-Hood, and President Porreca.

Park District Staff Present: Jan Arnold, Executive Director; Ann Marie Buczek, Director of Marketing and Community Engagement; Mitch Bowlin, Director of Business Operations; Bill Hamilton, Superintendent of Properties and Planning; Maureen McCarthy, Deputy Director of Recreation; Scott Sekulich, Registration and Customer Support Manager; Mike Baiardo, Superintendent of Special Facilities; Roger Oney, Parks and Facilities Supervisor; and Karen Gruszka, Executive Assistant.

Others: None.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The motion was passed by a roll call vote of 5:0

III. VISITOR/PUBLIC - None.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Wollmuth and seconded by Commissioner Worley-Hood to approve the Cash and Investment Summary and Warrants and Bills for the month of December 2025; approval of the Minutes from the Committee of the Whole Meeting (December 4, 2025), Regular Board Meeting (December 18, 2025); approval of Disposal Ordinance 2026-01-09; and the 2026 Full-Time Salary Bands. **The motion was passed by a roll call vote of 5:0.**

V. STAFF REPORTS

A. Executive Director's Report – In addition to the Executive Director's Report (which is included in the Board Packet), Executive Director Arnold informed the Board that Bill Hamilton and she would be meeting next Friday with a group of Futsal enthusiasts, looking to play at Barrie and they are willing to fundraise for a court which would be needed as there is currently no money set aside in the capital plan for it. We have engaged an architect for the ADA bathroom at Pleasant Home but are working closely with him on proposal and costs for the plan. A reminder that there are three referendum community sessions coming up that will take place at the CRC on January 22, February 4, and February 25. Staff believe with the cold weather this week, the Longfellow outdoor ice rink will be able to be brought back up for resident use.



B. Updates and Information – Written report included in the Board Packet.

C. Revenue/Expense Status Reports – No questions asked.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. Parks and Planning Committee

1. Field Center Park Playground Improvements Contract Approval Update – Executive Director Arnold informed the Board the bids are out and are expected to be returned January 28. Twenty-one bid packets were picked up and the walk through is next week. The Board will be updated at the February COW meeting of the bid results with approval coming to them at the February Regular Board meeting. The Board questioned if the presentation of the entire plan would be shown again and were informed that as it was just the contract for the work and they had already approved the plan, but she would send them the plan to refresh their visualization of the park. **No Board action is needed on this item.**
2. Cheney Mansion HVAC Geothermal Contract Approval Update – Executive Director Arnold informed the Board the bids for this project were also out and five bid packs had been picked up. She reminded them that the initial bids received were over budget and they had gone back and redesigned the system with alternates for the second and third floor. The bids will be opened on January 28. We are asking for this meeting to be continued to the February 5 so the work can be completed this year. **No Board action is needed on this item.**

B. Administration and Finance Committee

1. 2025 Tax Year Levy – Abatement Resolution for 2025 Levy Adjustment – Commissioner Wollmuth: I move that the Board approve the 2025 Tax Levy Abatement Resolution 2026-01-01 for the 2025 Tax Year. Executive Director Arnold noted that, since 2022, Cook County has been automatically increasing tax levies to recapture losses from assessment appeals refunds. The District has the option to abate this levy increase. The 2026 budget did not account for this additional levy. Since the levy is not part of the current budget and does not affect future PTELL calculations, staff recommend abating the levy and not collecting additional taxes from residents. Motion was made by Commissioner Wollmuth and seconded by Commissioner Lentz to approve the 2025 Tax Levy Abatement Resolution 2026-01-01 for the 2025 Tax Year. **The motion was passed by a roll call vote of 5:0**
2. 2025 Program Scholarship and CDM Report – Scott Sekulich provided the Board with an overview of the 2025 Program Scholarship and CDM Report. Staff identified a significant increase in the usage of scholarships and CDM in 2025. A total of \$159,082 in scholarship funds was used for 4,368 activities and memberships, compared to \$140,450 in 2024. Additionally, an increase in CDM discounts was observed, with \$172,260 in 2025 compared to \$162,240 in 2024. In 2025, 518 households were approved for scholarships, up from 472 households in 2024. The growth in the financial assistance program was attributed to increased marketing efforts. Scott noted a new piece of information learned was that the knowledge of our scholarship programs was 50% learned from on line with the other 50% split between D97 and word of mouth, which really shows the importance of our relationship with D97. The CRC has also increased the adult use of the scholarship program. A discussion took place with the Board stating how pleased they are to see the increase in all ages taking advantage of the scholarships and the significant amount of financial aid provided to the community. They also questioned a possible report to show the monthly cost



users usage vs the scholarship users usage. The Board thanked Scott for the thoroughness of the report and went on to say that this report just shows the values of the Park District. Executive Director Arnold reminded the Board that she and Scott will be attending a meeting at the Township to give this report per the new IGA with them and noted the \$10,000 they donate to the Scholarship program.

C. Recreation and Facility Program Committee – None

VII. NEW BUSINESS – None

VIII. COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

Commissioner Worley-Hood: Commissioner Worley-Hood stated he is waiting on the FOPCON meeting as nothing has taking place yet with the holidays. He also said it has been good to watch the community wrap their head around the indoor pool concept when he speaks with them. He feels that a lot of people just don't trust government and see the individual groups on social media but once he has spoken with them they understand the reasoning.

Commissioner Onayemi: Commissioner Onayemi expressed that he had missed the IGOV meeting, but when he attended the Rotary Meeting he had received numerous compliments on Jan and the referendum points and information she shared at the Business and Civic Leaders meeting earlier on Wednesday. Many people who had attended that meeting came up to him thanking her and the park district for the information they received so, he wanted to extend the kudos to Executive Director Arnold.

Commissioner Lentz: Commissioner Lentz mentioned sustainable discussions, impacts of funding being taken away, and environmental education not only here but on a national level and how important it is to get the information out to the community. IGOV was mentioned as one way where the taxing bodies can give solid information. She also stated some of the stats that will be shared during the upcoming Community Meeting on the referendum and is looking forward to that knowledge being spread further.

Commissioner Wollmuth: Commissioner Wollmuth attended the Pleasant Home Meeting on Wednesday which had good discussion and they are slowly moving forward and working with the architect on what he has provided so far. He also mentioned that over the holidays he ran into friends that shared very positive compliments on not only the CRC but their experiences while there, especially with the staff that are so welcoming.

President Porreca: At our last regular meeting, we all voted to advance a pool referendum question to the voters of Oak Park. I have comments tonight about that pool referendum issue, that vote, and what it signifies and does not signify. I am providing a transcript of these remarks to staff so they can be placed in the minutes of this meeting verbatim so that anyone who is not present tonight can read my comments in full.

First, I want to state again for the record, as this board is well aware, that we as an agency are entirely neutral on the outcome of this referendum. We are not campaigning to pass or even hoping to pass this referendum. We are asking voters to make a binding decision about whether or not we should build an indoor pool replacing the outdoor pool at Ridgeland. The agency does not have an official stance for or against this project. It's being presented to our residents as the option for them to accept or reject.

Our goal now that we've approved a referendum is to inform residents of the facts behind the referendum decision, to encourage residents to be familiar with the answers in the FAQ, to use the tax calculator so that they understand the potential economic impact to their household, to make their own informed decision and then to vote their choice on March 17 or before, if voting early.

Emails we have received as well as online commentary indicate to me that our residents need us to communicate the facts clearly, objectively, and often ; this is a critical job for staff and for the board right now.

I communicated on December 22 and 23 with Mr. Skolnick, a reporter for the Wednesday Journal. I emailed him on December 22 to answer a question and then spoke with him for 26 minutes on December 23 to answer follow up questions; other than my confirmation that the pool issue was discussed at our June board retreat in an open meeting, none of my comments appeared in the article that was first published. In the article that was published this week, 3 weeks later, some of those were included. I want to tell you what I said to him.

In the December 23 conversation, I made it clear to this reporter that we are not trying to pass this referendum, but that we are going to the voters with the decision, which is our duty in this situation. When he said some people felt we were springing this on people at the last minute, I asked him to tell me how a press release, a website, an FAQ document, mailings, and email campaigns were springing it on people. I asked him how 90 days is not enough time for anyone to examine the information and make a decision and how is that "last minute" and his response to me was "That's a fair point."

As we all know, discussion of an indoor pool has come up regularly for over a decade. The concept of enclosing Ridgeland Common was proposed as early as 2017. Members of the community discussed the plan with Jan - in writing - back then. This is not a new idea.

As I have said to constituents this month, it's the professional staff's job to assess viable options and present the board with their recommendation. We directed Jan to do that, and she did it. I have the utmost confidence in the professionalism, expertise, and thoroughness of Jan's work. She is nationally renowned and her leadership is the force behind our Park District being a Gold Medal winner twice and a finalist 4 more times in the last decade. She is a dedicated public servant in this community and deserves nothing but respect for the quality and integrity of her work.

I've heard from some people that it is unacceptable to them to lose an outdoor pool to gain an indoor pool. That's fair and that's their choice. But that was the plan that was determined to be the best and most responsible option and the one that we would present to the voters and ask for the financing for.

I also discussed with the reporter that you can't go to referendum on a completely generic question without a concept that includes location, and general size and layout. There's no way to put a price tag for voters to vote on a completely generic idea. Preliminary work is required.

Whether or not this plan is accepted by a majority of the voters remains to be seen. We will, of course, abide by the decision of the voters.

As we have learned in all our board member training and continual board member development, every new project that gets proposed and built will - and should- receive scrutiny and commentary from



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residents. No plan pleases everyone. Nevertheless, the duty of our elected office is to propose, approve, fund, and carry out projects for the benefit of our community.

Making the effort to run for office and spending the time and energy that it takes to be a well-informed and thoughtful board member is hard work and I appreciate each of you on this board for stepping up to that job. As I often say, being a leader means being willing to make a decision - even as you know that there is no decision that will please everyone. Sometimes people say mean and personal things about us as board members when they disagree with our decisions, but that comes with the role. We can and must accept that.

It would have been far easier for us to ignore the outcome of our community surveys and to defer any discussion of an indoor pool for future boards or staff to grapple with.

But this board believes that improving the quality of life for residents and responding to input about amenities that our residents would like to see in our community is our role. I thank each my fellow commissioners for your commitment to our community and your willingness to lead.

I'm encouraged to see that people are seeking to learn more about the issues at stake in this referendum and I hope that we see many people at the upcoming meetings so that they can have all their questions answered, and that everyone casts a vote that aligns with their own values and needs on or before March 17.

Thank you again to Jan, her staff, and this board for your work on behalf of our community our neighbors.

IX. CLOSED SESSION – None

X. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:34pm, a motion was made by Commissioner Onayemi and seconded by Commissioner Lentz to adjourn the Regular Board Meeting. **The motion was passed by a voice vote of 5:0.**



Secretary
Board of Park Commissioners

February 19, 2026

Date



President
Board of Park Commissioners

February 19, 2026

Date

