



**Park District of Oak Park
Committee of the Whole Meeting
John Hedges Administrative Center
218 Madison Street, Oak Park, Illinois 60302**

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:07pm.

I. ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Commissioner Onayemi.

Park District Staff Present: Jan Arnold, Executive Director; Mitch Bowlin, Director of Business Operations; Ann Marie Buczek, Director of Marketing and Community Engagement; Maureen McCarthy, Deputy Director of Recreation; Patti Staley, Director of Horticulture and Conservatory; and Karen Gruszka, Executive Assistant.

Others: Sue Boyer, FOPCON Board President and Cathi Knickrehm, ESAC Chair.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

III. PARKS AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

- A. **FOPCON Update** – Sue Boyer, Board President with FOPCON, provided the Board with an update on 2025. She began by sharing they are finally fully staffed with three part-time positions filled: Judy Klem, Executive Director, Amy Lavery, Volunteer Coordinator, and Karen Avila, Operations Coordinator and have a hard working Board of 17. She then spoke to the Board regarding their members, which continue to grow every year and have reached over 600, as well as their partnerships, volunteers, and donors, which all help to make their events a success and play a vital role in their financial success. She reminded the Board of all their free programs and the 58 tours they provided. The plant sale did very well with over 9,800 plants sold. The organization has also achieved success in its 2025 capital campaign, and everyone is looking forward to the 40th Anniversary in June! The Board thanked Susan and are appreciative of the time FOPCON has put in to work with the PDOP and the Board thanked Susan for her report. On May 13 the master planning meeting for the Conservatory will take place.
- B. **Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee (ESAC) Update** – Cathi Knickrehm, ESAC Chair, provided the Board with an update on 2025. She noted that ESAC meetings are taking place every other month and that the committee continues to experience membership challenges. She reminded the Board of the items the ESAC had been tasked with reviewing, including the Urban Forestry Plan, Lindberg Park Prairie List, Andersen Landscaping Plan, and the Climate Action Plan.



Cathi also shared suggestions for the PDOP and planned activities for the upcoming year. The Board discussed some of the ESAC's suggestions for the PDOP and thanked the ESAC on how their expertise has benefited the Park District and keeps them in motion. **No action is needed by the Board on this item.**

- C. Oak Park Conservatory Annual Report – Patti Staley, Director of Horticulture & Conservatory, provided the Board with a summary of the Oak Park Conservatory Annual Report included in the packet and thanked the Board, staff, FOPCON, and their volunteers over the past year for all that they accomplished. She highlighted last year's programming, events, and their visitors. Patti spoke of many of their event's successes, with some necessitating the need for additional days and times added to accommodate additional attendees as well as added new events and partnerships. The Conservatory's rentals exceeded budget by 25% and the new tent has definitely had a positive effect on those numbers. Staff are continually coming up with new ways to bring people into the Conservatory and looking towards the future, they will continue to look through a sustainability lens as energy costs will continue to rise and to help make it as efficient as possible. The Board thanked Patti for their work at the Conservatory and her information filled report. **No action is needed by the Board on this item.**

- D. MOU West Cook TreeKeepers – Executive Director Arnold and Patti Staley reminded the Board of propagated acorns from the heritage oaks at Scoville, Taylor, Field, and other locations. Patti was looking to enter into a three-year agreement with West Cook Treekeepers with no financial obligation where trained arborists would come in and do small tree pruning. Like a volunteer day, it would help with 'manpower' for the pruning season but there is also a social aspect for volunteers and an opportunity to give back. The Board discussed the training of the volunteers by the trained arborists, and it was confirmed that although they would be working independently they would never truly be left alone to prune and that it would be on the smaller trees. Patti also worked with Landscape Illinois nonprofit to provide education at the Wisconsin Landscape Industry Conference and mentioned that they also were honored to be the beneficiary of 12 free large trees from the conference. **This item will be brought before the Board on the consent agenda at the March Regular Board Meeting.**

IV. ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE COMMITTEE – None

V. RECREATION AND FACILITY PROGRAM COMMITTEE

- A. D97 Intergovernmental Agreement – Executive Director Arnold reminded the Board of Scott Sekulich's scholarship report earlier during the year when this IGA was brought up. Along with the financial assistance, we are excited for the 2-3 weeks of camp opportunity for the free reduced lunch participants. Last year we had 74 enrolled and this year we are on par with that number. We have held back a few spots to allow for working with the families to get them registered. The Board discussed how this is a life saver for families with working parents and it takes down previous barriers that might have been felt. The Board questioned the ability to have demographics to make sure we are reaching everyone in need and were reminded that demographic information is self-reported and therefore can never be a reliable number as not



everyone chooses to report. **This item will be brought before the Board on the consent agenda at the March Regular Board Meeting.**

- B. Referendum update – Executive Director Arnold and the Board briefly discussed and wrapped up the three community Referendum Meetings, the presentation, and the most frequently asked questions. They agreed that Caitlyn Culbertson, Elrod Friedman LLP, clearly articulated at the meetings that the referendum is a financial question not location, facility type, etc. and that the ballot question was formed within the legalities required. All three meetings had been posted on the website for residents to watch for the information if they were unable to attend. The Board agreed the information has been shared with the residents and for all to continue to guide the community to the website as needed. **There is no action needed by the Board on this item at this time.**

VI. NEW BUSINESS – None

VII. CLOSED SESSION

At 7:43pm, a motion was made by Commissioner Wollmuth and seconded by Commissioner Lentz to convene into closed session for the discussion of performance of a specific employee of the Park District. **The motion was passed with a roll call vote of 4:0.**

At 9:50pm, a motion was made by Commissioner Wollmuth and seconded by Commissioner Lentz to adjourn the Closed Session and to resume the Committee of the Whole Meeting. **The motion was passed by a voice vote of 4:0.**

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:50pm, the Committee of the Whole meeting was adjourned. **The motion was passed with a voice vote of 4:0.**



 Secretary
 Board of Park Commissioners



 President
 Board of Park Commissioners

April 16, 2026

 Date

April 16, 2026

 Date

