

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE  
DARIEN PARK DISTRICT**

**FINAL REPORT**

**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON 12/11/23**



## I. Purpose

The Darien Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 8, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the “Committee”).

## **II. Committee Membership**

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Ray Jablonski, Board President

Luanne Spiros, Board Vice President

Frank Noverini, Board Secretary

Cathy Marchese, Board Treasurer

Sylvia McIvor, Commissioner

Stephanie Gurgone, Executive Director

Matt Henderson, Director of Parks & Facilities

Vito Abbate, Resident

Tim Arnett, Resident

### **III. Committee Meetings**

The Committee met as follows:

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Meeting Time and Place</b>
May 8, 2023	7:23 pm, DPD Community Center
September 11, 2023	6:30pm, DPD Community Center
December 11, 2023	6:00 pm, DPD Community Center

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

**Please note that information in this report is current as of 12/11/23.**

## IV. 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 1974. 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 five 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 4.9% of the local tax bill.

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:

- **Board Member Policy Manual**
- **Parks & Facilities Manual**
- **Personnel Policy Manual**
- **Safety Manual**
- **Field Rental Policy Manual**
- **ADA Transition Plan**
- **Annual Reports**
- **Capital Asset Replacement Plan**
- **Annual Sustainability Report**

## V. 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

The Park District is part of the SEASPAR 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 SEASPAR, the Park District networks with eleven 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 SEASPAR's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

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

- **Darien Park District Community Center (various rooms)**
- **Darien Sportsplex – dedicated room for SEASPAR programs**

SEASPAR also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for the Park District programs or inclusive programming. SEASPAR collects information on the registered participant and determines what supports are 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, SEASPAR 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 SEASPAR.

In 2022, SEASPAR successfully served 42 residents, and Darien residents participated in 185 programs. SEASPAR also supported 15 Darien participants in 1092.5 hours of inclusive programs that were provided by the Park District.

The Park District is very proud of the ongoing collaboration with SEASPAR. 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. Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies**

- ***Cooperative Programming with other local park districts***- We continually work with other park districts to offer programs cooperatively – which are available at a resident rate to all of our residents. This allows all districts to offer more unique programs, which may not go if only offered in one town. We offer some of these programs at our facility, and some at neighboring facilities.

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

- ***Indian Prairie Library*** – use of our facilities at no cost, and advertisement of their programs in seasonal brochure
- **Darien School District #61** – Intergovernmental Agreement for Snow Plowing of their facilities
- **Darien School District #63** – Intergovernmental Agreement for use of Smart Oaks Soccer Field
- **Darien Police Department** – Intergovernmental Agreement for Police Protection Services
- **City of Darien** – Intergovernmental Agreement for Purchase of Gas and Salt at City pricing. Also have participated in joint bidding for projects with the City.

**Dupage County** – Intergovernmental Agreement for Purchase of Maintenance Facility. In 2017, the District executed an intergovernmental agreement to purchase a surplus facility from DuPage County, which allowed for re-use of an existing government building. Dupage County and Park District staff worked together for years to develop a plan to re-use this existing space in Darien, all while working within the Park District's existing capital budget.

As part of the agreement, many capital improvements were made to the site, to make it usable for District operations. In 2021, the Darien Park District finalized the purchase and renovation of the new Park District Maintenance Facility.



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

- Use of Joint purchasing and State bids, when appropriate

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

- Darien Youth Club (use of all fields at no cost)
- Chicago Hawks Hockey Club (use of indoor ice rinks)
- Chicago Empire Soccer Club (use of indoor soccer facilities)
- Pickleball Pals

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

- Darien Lions Club
- Darien Women's Club
- Darien Garden Club

**7. Informal cooperation with other units of local government which save taxpayer dollars by eliminating redundancy**

- Informal agreement to loan and borrow equipment from the City of Darien, when needed.
- Informal agreement to use Dupage County staff for expertise, when needed.
- Informal agreement for Darien Police and Darien-Woodridge Fire Departments to visit preschool and educate the students.

**8. Participation in PDRMA (Park District Risk Management Association)**

- Participation in joint self-insurance pool with over 160 other members.
- This results in pooled resources to meet risk management needs, reducing cost of each member having to buy private insurance.
- PDRMA also provides expert professionals, who assist all members with insurance issues and risk management tools.

## Other Examples of Efficient Operations

**Youth employment.** The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed many area youth for both Camp positions, as well as Summer parks positions. 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 include:

- Purchasing of vehicles and playgrounds on a regular basis

**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. Staff regularly reach out to colleagues at other Districts for ideas and feedback.

**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. Also, unlike Illinois cities, villages, counties, and school districts that received billions of dollars in direct financial assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Park District did not receive any such direct federal aid. 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. The District is eligible to apply for and receive specific grants through the State of Illinois, such as the OSLAD grant (Open Space Land & Acquisition Grant).

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.

## Financial Responsibility

- **Non-Tax Revenue:** In an average year, the Darien Park District's tax receipts account for approximately 46% of revenue budgeted for the year. The remaining 54% of revenue is from program and rental receipts. Without including tax receipts for debt payments, over 64% of revenue comes from non-tax sources. These sources include program and rental revenue, grants, and efficiencies achieved through joint governmental agreements.
- **Enterprise Fund:** The Darien Sportsplex operates as an Enterprise Fund, which means that the revenues from the facility pay all expenses at the facility, including long term debt, and the facility is self-supporting without tax dollars.
- **Balanced Budget:** The Darien Park District presents a balanced budget annually for all operating funds, unless there is an intentional spend down of the accumulated fund balance.
- **Annual Audit:** Annually, the District presents an audit report, to show the public the commitment to fiscal responsibility and practices.

## VI. 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</b> (website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)
• Annual tax levy	administrative offices
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	website
• Agenda and minutes	website
• Comptroller's annual finance report (AFR)	state website
• Annual audit	administrative offices
• Capital improvement plan	administrative offices
• ADA transition plan	administrative offices

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

- The board of commissioners meets approximately 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.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 630-968-6400 or email at [info@darienparks.com](mailto:info@darienparks.com)

## VIII. 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:

- ***Darien Park District Community Center, with gym, multi-purpose rooms, preschool and fitness center***
- ***Darien Sportsplex with 3 ice rinks, indoor soccer field and multi-purpose space, as well as dedicated SEASPAR space.***
- ***17 Park Sites over 154 acres. These parks include 13 playgrounds as well as multiple sports fields and walking paths.***

### 2. Programs

The Park District offered the following programs last year. Below is not an all inclusive list of all programs offered.

- ***Preschool***
- ***Summer Camp***
- ***Adult Special Interest (photography, dog obedience, dance)***
- ***Art/Craft Classes***
- ***Dance Classes***
- ***Early Childhood Classes***
- ***Fitness, Yoga Classes***
- ***Health Related Classes***
- ***Music Classes & Lessons***
- ***Science Classes***
- ***Karate Classes***
- ***Special Events***
- ***Sports Leagues & Classes***
- ***Senior Special Interest***
- ***Youth Special Interest***

### 3. Sustainability

The Darien Park District continually looks to improve the District's environmental footprint whenever feasible. Due to the District's mission, environmental impact is always considered when a project or purchase is being completed. The District accomplishes this through:

- Purchase and use of environmentally safe and sensitive products
- Wise use and protection of air, water, soil and wildlife
- Wise use of energy resources
- Reduction and handling of waste
- Environmental education and interpretation

#### **4. Other Benefits**

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact to 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. Preschool and summer programs offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare options for working families. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Park District's open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.

## **IX. 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.

- *Elevator license & inspection – \$100 annually*
- *Vending License – \$475 annually*
- *Background checks – \$300 annually*

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.

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. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. The City of Darien reduces the Park District's building permit fees significantly, based on the overlapping boundaries. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

### **2. 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) 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 \$300 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.

- b) Prevailing Wage.** One way to reduce burden on local government staff is to limit the prevailing wage requirement to larger capital contracts. This would free up tracking of the paperwork on small repairs and projects. One reason for creating a threshold requirement is the cost of the administrative burden relative to the cost of the actual project. For example, eliminating prevailing wage on smaller projects, e.g., those less than \$50,000, will result in more local bids and decrease the overall cost for these smaller public works projects.
- 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.

### **3. Opportunities for Other Intergovernmental Agreements**

- Advertise Downers Grove Township Senior Programs, so residents know of additional options available to them
- Advertise DG Township Dial-A-Ride in more detail, so residents know they could use this service to attend Darien Park District programming
- Work with City of Darien to have direct link to Darien Park District seasonal brochures, to reach additional residents
- Continue to explore additional joint programs with other government agencies, such as the Library
- Continue to explore partnerships with other government agencies, such as partnering with Willowbrook to offer additional senior programs to our residents



**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT DATE FINAL REPORT APPROVED BY EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE]

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ [CHAIR'S SIGNATURE]

Dated: 2/12/24 [INSERT DATE FINAL REPORT APPROVED BY EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE]

Signed: Ray Jablonick [CHAIR'S SIGNATURE]