

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE
ROUND LAKE AREA PARK DISTRICT**



**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY
ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2024**

I. Purpose

The Round Lake Area Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 11, 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:

Nick Metropulos	President
Sarah Wright	Vice President
Nathalie Alvarez	Treasurer
Lisett Secundino	Commissioner
Tim Pasternak	Commissioner
Christine Gentes	Resident
Pam Haines	Resident
Katie Gamroth	Executive Director
Karyn Nicholas	Superintendent of Recreation

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
June 13, 2024	6:00 p.m. Robert W. Rolek Community Center
July 11, 2024	5:00 p.m. Robert W. Rolek Community Center
August 8, 2024	5:00 p.m. Robert W. Rolek Community Center
September 12, 2024	6:00 p.m. Robert W. Rolek Community Center

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

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 (5) 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 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 6.5% of the local tax bill. Additionally, only 48% of the revenue earned by the Park District is generated through property taxes. The remaining 52% is generated charges for services, interest income, and other revenue sources.

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 and Administration Policy Manual
- Employee Manual
- Park Code
- Safety Manual
- Parks Department Operation Manual
- Master Plan

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 Special Recreation Association of Central Lake 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 can 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 seven (7) 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:

- Special Recreation Building
- Sports Center
- Robert W. Rolek Community Center
- Aquatics Center
- Prairie Grass Nature Museum
- Children's Neighborhood

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 greater without its participation and partnership in the SRA.

In 2023, the SRA successfully served 51 residents in 499 programs. The SRA also supported 7 participants in inclusive programs that were provided by the Park District.

The Park District is 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. Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies

- Lake County Forest Preserve
 - Easement agreement Fairfield and Nippersink
- Grayslake Park District
 - Avon Township Youth Baseball Lease Agreement

3. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government

- Round Lake School District 116
 - Intergovernmental Agreement – facility use
- Indian Hill School
 - Intergovernmental Agreement – facility use
- Grayslake School District 46
 - Intergovernmental Agreement – facility use
- Village of Round Lake Beach
 - Intergovernmental Agreement
 - Easement agreement
 - Shared parking lot construction
 - License Agreement
 - Self-service watercraft station
- Village of Round Lake Heights
 - Intergovernmental Agreement
 - Cedarwood Circle Park
 - Tomahawk Trail Park

- Village of Round Lake
 - Intergovernmental Agreement – Silverleaf Glen Park
 - Facility use agreement – concerts
- Lake County DOT
 - Intergovernmental Agreement – pedestrian walkway
- Round Lake Management Commission
 - Intergovernmental Agreement with Round Lake, Round Lake Beach, and Round Lake Park.

4. Intergovernmental agreements with the State of Illinois

- Source Well – NJPA Cooperative Purchasing Agreement
- National Auto Fleet Purchasing Agreement

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

- Avon Township Youth Baseball Field Use Agreement

6. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits

- Mano-a-Mano facility usage

7. Partnerships with for profit organizations

- All About Balloons
- Avon Township
- BCU
- Catholic Charities
- Counseling Corner
- Dragon Martial Arts
- Edward Jones
- Great Lakes Credit Union
- Jeff Ellis Management
- Meijer
- NorthShore University Health Systems
- Oak Hill Supportive Living
- Orthodontic Experts
- Raymond Chevrolet
- State Bank of the Lake
- United Way

- Vipers Hockey

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

- Snow removal agreement with the Round Lake Library

VI. 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, 30 individuals volunteered 60 hours of service to the Park District.

Youth employment. The Park District is an employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed 9 youth under the age of 18. Due to DCFS licensing the District is not able to utilize youth staff as effectively as other agencies.

Friend of Round Lake Parks Foundation. Last year, the Foundation raised \$1,000 that helps to provide scholarship opportunities for summer camp.

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.

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 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.

Instead, the Park District provides all the programs, facilities, and services to the community with a 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.

VII. Transparency to the Community

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

Document	Location(s) Available
Annual Tax Levy	Website, Administrative Offices
Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance	Website, Administrative Offices
Agenda and Minutes	Website, Administrative Offices
Comptroller's Annual Finance Report (CAFR)	Website, Administrative Offices
Master Plan	Website, Administrative Offices
Bids and Requests for Proposals	Website, Administrative Offices
Annual Audit	Website, Administrative Offices
ADA Transition Plan	Administrative Offices
Staff Directory	Website, Administrative Offices

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 847-546-8558 or email at katie_gamroth@rlapd.org
- Additionally, the Park District has solicited community input through the following:
 - 2019 Sports Center Park Master Plan public meetings
 - 2021 Special Recreation Services of Central Lake County Special Recreation interest survey
 - 2016 Community-Wide Needs Assessment
 - 2023 and 2024 7-month Dance program survey

- 2023 Child Development Center preschool program survey
- 2023 Pup-a-Palooza event survey
- 2024 Spring Children's Theater program survey

VII. District Awards and Recognition

The District's achievements in the last five years include:

- Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Grant 2019
- Morton Arboretum's Chicago Region Trees Initiative Grant 2024
- IAPD Partnership Award 2023

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:

Robert W. Rolek Community Center

- Administration offices
- 11-room Child Development Center
- Children’s Neighborhood Museum located on the lower level off the gymnasium
 - Tot-size replica of a town for kids 1-6 years of age. An interactive learning space for kids to explore, create, and work on small and large motor skills.
- Gymnasium
- Dance Studio
- Senior Center
- Guest Services Area
- Two meeting rooms

Sports Center

- 50,000 square foot facility
- Adult size, regulation indoor soccer field
- Regulation basketball/volleyball court
- 9,000 square foot mezzanine
- Two preschool rooms
- Multipurpose rental room

Aquatic Center

- Community pool with zero-depth entry and diving board
- Pool is accessible via lift in two locations
- Splash pad features a water play system with splash buckets
- Lifeguard office
- Dance studio in the lower level
- Prairie Grass Nature Museum on the main floor
 - Nature museum with lifelike displays of the natural areas and experiences found in Lake County.

Renwood Golf Course

- 18-Hole golf course
- Driving range

- Heated driving range
- Practice green
- Clubhouse with bar and grill
 - Seasonal indoor golf simulators

Special Recreation Center

- Reconfigured home to have open program space
- Staff offices
- Accessible restrooms

Fairfield Disc Golf Course

- Two playable 18-hole courses

Park Sites

- 60 park sites that contain a variety of
 - Basketball courts
 - Baseball diamonds
 - BMX track
 - Bocce ball
 - Canoe and kayak launch
 - Kayak kiosk for rentals
 - Fishing pier
 - Fitness equipment
 - Football
 - Natural areas
 - Pickleball
 - Picnic shelters
 - Playgrounds
 - Sand volleyball
 - Skate park
 - Sled hill
 - Soccer
 - Splash pad
 - Trails
 - Tennis

2. Programs

The Park District offered over 600 programs with 10,000 participants in 2023.

3. Additional Services

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

- Various clothing, food, and supply drives to benefit local charities and food banks.

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. Before and after school and summer programs offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare options for working families during critical times when school is not in session. These opportunities help to provide alternative opportunities to youth at risk. 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. The Round Lake Area Park District routinely pays fees and charges on an annual basis for the following:

- Safety/Parks and Signage
- State and local liquor license
- Elevator license and inspection
- Fire inspections
- Pool Permits
- Hearing and Vision Screening
- Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems Inspections
- Ordinance/Audit Certification Seals
- Sewer

The example fees listed above are illustrative of duplicate fees for similar services across local government entities including at the Village, Township, County and State levels. The District recognizes that these 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. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Park District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees on the Park District not only leads to inefficiency, but it is also shortsighted.

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 grant processes are often overly complicated to apply for. Staff at the state level can be hard to reach when looking for guidance on application processes. Once grant funding has been awarded, there are time consuming reports that are due monthly or quarterly to the state. And to finish the process, even with reports completed it takes a long time to receive awarded grant money.

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 devoted up to one half time employee to satisfy FOIA requests. Often the individuals/businesses submitting the FOIA requests are from outside of the park district boundaries, and they appear to be seeking specific information to benefit their line of business, 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) limit how far back a non-resident can request information; (3) staff time and costs should be included in the amount that is reimbursable for non-resident 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. Last year, the park district spent nearly \$1,000 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) 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.

d) 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.

4. Opportunities for Increased Transparency

As illustrated above, the Park District is transparent in its operations. The following are opportunities for increased transparency:

- Board member photos and term years
- Community survey results

5. Opportunities for Other Intergovernmental Agreements

6. Opportunities for Savings such as Energy Efficiency Projects, Joint Purchasing

- Seek out combined purchasing power across the communities we serve.

X. OTHER

The Round Lake Area Park District not only serves Round Lake but also the communities of Round Lake Beach, Round Lake Heights, Round Lake Park, and Hainesville. Similar to a Special Recreation Association (SRA), the Round Lake Area Park District can effectively and efficiently offer a broader range of successful program opportunities to community members.

Dated: September 12, 2024

Signed: /s/ Nick Metropulos