



PARK
DISTRICT
OF OAK PARK

2014 Comprehensive Master Plan

Park District of Oak Park

Adopted December 18, 2014

2. Engage

Throughout the Engage project phase, the project team focused on community outreach and dialogue facilitation. Engagement with the community was conducted through one-on-one stakeholder interviews and small focus group meetings as well as an independently conducted, statistically valid, community attitude and interest survey. These methods of interaction served the following primary objective: to help provide the team with an understanding of the needs of project stakeholders and the broader community.

Community Engagement and Outreach Summary

Summary of Public Input

An involved community engagement strategy has helped the project team respond to planning process goals. Through stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings, the project team spoke to a broad spectrum of community members and project stakeholders. Park District staff provided the Lakota Group team with a list of stakeholder groups and key individuals, representing a variety of Park District parks and recreation-related advisory committees, affiliate groups as well as representatives from Park District staff, both School District 97 and School District 200, Village of Oak Park, and other representatives from the community at large.

Over 60 stakeholders were interviewed over the course of eight focus group discussions. Each discussion was led by one or more members of the consultant team and organized around a series of pre-approved questions. The following groups were represented:

- Residents
- Village Staff
- Current/Former Village Elected Officials
- Park District Staff
- Former Park Board Members
- Oak Park Township
- Oak Park School District 97
- Oak Park School District 200
- Oak Park Library
- West Suburban Special Recreation Association
- Park District Citizen Committee (PDCC)
- Greening Advisory Committee (GAC)
- Art Advisory Committee (AAC)
- Senior Advisory Committee (SAC)
- Parks Foundation
- Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory (FOPCON)
- Friends of Oak Park Dogs (FOPD)
- Collaboration for Early Childhood Care & Education
- Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest
- Oak Park Arts Advisory Committee
- West Cook YMCA
- Oak Park River Forest Pony Baseball
- Oak Park Youth Baseball & Softball (OPYBS)
- Oak Park AYSO Youth Soccer
- Chicago Edge Soccer
- Team Millennium/Swimming
- Hockey
- Gymnastics
- Adult Sports
- Oak Park Festival Theater

Additionally a series of one-on-one interviews was conducted with all members of the current Park Board and other individuals selected by the Park District. These included:

Park Board Members

- Jessica Bullock
- Paul Aeschleman
- Victor Guarino
- Sandy Lentz
- David Wick

Key Community Informants

- Peter Barber, Oak Park Village Board
- James Foster, Impact Basketball Academy
- Dan Haley, Wednesday Journal
- Mary Jo Schuler, Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation

General Themes

While a range of discussion occurred throughout these conversations, there were several common themes that arose in most of the sessions.

Space Constraints and Limitations

Throughout most of the discussions there was a recognition that there is limited space within Oak Park to accomplish open space and recreational goals. This constraint leads to many challenges with programming of fields and specialized indoor facilities and the ability to allow for non-programmed times for drop-in use.

While there was recognition of these challenges, many of the affiliates or special interest groups strongly advocated for their programs saying they need additional space or time. Suggestions and thoughts discussed included the following:

- Recommendations to create opportunities for new spaces through the temporary use of vacant spaces within the Village.
- Perception that there is a lack of flexible open space and a desire for some un-programmed or “family time” on the fields.
- Taxes were seen as a major issue within the community, so additional tax burden for new facilities could create concerns. Additionally, acquisition of new land or buildings by the Park District would remove them from the tax rolls.

Attitude and Interest Survey Summary

As part of the overall Comprehensive Plan effort, the Park District contracted with Public Research Group (PRD) to conduct a statistically valid community recreation survey to identify and update understanding of the resident's needs and preferences related to recreation.

The survey was administered to a random sampling of households in the community, from which 2,268 responses were collected. Those included 2,068 email responses, 188 mail and 12 telephone.

The survey included 21 questions which included some quantifiable results and some answers to open-ended questions.

The full results are summarized in the *Park District of Oak Park - 2014 Community Recreation Survey Analysis (August 2014)*. Additionally, the results are used as to inform the Analyze phase of the process. However, there are several take-aways worth mentioning:

- The District's parks and facilities are heavily used by the community.
- Compared to the 2004 and 2010 surveys, there is an improvement in how residents evaluate the physical condition of the parks, reflecting an awareness of the work completed by the Park District.
- Of the District's facilities, the most respondents indicated they use the Conservatory.
- The neighborhood community centers rated the worst when it comes to condition.
- There is a majority support for the Park District to build and operate both an indoor pool and an indoor multi-use facility, though the community does not have a clear support for how these facilities should be paid for.
- The community is almost evenly split when it comes to prioritizing future investment towards additional greenspace or new facilities.