

PARK DISTRICT OF OAK PARK RECYCLING & ZERO WASTE PLAN



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Park District of Oak Park Recycling & Zero Waste Plan

PURPOSE

As stewards of public land and resources, environmental sustainability is something that the Park District must support and make part of its daily operations. This must be done not only to protect future interests, but also because as resources become more scarce and regulated, the costs of water, utilities, trash removal and other basic services are already having an impact on Park District financial resources and staff time. The Park District has developed this plan to outline efforts specifically related to the reduction of waste and amount of materials entering landfills, both through recycling and also work towards less waste or zero-waste operations where feasible.

Objectives

- To eliminate waste wherever possible by encouraging purchases and actions that avoid the creation of waste in the first place.
- To identify opportunities to reuse materials and services.
- To expand recycling and composting services for the Park District.
- To reduce the volume and toxicity of wastes.

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Statement of Philosophy

The community and the Park District are increasingly aware of the environmental issues that affect the quality of life. It is the intent of the Park District to assume a leadership role in the development and use of sound environmental policies, practices, and educational opportunities.

Environmental Principles

The Park District will to the greatest extent practicable:

- Promote the acquisition, protection, and environmentally sensitive management of open space and natural habitat areas.
- Protect, enhance, and interpret the Park District's natural resource heritage.
- Design, develop, and maintain parks, facilities, and natural areas in a manner that enhances and protects the environment through conservation of soil, water, and energy; by minimizing the

adverse impact on air and water quality; by reducing waste; and by utilizing in the most efficient manner possible/practical.

- Encourage recycling practices that utilize renewable resources and minimize the use of non-renewable ones.
- Practice integrated pest management, which reduces the Park District's dependence on pesticides.
- Abide by the federal and state Endangered Species Protection Acts in order to avoid adverse impacts on endangered or threatened species during Park District operations.
- Function as a role model within the community by actively promoting public awareness and educational programs that encourage environmentally sensitive lifestyles.

Environmental Practices

- a. Open Space and Natural Habitats Preservation. The Park District shall develop relations and agreements with public and private organizations and individuals in order to have open space and natural habitats preserved and or managed.
- b. Bio-Diversity. The Park District will strive for the introduction and maintenance of naturalized areas within our parks for their many benefits to all forms of life. By incorporating biodiversity into our park system we can educate the community as well as foster a culture of conservation. The park district will strive to use native planting and a mixture of tree species throughout the park system for best results. Additionally, the Park District will designate specific areas for native plantings.
- c. Park & Facility Design and Construction. The Park District will adequately plan and construct using the latest available information for new and renovated open space areas and facilities. Whenever possible, these projects will not negatively impact the environment. The District will strive to conserve soil, water and energy resources, and protect indoor and outdoor air quality whenever practical.
- d. Energy Resource Management. The Park District will continually upgrade utilities in a financially responsible way to improve efficiencies in energy use and seek alternative energy sources.
- e. Tree Management. The Tree Management Policy is intended to facilitate the Park District's mission, recognizing the immense value of its trees, which provide residents and visitors to our village with beauty, shade, cooling and enhanced air quality, as well as reduction of storm water run-off and atmospheric carbon dioxide. Trees are the only asset in our park system that increases in value with age as other infrastructure components lose value with age. Fundamental to the Park District's tree management policy is the setting of specific strategies to enhance the long-term value of our trees and the tree inventory is the basis for developing these strategies. The Park District will strive to maintain a healthy tree system which includes pruning, inoculation, protection and replacement. Additionally, the Park District will keep an inventory of all trees within its system and provide an annual report to the Park Board.
- f. Integrated Pest Management Program. The Park District recognizes the importance of both safe and attractive parks and open space and has established a balanced Integrated Pest Management Program. This program utilizes cultural methods that include:

- Selecting appropriate plant species and their proper location.
- Use of preventative maintenance procedures.
- Promoting early detection of problems
- Utilizing natural control methods, where possible
- Testing for better application methods
- Minimizing overall pesticide use

It is the policy of the Park District of Oak Park that Integrated Pest Management (IPM) will be used to prevent and control pest problems in all parks and facilities maintained by the District. The principles of IPM require that non-chemical methods of pest control be given preference over chemical controls and the least hazardous chemical controls be given preference over other chemical controls. The goal of IPM is the reduction of chemical pesticides used in outdoor landscapes and indoor facilities. IPM usually results in a graduated response to any potential problem, with natural control methods being employed first and chemical pesticides used only as a last resort. In the park setting, IPM has become standard practice for many public agencies, which must consider the health of patrons, including young children and people with chemical sensitivities. Instead of relying on pesticides as the first choice for managing pest problems, IPM uses a hierarchy of pest control methods to maintain pest populations at or below levels determined by park management.

- g. Green Operations. The Park District will strive to incorporate green cleaning products and practices within the daily operations where possible. When possible products that carry the Green Seal's GS-37 shall be used in both public and employee areas. Specific language for environmentally safe and sensitive products shall be included in RFP documents when appropriate. The District shall strive to purchase products for use in facility and park operations to minimize negative environmental impact. Contract award will be considered with a 15% premium for green products when considering lowest responsive and responsible bidder.
- h. Recycle & Reuse. The Park District will reduce the amount of material going into landfills by recycling paper, cardboard, aluminum and glass whenever and wherever in the park system it is reasonably possible and by composting landscaping waste
- i. Carry In Carry Out. The Park District will encourage all of our affiliate users to exercise the philosophy of "Carry In / Carry Out" at all playing fields. By trying to be more conscious about generating less waste, using more reusable containers, increasing recycling, assuming responsibility for the trash we make and taking better care of our parks we improve the experience for all users. The waste minimization program's success depends on the cooperation of all coaches, players and families.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION

Waste and Recycling Estimates

In conjunction with the Village of Oak Park, the Park District's specialized facilities, namely the John Hedges Administration Building, Cheney Mansion, Gymnastics & Recreation Center, Oak Park Conservatory, Rehm Pool, and Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex have been part of the Village of Oak Park's solid waste and recycling system. The Conservatory and the Cheney Mansion also participate in the Village's compost and food scrap collection program.

Trash picked up at the Administration Building is disposed of via two "2-yard boxes" (2 cubic yards each) which are stored in the alley in the back of the facility at 218 Madison St. In addition to these boxes, eight 96 gallon roll-a-way containers are maintained for the collection and storage of paper, glass, metal, and plastic recyclable materials. Pick-up and dumping of all these containers occurs one time per week. The general percentage (by weight) of material being recycled through this program has been calculated by the Village Environmental Services Division for the year 2014 to be 39%. The previous years - 2013, 2012, 2011, and 2010 were respectively 38%.

Using the Administration Building as the key example and knowing that trash weighs an average of 350 pounds per cubic yard, we can make the following rough estimates:

$$350 \text{ pounds/cubic yard} \times 4 \text{ cubic yards (two } 2\text{yd}^3 \text{ containers/week)} = 1,400 \text{ pounds/week}$$

$$1,400 \text{ pounds/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks/year} = \sim 72,800 \text{ pounds/year (36.4 tons/year)}$$

Note: The trash placed into the 2-yard boxes is very mixed, being comprised of materials ranging from organic materials from the employee lunchroom to miscellaneous "park trash" which includes soils, masonry, and any other debris commonly found in parks.

A 96 gallon roll-a way container (1/2 cubic yard) of mixed recyclables weighs on average 110 pounds. Much of this waste is dense paper, frequently old brochures, cardboard boxes, copy paper, in addition to crushed cans, metal waste from the maintenance shop and other recycled components. Much of our play center equipment is HD plastic, which is also placed in these containers. Once again using the Administration Building as the key example and knowing that recycling weighs an average of 110 pounds per half a cubic yard, we can make the following rough estimates:

$$110 \text{ pounds/container} \times 8 \text{ containers/week} = 880 \text{ pounds/week}$$

$$880 \text{ pounds/week} \times 52 \text{ weeks/year} = \sim 45,760 \text{ pounds/year (22.9 tons/year)}.$$

This results in the estimated total annual tonnage for the Park District's Administration Building to be 59.3 tons. Although estimates, 22.9 tons of recycled material out of a total of 59.3 tons results in the percentage of recycled materials to fall at 38.6%, which is incredibly close to the information provided by the Village of Oak Park. Staff report that trash and recyclables moved at the other sites result in similar proportions.

Challenges

Measuring Waste

As mentioned above, even at one of the Park District's main facilities, it is challenging to collect hard data on the Park District's recycling and zero waste efforts. Trash generated at parks is also difficult to accurately measure for these reasons and others. For example, the Park District sponsors a "Carry in-Carry out" Program at several sites in which the youth soccer and baseball leagues collect the largely paper and plastic trash generated during the course of their games (such as water bottles, sports drink bottles, snacks, etc.) and take it with them as they leave the park. Trash cans have been removed from these areas in order to encourage the carry out process. Although this has resulted in less waste requiring pick-up from the parks, the waste is most likely placed in an individual coach's home recycling containers, which does not have an impact on the reduction of waste in the community overall.

Public Participation in Recycling Efforts

Encouraging recycling with the public within the parks is also a recurring challenge. Trash containers are present in all the parks and for a number of years the Park District had a "trio" of cans grouped together, one receptacle designated for cans and bottles, one for paper products, and one for "other" organic trash. "Cans & Bottles" and "Paper" containers were continuously contaminated with non-recyclable waste, including with dog feces as pet owners indiscriminately dumped their pet excrement in improper receptacles. The recycling centers could not accept recyclable materials with these contaminants and insisted that the Park District separate out the offending materials. This work would had to be completed by hand and Park District staff determined that this was too time-consuming and expensive, as well as a health risk, so recycling in the parks was abandoned.

Lack of Space

The continuing issue of lack of space also presents challenges to the Park District. In previous years, the Park District would run tree materials through a chipper to create mulch. The mulch was kept at a location on the Ridgeland Common property for eventual use in parks and was also made available to the public. This resulted in these tree materials no longer being buried in a landfill, saved staff and vehicle costs, provided materials that the Park District no longer needed to purchase (mulch), and offered a free benefit to the public. With the redevelopment of the Ridgeland Common property, there is no longer space to continue this operation.

Recycling Guidelines & Acceptable Items

Guidelines

- Material must be clean and free of food waste. Rinse bottles, jars and can. Discard caps and lids.
- Do not use plastic bags to hold paper or containers
- Automobile fluid containers are not accepted
- Polystyrene (#6 plastic) products are not accepted
- Plastic toys and furniture are not accepted
- When in doubt, throw it out

Acceptable Items

- Glass bottles and jars (all colors)
- Steel, aluminum and bi-metal cans
- Plastics – check for these numbers on or near the bottom of the container:
 - #1 PETE (plastic soft drink bottles)
 - #2 HDPE (milk or water jugs, detergent bottles)
 - #3 PVC narrow neck containers like household cleaners, health and beauty products
 - #4 LDPE (margarine tubs and plastic rings from beverage cans)
 - #5 PP (yogurt cups, narrow neck syrup and ketchup bottles)
 - #7 OTHER (plastic resin grocery narrow neck containers)
- Aluminum foil and formed containers
- Empty paint cans
- Empty aerosol cans
- Newspapers and inserts
- Magazines
- Telephone books
- Paperback books
- Chipboard (cereal and cracker boxes)
- Wet-strength cardboard (beverage cartons)
- Junk mail
- Office paper
- Gift wrapping paper
- Brown paper grocery bags
- Corrugated cardboard (place small pieces in the cart; cut and flatten larger pieces into three-foot-square pieces and place next to cart)
- Prepare jars & containers for collection by rinsing and discarding all lids.

Current Efforts

The Park District of Oak Park is committed to environmental friendly practices and in an effort to reduce the amount of material that goes into landfills generated as a result of park and recreation operations, has undertaken a number of efforts and developed procedures aimed at landfill material reduction and increased materials recycling. This is a multi-tiered approach that maximizes recycling efforts in specific areas based on results that are achievable.

Single Stream Recycling Programs

The Park District works with waste/recycling companies that provide single stream recycling programs. Single stream recycling does not require that recyclable materials be sorted into separate containers. Instead, all recyclable materials may be placed in a single bin, simplifying the program and improving the possibility of success.

Environmentally-Friendly Purchasing Policy

The Park District currently has in place a policy that allows for staff to spend an additional 15% above the “lowest price found” for a product if that product produces an environmental benefit.

Vending

In facilities where vending machines are located, all beverages are served in recyclable bottles or cans. The Gymnastics and Recreation Facility and the Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex both have installed bottle fill water fountains aimed at reducing plastic bottles that could go in landfills.

Offices and Staff Spaces

Recycling in areas such as office spaces, break rooms, copier rooms, etc. is easily managed with a high level of staff communication, training, and control. While eliminating all waste is difficult, the vast majority of material generated by staff can be recycled. This is encouraged through:

- Signage listing acceptable recyclable materials and non-acceptable materials are posted on bulletin boards in staff break rooms, work rooms and offices.
- Each staff member receives, annually a list of acceptable and unacceptable recyclable materials as well as the written standard outlining the Recycling/Zero Waste Procedure.
- All staff desks and work stations have a combination waste/recycle bin for “Desk Side” Recycling that features a large recycle bin and a small waste side basket to encourage staff to start the recycling process at their individual work stations.
- Each staff break room, work room, copier room and common space has a recycle and waste receptacle with signage indicating acceptable recyclable material.
- Recycle receptacles are lined with clear recyclable bags, identifying the contents as materials for recycle.
- Waste receptacles are lined with black bags indicating contents as waste materials.
- Each main Park District facility has either a 96 yard tote, or a 2 yard recycle materials container located in the designated area for weekly or bi-weekly pick-up, depending on the facility need.
- Maintenance staff and contracted cleaning staff empty recycle and waste containers daily, depositing the clear recycle liners in the recycle container and the black waste liners in the waste dumpster for the scheduled pick up by the recycle/waste hauler.

Concession Operations

In the operation of concessions, staff adheres to standards of operations that minimize the amount of waste generated in both the operation of the concession and from the public consumption of concession products. The majority of material produced for disposal in concession operations should be eligible for recycle. The target is 75% recycle and 25% waste. Staff will on an on-going basis work to improve this ratio in favor of recycling.

- Consumable products that are purchased for resale are packaged in recyclable materials.
- Consumable products are served on or in recyclable paper plates, recyclable paper trays, boxes or aluminum foil.
- Beverages are served in recyclable paper cups with no lids or straws.
- Napkins are made from recycled material.
- When deliveries are received, staff unpacks boxes, stores product, and then breaks down boxes for recycling in the 2 yard recycle containers and placed neatly to maximize space.
- Concession areas have a recycle and waste receptacle with signage indicating acceptable recyclable material.
- During operations, staff takes care to minimize waste by disposing of recyclable material in the proper recycling receptacle and disposing of waste in the proper waste receptacle.
- At the end of each shift the recycle and waste receptacles are emptied by staff into the appropriate 2 yard containers located on-site.

Facility Public Spaces

Recycling in Public Areas such as lobbies, lounges, bleachers and locker rooms is challenging. Educating the public about what can be recycled and what is waste requires strong communication and staff encouragement.

- Signage listing acceptable recyclable materials and non-acceptable materials are posted at recycle and waste receptacle locations.
- Each staff member receives training and information regarding facility recycling efforts and expectations annually and upon hire.
- Flyers are available to the public which describe facility recycling efforts, and how the public can contribute positively to recycling efforts.
- Announcements are made by staff over the PA system (where available) on a regular basis reminding patrons to recycle.
- Public recycle receptacles are located in public spaces lined with clear recyclable bags, identifying the contents as materials for recycle.
- Waste receptacles are located next to recycle receptacles lined with black bags indicating contents as waste materials.
- Maintenance staff or cleaning contractor staff, empty public recycle and public waste containers daily, depositing the clear recycle liners in the recycle container and the black waste liners in the waste dumpster for the scheduled pick up by the recycle/waste hauler.

Composting and Yard Waste

The Oak Park Conservatory has a number of additional environmentally friendly practices including:

- Two 9 cubic yard bins are used for composting yard waste that is produced throughout the Park District system. These are emptied into a yard waste receptacle picked up by waste management and brought to their composting facility.
- One 8 cubic feet worm compost bin is utilized for composting employee and volunteer food scraps consisting of fruit and vegetable waste only. The compost is used on conservatory growing beds.

Carry-In/Carry-Out Program

The Carry In/Carry-Out Program is an effort between the Park District of Oak Park and affiliate youth sports groups, including Oak Park Youth Baseball and AYSO, to reduce the amount of waste material brought to the parks that must be disposed of. Blue recycling bags are provided by the Park District and waste bags are provided by the teams. Any waste/recyclable material brought into the parks by team members is separated by coaches or parent volunteers into the appropriate bags and removed from the park by the coach or parent volunteer to be disposed of properly at home. A full description of the Carry-In/Carry-Out Program is sent to team coaches and league official to distribute to participant parents and guardians.

Special Waste Materials

Many materials that cannot be readily recycled in a single stream program are recycled using 3rd parties to reduce the toxicity of materials ending up in landfills.

- Batteries and Fluorescent Bulbs are collected at Buildings and Grounds, 218 Madison Street, and are dropped off for proper recycling at Batteries Plus in Oak Park.
- Oil is collected by Buildings and Grounds staff and is then delivered to the Village of Oak Park's Public Works Building for recycling.
- Electronics are collected at Buildings and Grounds and can be dropped off for recycling at the Village of Oak Park's Public Works Building on South Blvd on the last Saturday of the month from May through October.

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

Work with the Park District's Greening Advisory Committee

The Park District's Greening Advisory Committee makes a natural fit for this plan in offering advice for staff to expand their efforts towards zero waste and increased recycling. As volunteers, they may also offer support and help the Park District secure necessary resources to move the Park District's Recycling and Zero Waste Program further.

Put Measurements in Place to Track Progress

The Park District's new Performance Measurement Program has proven to be successful in focusing the agency on making improvements to key metrics. The development of performance indicators related to recycling, zero-waste, and utility reduction could also result in similar improvements.

Expand Training for Staff and Public

On-going training and education will be key to ensuring success. Even small efforts to educate youth in Park District programs by creating a craft of melting down old crayons into "super crayons" instead of throwing them away, or educating parents about packing zero-waste lunches for their children in summer camps will make a difference.

Actively Encourage Staff to Identify Ways to Eliminate Waste

Encouraging staff to take the time to take themselves off of mailing lists, for example, will help reduce the amount of recyclable materials entering Park District facilities in the first place.

Expand Composting Services

Composting collection programs for discarded food and food-contaminated paper could be a viable option for facilities with concession sales.