



Wilmette Park District
Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 6, 2021
5:30 p.m. – Village Hall Training Room

Attendees Present

Commissioners/Committee: Chair Patrick Duffy and Allison Frazier

Staff: Superintendent of Recreation Emily Guynn and Superintendent of Parks and Planning Kristi Solberg

Additional Staff: Executive Director Steve Wilson

Visitors: Alan Golden, Laurie Leibowiz, Walter Keats, Piper Rothschild and Kent Nusekabel

Absent

Commissioner Kara Kosloskus

I. Meeting Called to Order

Meeting called to order at 5:31 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes

A. November 1, 2021

Commissioner Frazier moved and Commissioner Duffy seconded a motion to approve the minutes for the November 1, 2021 Parks and Recreation Committee meeting.

By a unanimous voice vote, **motion carried.**

III. Park Landscape Plan Presentation by Upland Design

Maria Blood, Project Manager at Upland Design, initiated the discussion by providing some background on Upland Design as well as her credentials. She advised that the Park Landscape Plan focuses on seven key parks within the District, specifically Centennial Park, Community Playfields, Hibbard Park, Howard Park, Maple Park, Thornwood Park and Vattman Park. With respect to design goals, Upland Design strove to create enhancements for each park, including trees, shrubs, plants and grasses. Additionally, Upland Design strove to create habitat for wildlife using mostly native plantings, improve existing plant beds, and create a guide for future Memorial Tree plantings to identify where Memorial Trees were, where Memorial Trees could be placed and a list of tree variety for the Memorial Tree plantings moving forward. They have designed a master plan list specific to Wilmette and northern Illinois. To accomplish this, Upland referenced resources specific to this region such as Openlands and Morton Arboretum. The Consultants also visited each site in person and spent hours at each site to identify current park uses and how this may affect landscape-planting materials. Lastly, Upland considered maintenance for any future plantings to ensure the Parks and Planning Department is not overwhelmed.

When creating the Master Plan, the Consultants analyzed what is native to the area versus a variety. If there was a change in variety, there was a reason behind it. For example, the Autumn Gold Ginkgo is a salt tolerant tree, which would make it good for parking lots. The Consultants also recommended an Exclamation London Planetree as this species is resistant to disease and frost cracking. Commissioner Duffy asked for clarification regarding the word variety. Ms. Blood advised that variety means the tree was created from the native cultivar but specific genetics were taken out to make the species more resistant. There needs to be a balance between planting native trees that are original to this area and variety trees that are easier for maintenance and safety purposes. These variety trees are still somewhat related to the native trees but genetically altered. For example, the native Hawthorn tree has thorns whereas the variety Hawthorn does not have thorns.

Moving on, Ms. Blood advised that there are not many native trees with respect to Evergreen trees. However, the Consultants were able to incorporate Evergreens in spaces that needed screening or winter interest. There is also a Master Plan Plant List for ornamental trees. Ms. Blood then pointed out the percentages located at the bottom of each list and advised this is the percentage of native versus variety within each category. Overall, the total of native plantings included in the list is 69% and the total of variety plantings is 31%. She emphasized that this is not the percentage of plantings actually being used but rather a guide.

The Master Plan Plant List for perennials, ornamental grasses, groundcovers and bulbs are more of a 50/50 mix of variety and native because the Consultants sought to include perennials that were longer blooming for landscape enhancement purposes. Commissioner Duffy then asked for clarification regarding annual and perennial plantings. Ms. Blood advised that perennials grow again the next year whereas annuals will die at the end of the season. The list focuses on perennials with minimal maintenance, long color and the ability to grow back each year. Commissioner Frazier asked if this list were flexible and if it were possible to swap certain plants out for another native plant. She referenced a resident e-mail that expressed concerns over additional Hosta plantings, as the resident believes there are already too many within the Park System. Ms. Blood confirmed and reiterated that the Master Landscape Plan is more so a guide. Superintendent Solberg advised that staff's goal moving forward is to use this Master Plan as a guide to plant within specific environments.

Ms. Blood then directed the Committee back to the individual plans for each park. At Centennial Park, general landscape improvement recommendations include:

- Increasing use of native plantings;
- Removing and replacing invasive species such as Burning Bush and Barberry;
- Removing and replacing diseased trees;
- Removing and replacing Memorial Trees as they decline;
- Adding mulch tree rings to trees in lawn areas;
- Refreshing planting beds around Park Identification Signs;
- Identifying locations for possible tree groupings; and

- Increasing planting diversity.

Areas identified by numbers within a hexagon are areas the Consultants believe need to be enhanced. One area in particular is the parking lot, which currently has no plantings within it. Throughout the Master Plan, Consultants kept towards the entrances for these areas so that it is easier on the Park District to maintain. Areas identified by with a circle and a corresponding number underneath are suggested tree plantings. Commissioner Duffy stated that there are a grove of Pine trees on the corner of Old Glenview Road and Crawford Avenue. He noted that nothing grows underneath Pine trees and asked if this is the reason why there is nothing planned for this corner. Ms. Blood reiterated that the Consultants sought to keep towards the entrances of the park but agreed it would be a hard corner to plant in because of the Pines. Commissioner Frazier questioned whether it were the best use of Park District resources to focus on planting pods within the parking lot as opposed to the perimeters of the park. She noted these pods fill with snow during the winter and suggested it would be hard for a plant to grow there. Superintendent Solberg stated an ongoing maintenance challenge has been to get snowplows not to push snow onto the grass in the parking lot. The goal has always been to push snow into a corner of the parking lot and come back later to remove that snow and alleviate parking congestion. If the Committee agrees to plantings within the parking lot, Superintendent Solberg stated she would ensure staff does not plow onto the new plantings. Continuing on, Ms. Blood noted a lack of plantings near the south entrance and exit that this Master Plan would address. She suggested plantings such as New Jersey Tea, Cat's Pajamas Catmint and Russian Stonecrop. These plants would provide depth and color to the entrance. Plantings such as the Rosy Returns Daylily and Karl Foerster Feather Reed Grass were suggested for the east entrance of Centennial Park. Ms. Blood acknowledged Karl Foerster was a variety species but advised that native grass tends to be very tall so if the Committee were to consider a native grass planting, she asked they be mindful of this with respect to sightlines. If the Committee were to consider plantings in the parking lots, Ms. Blood recommended soil testing prior to installation of plants to ensure a higher success rate.

At Community Playfields, Ms. Blood advised there are currently 291 trees. Upland sought to keep tree plantings along the perimeter of the park because of Park District operations and the routine shifting of fields for sports. She suggested beautification near the entrance sign of the park and the playground. With respect to the supplemental rain gardens near the tennis courts, Upland identified several areas that could be spruced up with additional perennial plantings. There was a brief conversation regarding the irrigation pump, as the

pump will be relocated to a different environment. Commissioner Duffy referenced a resident e-mail regarding concerns over the Berry Poppins Winterberry and asked whether this plant were poisonous. Superintendent Solberg advised that the plant can make domestic animals mildly sick but they are advantageous for birds and other wildlife. Similar to the west side of Community Playfields, Upland has created landscape plans surrounding the east park sign.

Considering Hibbard Park is landlocked, the landscaping options are slightly limited. Ms. Blood explained there is room for improvement by incorporating additional landscaping into the existing plant beds. This can be achieved through native plantings. A benefit of native plantings is that once they are established, they require less water resources. Plantings such as the Rosy Returns Daylily would provide a beautiful pop of color. Another consideration is lower level plants around the fire hydrant for visibility reasons. Additionally, perennials and grasses can withstand being trampled on in the event of an emergency were to occur.

Howard Park offers community sports fields, open space, a neighborhood pedestrian connection, the maintenance facility and the Warming House Youth Center. In the Master Plan, the Consultants have contemplated shade trees for spectators along the perimeter of the park. Ms. Blood encouraged smaller and more diverse tree groupings to protect the grove if disease were to infect the area. Similar to other parks, the entrance sign would be enhanced. Ms. Blood also suggested landscape improvements around Spire Monument.

Near the playground at Maple Park, there is understory and landscape that needs to be refreshed. As such, the Consultants focused on a few additional trees. Through community outreach, the Consultants learned that residents enjoy the open space at Maple Park so Upland did not want to inhibit this by planning trees in the open space.

Thornwood Park offers sports fields, tennis courts, a seating area, a playground and open space. Due to the sports fields and open space, the Consultants again sought to keep tree plantings on the perimeter. Additionally, the Consultants have suggested trees near the playground to provide shade on the playground. Enhancing the entrance signs is a key feature throughout the Master Landscape Plan. Ms. Blood further suggested a sensory garden for the children as well. Commissioner Frazier contemplated pavers throughout gardens to prevent users from trampling through and creating their own path while exploring.

At Vattmann Park, the Consultants contemplated adding ornamental trees to blend into the existing landscape. The Master Plan suggests lush plantings at both entrances and the island in the middle of the playground. Ms. Blood explained that Hostas are good perennials in this location because they can survive without much water as well as in shaded areas but the Consultants can provide alternatives.

Commissioner Duffy then opened the floor to open public comment (see below).

After public comment, Superintendent Solberg stated that she envisions these plans will take the Parks Department over ten years to accomplish because one planting bed is going to require up to five years of ongoing maintenance. Although not an annual bed that needs to be planted every year, the first couple of years of these perennial gardens will still require a lot of watering and weeding.

Commissioner Duffy thanked Ms. Blood for her presentation.

IV. Communications and Correspondence

Commissioner Duffy acknowledged the Committee did receive some e-mail correspondence that was addressed during the Upland Design presentation.

V. Public Comment/Recognition of Visitors

Commissioner Duffy facilitated public comment. The Attendance Sheet will become part of the permanent record.

Alan Golden – Mr. Golden asked the Committee to not plant trees that drop material such as seed pods near resident houses as they are hard to clean up out of the yards.

Peter Ecket – Mr. Ecket stated he is Mr. Golden's neighbor and echoed similar concerns with regards to trees that drop material. He also commented that trees have not historically been replaced by the Park District and believes the Master Landscape Plans are a good start.

Piper Rothschild – Ms. Rothschild stated she was initially excited by the Master Landscape Plans but does not believe the plan adds enough trees and urged the Board to adopt an Urban Tree Management Plan for maintenance moving forward. She would like to see groves of Oak trees and true native trees. She believes the Master Landscape Plans simply add plantings around signs and existing beds. She is concerned about the lack of true native trees and plants in Upland's schematics and believes genetically modified variety trees are bad for the environment. Commissioner Duffy thanked Ms. Rothschild for her thoughtful comments.

Walter Keats – Mr. Keats suggested an accounting code for Park Management Preservation and Beautification as opposed to spend being absorbed by a general Parks Department code. He believes without a proper accounting code for this spend, residents will not be able properly track Park District spend and upkeep. He is concerned that new landscaping will not be properly maintained. This initiated a brief discussion about how the Park Department is allocated within the budget. It was agreed Director Wilson would meet with Mr. Keats separately to review the budget and explain the account code allocations.

Kent Nusekabel – Mr. Nusekabel asked if the Parks affected by the Village's Stormwater Project will be prioritized for rehabilitation. Director Wilson advised that those parks will be prioritized as the Village has given funds to the Park District for those parks and implemented a deadline as to when those funds can be used by. Mr. Nusekabel agreed these plans were a great start.

VI. Managers' Reports

Superintendent Solberg Reported:

- About twenty years ago, the Parks Staff installed drainage tile underneath Shorewood Park along the trail near the playground. In between the trail and the neighboring property, there is a low spot that holds some water during heavy rain events. Drainage installed then did alleviate some drainage issues. However, recently neighbors of the park installed a fence, which has caused unintentional runoff. Staff is monitoring the situation to determine a solution in the spring.

Superintendent Guynn Reported:

- The Center Fitness Club is promoting a Maintain Campaign. There are currently fourteen people enrolled. As a recruitment initiative, Early Childhood Center parents have received the month of November free and five group fitness passes. Six parents have engaged with this initiative and three of those parents have signed up for an annual membership. Monthly visits are up 17% from October to November. There were over 2,600 visits last month. Total active memberships have increased by 5%. Group fitness attendance has plateaued but staff believes this is because it has been held outside. As of today, group fitness has moved inside. Staff will continue to offer virtual classes.
- Mallinckrodt Senior Center continues to strongly rebuild. The Center is busy from 9AM until 2PM Monday through Friday. The Men's Discussion Group has been brought back. Staff is happy with the utilization.
- Gymnastics is strong. Winter registration is about 80% full and it has just opened. Birthday parties are increasing in popularity with an average between 5 to 6 parties per weekend.
- Last week, staff facilitated the Nutcracker performance, Breakfast with Santa and the Gingerbread Workshop.
- Youth and Men's Basketball Leagues are back online for the first season since the start of the pandemic. Games start in January 2022
- New General Recreation Supervisor, Callie Pekosh, starts December 13th.

- Preschool registration opened November 30th and is steadily taking enrollment.

Commissioner Duffy congratulated staff on the Nutcracker performance and their hard work. Commissioner Frazier suggested that new staff be engaged in reviewing survey data to improve user services.

VII. Unfinished Business

None.

VIII. New Business

None.

IX. Next Meeting

The next Parks and Recreation Committee meeting is to be determined.

X. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, Commissioner Frazier moved and Commissioner Duffy seconded a motion to adjourn the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting at 6:45 p.m.

By a unanimous voice vote, **motion carried.**

Minutes Approved on February 7, 2022.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine A. Serbin

Catherine Serbin
Executive Administrative Assistant