

# EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE FRANKFORT PARK DISTRICT



**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON OCTOBER 22, 2024**

## I. Purpose

The Frankfort Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on September 26, 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:

- Mike McCarey, Commissioner
- Tom Barz, Commissioner
- Tom Ruvoli, Commissioner
- Mark Ponton, Commissioner
- Elmer Gentry, Commissioner
- Brad Baker, Resident Member
- Melissa Cosich, Resident Member
- Gina Hassett, Executive Director

## III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

- Tuesday, September 26, 2023
- Tuesday, November 28, 2023
- Tuesday, October 22, 2024

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 1967. 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: serving four year terms. 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 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 2.66% 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 implemented the following rules, policies, and procedures:

- Board Policies and Procedures Manual
- Personnel Policies/Employee Manual or Handbook
- Comprehensive 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 Lincolnway Special Recreation Association (LWSRA)**

The Park District is part of the Lincolnway Special Recreation Association ("LWSRA"). 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 LWSRA, the Park District networks with eight other local governments to provide many more program opportunities for our community members who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in LWSRA's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

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

LWSRA also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for the Park District programs or inclusive programming. The LWSRA 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, the LWSRA 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 the LWSRA.

In 2023, the LWSRA successfully served 451 member residents in 4,775 programs. The LWSRA also supported 337 participants in inclusive programs that were provided by the Park District.

The Park District is proud of the ongoing collaboration with the LWSRA. 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.**

- The Park District partners with other area Park Districts such as Frankfort Square, Mokena and New Lenox Community Park District to achieve efficiency by co-oping programs and trips to serve the residents.

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

- The Park District has Intergovernmental agreements with Frankfort District 157C and Lincolnway High School District 210. The agreements allow for the Park District to utilize the school facilities for programming opportunities to service the community. The intergovernmental agreement allows for Park District to have priority use after the school districts day and waives user fees or at a reduced cost. The Park District in return for facility access provides mowing services for portions of District 157C's school facilities. The agreement with District 157C allows the Park District to offer a before and after school program and summer day camp.
- The Village and Park District have an intergovernmental agreement that allowed for the Park District to install fitness equipment along the Old Plank Trail that the Village manages.

**4. Partnerships or agreements with athletic organizations that operate sports or other leagues**

- The Park District has user agreements in place with community volunteer athletic organizations including Frankfort Baseball, Frankfort Girls Softball, Falcon Football and Cheer and Lincolnway Soccer. The agreements provide priority use to fields for their programs that serve the residents of Frankfort Park District. These organizations have made substantial investment in the Park District's facilities including but not limited to construction of the fields, athletic lighting, fencing, dugouts and concession and bathroom facilities. With the investment

made by the athletic organizations, the Park District agreed to provide them priority use of the fields during their seasons. The services provided by the volunteer athletic organizations are services that would otherwise be provided by the Park District.

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

- The Park District has a working relationship with the Frankfort Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society, and the Frankfort Lions Club. The Park District provides the community groups with access to facilities and equipment to host their events and/or meetings.

**6. Partnerships with for profit organizations**

- The Park District partners with community businesses that sponsor programming opportunities. The Park District has a long-standing relationship with Town Center Bank who has a multi-year agreement to financially support community events offered by the Park District.

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

- The Park District has a supportive relationship with the Village of Frankfort. The Village and Park District support one another co-oping on community events, sharing event equipment and when needed providing expertise that the other needs. The Village has assisted the Park District with flooding and pond issues that the Park District doesn't have equipment to manage. During the holidays, the Park District and Village partner to recycle Christmas trees.
- The Frankfort Police Department and Frankfort Fire Department provide training to the Park District staff. The public safety teams support the Park District at special events and through education of best practices.
- The Frankfort Library and Park District work together to collaborate, when possible, on programming including offering Little Libraries in neighborhood parks.

## 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, over 100 individuals volunteered 1,000 hours of service to the Park District.

### **Youth employment.**

The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed 20+ youth. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workforce.

### **Operation Playground Foundation**

Operation Playground Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization and was established in 2000 by a group of volunteers in Frankfort, Illinois to support the Park District. Its initial project was the funding and construction of Fort Frankfort playground which was installed at Commissioner's Park. The Foundation works to raise funds that can be invested in the parks. A few of the projects that the Foundation has funded include the construction of the Bark Park, Main Park 3-on-3 basketball court, Old Plank Trail Fitness Station equipment, Judy Herder Pump track and pickleball court renovation.

**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. Park District staff engage in professional associations at the regional, state and national level to ensure that Park District is engaging in best practices.

**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 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 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 as well as private donations and grants.

## VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Park District may is available to the public in the location listed.

<b>Document</b>	<b>Location Available</b>
Annual Tax Levy	Agency Website, Admin offices, and County Clerk
Annual Budget	Agency Website, Admin offices, and County Clerk
Board & Committee Minute & Agendas	Agency Website and Admin. Offices
Annual Audit	Agency Website, Admin Offices and County Clerk
Comprehensive Master Plan	Agency Website and Admin Offices

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

- The board of commissioners meets twice each month. Residents may provide public comment at every meeting. The Board meeting is held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and the Committee Meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday. Agendas are posted on the website and the administrative offices.
- 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 subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 815-469-9400 or email at [information@frankfortparks.org](mailto:information@frankfortparks.org)



- The Park District engages the community to get feedback on programming services and to get input on the design and construction of recreation facilities. In 2024, the Park District held a Town Hall meeting regarding the renovation of Fort Frankfort Playground. Residents could also provide feedback on the project through an online survey that sought feedback about the design. The Park District has engaged residents in similar processes for Windy Hill, Brookmeadow and Sandalwood Park renovations.
- In 2016, the Park District engaged residents through Town Hall meetings and surveys to gather input on design and support to fund an indoor recreation facility. There was not support at that time therefore the Park District did not pursue a referendum. In 2024, the Park District is engaging the community to evaluate the need and support to fund an indoor recreation facility.

## VII. District Awards and Recognition

The Park District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways. The Park District employees have earned certifications and work to be industry leaders. The certifications held by park district employees include:

- Certified Park and Recreation Professionals (CPRP)
- Certified Pool Operators (CPO)
- Certified Park Safety Inspectors (CPSI)
- Committee Chairs of Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SSPRA)
- Section Director of the Illinois Park and Recreation Association Administration & Finance Section

### 1. Facilities

The Park District offered and maintained the following facilities to the community last year.

Park/Facility	Classification	Acres
Brookmeadow Park	Neighborhood Park	12.98
Butternut Creek Park	Neighborhood Park	9.41
Commissioners Park	Regional Park	60.5
Heritage Knolls Park	Neighborhood Park	5.03
Founders Community Center	Community Center	2.5
Indian Boundary Park	Neighborhood Park	3.89
Jackson Creek Park	Community Park	20.78
Kohlhagen Park	Neighborhood Park	8.78
Lakeview North Park	Neighborhood Park	25.81
Lakeview South Park	Neighborhood Park	20.05
Lincoln Meadows Park	Neighborhood Park	1.75
Main Park	Regional Park	23.7
Michelle Bingham	Neighborhood Park	5.74
Roy & Dorothy Janssen Park	Neighborhood Park	10.01
Sandalwood Park	Neighborhood Park	5.94
Shaffer Park	Neighborhood Park	1.16
Stone Creek Park	Neighborhood Park	2.92
Timbers Edge Park	Neighborhood Park	11.41
Windy Hill Park	Neighborhood Park	8.29
Stone Creek Park	Neighborhood Park	2.9
Sara Springs Park	Maintenance Building & Green Space	16.22
Olde Stone Park	Undeveloped	4.28
Susan A. Puent Building	Programming General Use	Included in Main Park
Buildings & Grounds Facility	Maintenance Facility	Included in Main Park
Five Oaks	Undeveloped	2.6
Laraway Road Parcel	Undeveloped	10.5
<b>Total Acreage</b>		<b>278.58</b>

## **2. Programs**

The Park District offers recreation programs in an array of categories to serve all residents. The Park District offers approximately 300 programs each season that are available to residents. The Park District direct mails a seasonal recreational program brochure three times per year to market the programs to residents. The program brochure is available on the Park District website. The Park District offers in-person and online registration. In 2023, the Park District processed 14,385 registrations for a variety of recreation programs. The Park District offers free community Special Events. In addition the Park District's offerings, the District participates in a number of community special Events that are led by organizations such as the Frankfort Chamber, Library, Township and Village of Frankfort.

### **Program Categories**

- Adult Programs
- Before & After School
- Day Camp/Camps
- Early Childhood Programs
- Fitness Programs
- Gymnastics
- Leagues
- Preschool
- Seniors
- Special Events
- Teen
- Travel
- Youth Athletics
- Youth Programs

## **3. Other Benefits**

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact to the community is multi-faceted and far reaching. 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. The Park District's open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding. Quality recreation facilities have been known to increase values of homes.

## **VIII. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency**

### **1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges**

The Park District has a strong solid relationship with local and regional governmental agencies. One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. The Village of Frankfort has historically waived permit fees and only charged the Park District direct cost which allows the District to use the tax funded dollars directly.

The Park District is subject to local and state fees for sewer taps, county food inspection fees, state and local liquor license, elevator license and construction permit, building inspection, stormwater management, impervious surface, ISP background checks, fire inspection, sprinkler inspections, and splash pad/pool permits.

It would be beneficial if Governmental units should be discouraged 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. 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. Unfunded Mandates**

Unfunded state mandates impact the Park District. 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. An example of unfunded mandates increases to minimum wage which are not funded through program revenues but the tax levy.

**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 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. 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.

**Prevailing Wage.** The Park District complies with the Prevailing Wage law. 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.

**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 helps to reduce costs.

### **3. Opportunities for Increased Transparency**

The Park District works to be transparent. There are always opportunities for increased transparency:

- The Park District does not currently have a dedicated staff member to maintain the agency's website. If we did have that staff, additional items could be posted such as meeting packets with supporting documents, annual reports and other items.

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

- Although the Park District has a strong relationship with local schools and government agencies there are opportunities to further the partnerships. Long range planning sessions would be helpful to ensure services and facilities are not duplicated. There are several agreements in place should be updated to ensure the reflect current practices.

### **5. Opportunities for Savings such as Energy Efficiency Projects.**

- When the Park District has funding to construct new facilities, energy efficiency and green practices will be considered.

**Dated: October 22, 2024**

**Committee Chairman: Mike McCarey, Board President**

**Executive Director: Gina Hassett, CPRP**