



City of Palos Heights
Recreation Committee
Tuesday, February 14th, 2023
Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Key called the regular meeting of the Recreation Committee to order at 7:12 p.m. at the Palos Heights City Hall, 7607 W. College Drive. In attendance were Chairman Key, Alderman Bylut, Alderman Clifford, Alderman Begley, Director of Parks and Recreation Matt Fairbanks, Lake Katherine Director Gaerth Blakesley, Superintendent of Recreation Lauren Koszola, Superintendent of Facilities Joe Smith, recording secretary Morgan Pukula and one member of the public.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Key moved to approve the minutes of the January 10th, 2023 meeting, seconded by Alderman Clifford. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

LAKE KATHERINE REPORT

Gaerth Blaksley provided the Lake Katherine update:

- ANCA updates: We have been scheduling focus group meetings for the upcoming ANCA peer review. We have kept 8:30 to 9:30 on Saturday, March 11th, open for council members with a couple members expressing their preference for this time slot. If you can attend, please let me know.
- Lake Katherine updates presentation was given at the council meet and greet, and will also be presented at the city council meeting on February 21st.
- Save the dates will be sent out this week for the Grow with Lake Katherine annual fundraiser. This fundraiser will be for the Mayor Bob Straz boat house and board walk.
- Prescribed burn started in the children's forest, making the most of the March in February weather. We have also been conducting brush pile burns in the children's forest.
- Volunteer appreciation breakfast event: Although we have had volunteer events, this was the first formal appreciation we hosted since the pandemic. Our volunteer base jumped from 30 to 60 last year. We will be opening up to new volunteers this spring for our spring recruitment drive. We also were able to introduce our new part time volunteer coordinator, Chris Mannix at this event.
- Fitness hike and yoga was on Saturday, we had 20 people joining us for a 2.3 mile walk, followed by an hour yoga session conducted by Do Good Movement.
- Channel 4 interviewed Tara, our program coordinator, and Sophie, our Naturalist, for upcoming events and programs.
- We conducted a visit to Chicago Agricultural High School and met with their environment club. We talked about how they can grow native seed in their green houses and as a part of their education, we talked about restoring their "prairie" area.
- Green team meeting discussed the arbor day tree planting that is sponsored by the beautification committee. We are also in talks of doing a pumpkin smash.
- We held a MLK day of service where volunteers removed buckthorn and conducted brush pile burns.
- Botanical painting night had 20 people in attendance where we painted prints on reclaimed wood.

PARKS & RECREATION REPORT

Director of Parks and Recreation Matt Fairbanks, Superintendent of Recreation Lauren Koszola and Superintendent of Facilities Joe Smith provided the Parks & Recreation update:

- **Annual Review 2022:** Our 2022 year started to show signs of normalcy from the pandemic. Financially, we ended the year with \$1.9 million in total revenue and \$138,000 in net revenue.
Superintendent of Recreation Lauren provided highlights from their programming at the Recreation Center. Lauren wanted to acknowledge Kara and Eric for all their hard work. This was Kara's first year working full time with us and Eric's 4th year now. Starting with athletics, our athletic program numbers are increasing, as well as our enrollment in our leagues and athletic classes. Our youth basketball league had 396 participants in 2022 compared to 392 in 2021. For 2023, we are looking at 490 kids

registered and are incorporating different ways to include residents, registration, forming teams. We were able to expand the program and accommodate waiting lists for the basketball teams. Currently we are looking at ways to expand our space; we have great connections with District 128 because of our before and after school program. They allow us to use their gym space free of charge, but we are open to exploring new gyms as well, and not opposed to paying for space, especially for the amount of participants expected in the new year. Eric has done a great job handling all the questions, parents and unexpected issues to make it accommodating for all.

Another highlight of ours is the indoor soccer league. We had almost 200 registrations in 2022, compared to the 156 in 2021.

Our Little Learners preschool program offers two 4-year-old classes and one 3-year-old class. This program took a hard hit during the pandemic due to COVID restrictions, but we plan on expanding our classrooms again because 2023-2024 registration has already opened up.

Our summer camp program had 425 participants compared to the 342 in 2021. Again, we have started registration for this upcoming summer so we are looking forward to another great summer!

Our before and after school program has a total of 44 participants compared to the 35 in 2021. Again, our relationship with District 128 allows us to utilize Independence school for summer camp overflow. Our smaller 4-week school programs' numbers have also increased and we're excited to get the little ones engaged with each other before they go to school. We ran 31 special events in 2022, out of the 34 offered. In 2023, we are looking to run the 34 this upcoming year as well, if not more.

I also wanted to highlight our Independence day celebration. This was the first year we had the inflatables during the day, and we thought it ran very smoothly and successfully. We received really great feedback from the residents regarding minimal waiting in lines and being able to enjoy the rest of the fest at night. We do plan on repeating the same structure again this year.

Moving on to our concerts in the park; we have around 3,500 participants that attend every concert. We try to do as many concerts we can a year and offset them with sponsorships as much as we can. This summer, we plan on doing a kids concert, where the band will play kids music and hopefully get the kids engaged with the music and dancing. We also plan on doing a live karaoke band, where the community can come up and sing along.

We ran our Farmer's Market from May 11th – October 12th. We extended it a week because of the weather and the community along with the vendors were very appreciative of it. We received a grant for the Farmer's Market which offsets our LINK program. We were able to offer even more money to the participants who use their LINK card at the market. Total, we had about 500-600 participants each week. Our biggest time is June through August when the kids are out of school and they and the vendors can participate in our theme each week. Some of them dress up for the theme and we do scavenger hunts for the kids. We offered 3 indoor markets: one in November and two in December. Our November and Saturday one in December were extremely successful, so we will reevaluate whether we run the Friday night one again in 2023.

Overall, our budget numbers were very successful in terms of programming. Some of our goals are going to continue to survey and make sure we offer what the community wants, as well as market a lot more using social media. Lauren also stated every time a new playbook comes out, which is 3 times a year, registration for Palos Heights residents is always a week in advance, and then it opens up for "open registration" for the rest of the community.

Alderman Begley brought an idea to Lauren about hosting an event with a DJ around the beginning of June, when Taylor Swift is hosting her concert in Chicago, for the people who could not attend. This event would be a fundraiser for either the rec center or Lake Katherine. Lauren stated she would look into if it's something the community would be interested in and follow up with Alderman Begley.

Superintendent of Facilities Joe Smith provided an overview on the facilities they run at the rec center. The fitness center is open and memberships are higher than they were before 2020. A lot of it is credit to the Silver Sneakers program where residents and nonresidents can take advantage of using their Medicare programs. We are also finding we have a lot of members who sign up and unfortunately never come. I'm in the process this year of running a report on the people who do not use it, and wiping them off the report so we can keep accurate numbers of those using the fitness room. Revenue is starting to kick back up but it may be hard to reach numbers we had in the past because members of the program receive a discount. We now receive a max of \$20 a month for anyone who is on Silver Sneakers, where a nonresident, would be paying \$35 a month, but to keep them active and socializing, this is a better option.

Our visits are increasing as well, and we are getting close to our 2019 numbers. Last year we had 35,828 visits to the fitness center, including track users as well. Track user numbers are increasing and we have started to see some track users obtain a membership for the fitness center as well. We did get new cardio equipment in April including a Stairmaster, from many requests and new treadmills.

In regards to personal training, we got a new trainer this last year. He is starting to gain his clientele so we are hoping 2023 sees a huge rebound. Right now, we only have one trainer and Joe bases it off the workload each trainer has so there is no competition. Moraine Valley has a personal trainer program, so we try to hire from their program and keep it close in the community. In Palos Heights, there aren't many fitness centers but there are a lot of health clubs, so our biggest competition is specific exercises that the clubs offer. Our fitness center has not seen an increase since we've opened and we keep it as clean as possible. Our staff does a great job of keeping it spotless and are quick to let me know if equipment is down. Maintenance is usually out within the day to fix equipment as well, so nothing is ever down for long periods of time.

The pool is back as well as of last year and we did not have to run under COVID restrictions. Our admissions for nonresidents was higher than they've ever been due to other cities not opening their pools until after the 4th of July holiday. Our memberships as well started to increase. Our biggest challenge last year was the supply chain issues; we could not get the chlorine, algae materials, etc. that we usually order. Prices steadily increased as well, so we bought more bottles up front to avoid the inflation. Concession items were increasing in price, along with stock issues of food we usually carry. Eric oversees the lifeguards and swimming lessons at the pool and has done a phenomenal job with both. Our swim lessons have seen one of our highest years with just under \$29,000 in revenue and just over 400 kids. Sylvia is our lessons coordinator and did a great job organizing and scheduling the lessons; we did not lose one day due to bad weather because of her. A major upgrade from last year was the removal of the pine trees. Lower landscaping in that area will be easier to maintain and will not require cleaning of the pool, pumps or filters from the needles. Director Matt Fairbanks added that Lauren and Joe did a great job hiring for positions at the pool before the season started and went above and beyond to recruit for the summer.

- **Recreation Program Updates:** Director Matt Fairbanks stated they opened the ice rink December 21st-27th and saw about an average of 10-12 participants using the rink. Just before the new year, rain and an increase in temperatures made the ice rink unusable and it has been closed since. We opened it again the last week of January for a couple days but since that point we haven't had ideal weather conditions for an outdoor ice rink. Staff is going to close the rink in the upcoming weeks because the weather does not look like it will be changing for the better.

Our preschool has begun registration for the 2023-2024 school year. There was a Little Learners open house held on February 1st and February 5th for families to ask questions and see what the preschool offers.

Our dance recital classes started the last week of January and have about 70 participants enrolled. Our non-recital classes started February 4th and have 18 participants enrolled in those classes.

Musical theatre auditions began the first week in January for Winnie the Pooh for the 2nd and 4th graders. The Adams Family is the other play and will be the 5th through 8th graders. All the musicals are full with a total of 98 participants enrolled, which is 8 more than the previous year.

Our youth basketball league exploded with 100 more participants than the year before. We are in the process of accommodating these huge numbers, assuming they stay like these for future years.

- **Pool Decking:** We are in the process to complete the pool decking early to mid-April. Public Works will be completing the job after we receive all the material, which will be saving around \$15,000. They have taken down all the existing wood for safety reasons already. We have priced material from Menards and Schilling Supply that will cost around \$17,500. The material we are looking to purchase will be the same style that is at Lake Katherine.
- **Orchard Park Update:** Matt Fairbanks and Director of Public Works Adam Jasinski discussed the splash pad that is to be installed and whether to use a water to waste system rather than a recirculating system. In the original design we sent to OSLAD, we had the water to waste system for the lower cost. After talking with JSD, the recirculating system would cost another \$141,000-169,000. This recirculating system will also increase the design fees to update what we already had in the original plan. After consulting with the City Administrator David, we decided it would be bubblers rather than a full blown spray pad to conserve massive amounts of water.

- Request for motion to approve purchase of materials for pool deck repairs expending up to \$17,500, with labor to be completed by Public Works Department.

Chairman Key motioned to approve the purchase of materials for pool deck repairs expending up to \$17,500, seconded by Alderman Clifford. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously. – **AGENDA**

- Request for motion to approve \$47,230.50 for the second installment for 2022-23 membership contribution to the South West Special Recreation Association (SWSRA). – **AGENDA**

Chairman Key motioned to approve \$47,230.50 for the second installment for 2022-23 membership contribution to the South West Special Recreation Association, seconded by Alderman Begley. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously.

- Request for motion to approve Zenere Landscape proposal in the amount of \$7,840.00 for the spring and fall clean up at parks, the swimming pool, and recreation center. This includes monthly maintenance visits to the Recreation Center, Walsh-Westgate Park and the Veterans playlot, and mid-summer pruning at the pool. – **AGENDA**

Chairman Key motioned approve Zenere Landscape proposal in the amount of \$7,840.00 for the spring and fall clean up parks, the swimming pool, and recreation center, seconded by Alderman Begley. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously. – **AGENDA**

- Request for motion to approve The Sound of Music & Video Systems for the installation programming and purchase of a new projector for the Orchard Room in the amount of \$5,639.79.

Chairman Key motioned to approve The Sound of Music & Video Systems for the installation programming and purchase of a new projector for the Orchard Room in the amount of \$5,639.79, seconded by Alderman Clifford. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously. – **AGENDA**

- Request for motion to approve updates to City Ordinance § 34.58 pertaining to the hours of operation for Lake Katherine and Recreation Department park and facilities.

Chairman Key motioned to approve the updates to the City Ordinance § 34.58 pertaining to the hours of operation for Lake Katherine and Recreation Department park and facilities, seconded by Alderman Clifford. On a voice note, the vote passed with Alderman Begley voting nay. – **AGENDA**

- Request for motion to approve facility fee 50% reduction request from Pathlights for use of the Orchard Room on Friday, March 3, 2023 from 8:00 – 11:00 am. And Wednesday, April 19, 2023 from 8:00 – 11:00 am. Pathlights is a non-profit group who works in the area to assist older and special needs populations in various facets.

Chairman Key motioned to approve the 50% reduction request from Pathlights for the use of the Orchard Room on two occasions, seconded by Alderman Clifford. On a voice note, the motion passed unanimously. – **AGENDA**

OLD BUSINESS

Employee Recreation Benefits Proposal – We sent out a survey on February 10th and have received 100 replies out of the 190 sent out. The replies we are receiving is that staff would utilize the benefits if they were free. Part timers said they would use any discounts that were offered to them. February 24th is the last day to respond to the survey, so after we receive all the replies, we will compile date for the March meeting.

CAPRA – Chairman Key stated we are unable to meet deadlines for this process. To follow through, it would be extremely costly. Matt followed up with the mayor and administratively they agreed to pull us from CAPRA. This information was shared with the RAB, the Mayor and City Administrator to discuss the background of the situation. We gained a lot of knowledge from this whole process of accreditation and incorporated them into what we do on a regular basis.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Key moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Alderman Begley. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Morgan Pukula, Recording Secretary