



## **MEETING MINUTES**

### **PARK AND RECREATION BOARD**

Thursday, February 19, 2015

7:00pm

Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Ave.

Members Present: D. Stein, B. Logan, J. Brown, A. DiMarco, H. Garcia  
J. Bryan, M. Casady, D. Campbell, R. Mayne

Members Absent:

Staff Present: J. McRae, B. Dorneker, S. Levine, S. Robinson

Others Present: P. Braithwaite, K. Walchak, G. Rieger, T. Gronner, Y. Borisova, E. Rieger, A. Anon, L Barski, C. Guggero, D. Garfield, B. Haberl, L. Damashek, T. Sheridan

Presiding Member: D. Stein, President

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### **DECLARATION OF QUORUM**

With a quorum present, D. Stein called the meeting to order.

### **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES of JANUARY 15**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as written. A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Walchak was involved with the original Penny Park development where he met people who he's been friends with ever since. Penny Park has really brought the community together. It's time for the next generation to have the same opportunity to really cement themselves in the neighborhood.

Mr. Rieger was also involved in the original Penny Park development. He feels that adding a pavilion would destroy a great area of play in the park taking away field space that's heavily used year round. It would also be dangerous for the kids sledding down the hill in the winter who may slide right into it. As for type of material for the park, he prefers wood. There would be a little more maintenance involved but it's cheaper than composite lumber (the savings could go toward the maintenance). Wood looks great; it has a restorative quality, and provides a healthy balance.

Mr. Gronner said the successes of Penny Park is that it functions as a family park for the whole community to enjoy. He's bothered by the idea of a separate confined area for younger kids, which would make it difficult for parents managing both young and older kids. The emphasis should be on the park's function as a family gathering place encouraging creativity and imagination for children. Schools and other institutions should be welcome to use the park but any redesign should not be driven by their special needs at the expense of residents' needs. He's opposed to adding a pavilion

and bathroom. It would add substantial cost to the budget and it doesn't fit in with the simplicity and elegance of the current design.

Ms. Borisova talked about the risky elements of the park such as the tire swing and the wobbly bridge stating we need to establish difference between hazard and risk. Hazards are situations that are objectively dangerous and potentially unsafe such as poorly constructed play apparatus, the presence of broken glass, etc. Risk is a subjective situation that involves an individual attempting to calculate the likelihood of something occurring and the probable consequences if it does indeed occur. We do our kids a favor by allowing them to make those calculations and learn from that experience. It will be a life experience for our kids if they become aware of risks around them and learn to deal with them.

Mr. Anon sees the benefit of wood as a material for the park. It's tangible, versatile, easy to maintain, the most renewable method of construction and kids respond to it with a sense of adventure and imagination.

Ms. Barski focused on 2 big picture issues: safety and Americans with Disability Act (ADA). We all agree that safety of the children that play in the park is important. There are no laws that require certain design features, separate play areas by age, or use of plastic or other materials instead of wood. The disagreement around safety issues is what constitutes safe playground equipment versus non safe equipment. It's a matter of perspective and has to do with parenting style and philosophy. There's no right or wrong approach but it's important to be mindful as we proceed, that Penny Park enables a very certain kind of play. It's the only park in Evanston that enables that kind of play. We all agree that bringing a park into ADA compliance is something that we value as a community. Unlike the safety standard, which are industry recommendations – not laws, the ADA is law. So it's important to know what the law says, what it permits and what it prohibits. Any park can be made ADA compliant so let's keep this in mind going forward as we think about the principles and the guidelines and the laws, all very different things that are going to govern this process.

Mr. Guggero was reading Historic Preservation information regarding landmark structures reflecting the pride and character of the community and the desire of the community and the city to preserve that asset. Penny Park is a huge asset to the Evanston community as a whole. There should be some thought put into pursuing a preservation status for Penny Park to maintain its original design.

Ms. Damashek's focus is making sure the current generation and generations to come, get to enjoy to the park as it is. She's glad the Board is starting a new process. The key thing to keep in mind is the existing special flowing design with lots of opportunities for creative play should be maintained.

Mr. Sheridan feels it's very important that we maintain all the qualities that were formed and enjoyed 25 years ago.

## **OVERVIEW OF PENNY PARK PROJECT AND PROCESS GOING FORWARD**

Mr. McRae thanked everyone for coming and sharing their comments. He reviewed the process that has occurred thus far and noted City Council referred the Penny Park

project to the Park and Recreation Board with the desired interest of the Board making a recommendation, no later than June 2015, as to how to proceed. It's a strong possibility that the project won't occur until next year using this year to obtain community feedback and support necessary to amicably proceed with a process.

Going forward it's important for the Board to look at the issues raised tonight in more detail as they prepare their recommendation for City Council:

- Does the playground need to be rebuilt or renovated. In order to answer this question we may need to have an evaluation of the existing structure.
- The idea of a restroom and/or pavilion has to be discussed including the impact in terms of cost and impact on green space, versus the need for individuals who see it as an item of concern or need.
- What we need to do for ADA compliance on the existing structure and going forward.
- What material to use - wood versus composite lumber or plastic
- Should the project be community build or regular build with community support

Mr. Casady asked about the status of the Penny Park Steering Committee. Mr. McRae explained the steering committee is the vehicle by which Leathers and Associates Inc. utilizes to accomplish fundraising and volunteers. That was a contemplated piece of their plan but there have been no formal appointments to a steering committee.

Ms. DiMarco asked if there was city staff that could perform an evaluation of the existing park structure. Ms. Robinson said an evaluation is not needed because Leathers has provided information as it relates to the life span of the park. Something needs to be done to upgrade the park; the question is what is it that we need to do. She will provide the Board with the maintenance information with all the components that had to be addressed and why; and annual costs.

Mr. Bryan asked if there is a list of parks and all their amenities. He'd like to have a sense of how many parks have a bathroom and when are they used. Mr. Braithwaite mentioned that the desire for a bathroom came up as many families travel from other areas of Evanston and surrounding communities to visit Penny Park and there's no bathroom.

Mr. Bryan asked Mr. Braithwaite what were the safety issues raised. He responded there were concerns with the wooden fence which is very dense. The wood beams are so close together it's hard for parents to see their kids from a distance. There's also a back area that invites loitering teenagers.

Mr. Casady noted that we're not going to solve all the issues tonight and requested that Penny Park remain on the monthly meeting agenda. He encouraged all in attendance to reach out to others who might have a stake in this park or any park to come to the meeting and eventually we can start our own type of visioning process here at the meetings; similar to what was done for the Robert Crown Center and the Lakefront Master Plan.

**Action:** It was moved and seconded that staff prepare an evaluation of the current structure of the park and the structural soundness of the wood structure and then maybe get some early cost estimates on what it would take to at least bring parts of it up to ADA compliance. After the Board receives some of these data points they will look at the next step. A voice vote was taken and motion passed.

Mr. McRae noted that the evaluation will not occur until the weather breaks/snow melts.

#### **REQUEST FOR WILLIAM N. ERICKSON FUNDS**

**Action:** It was moved and seconded that the Evanston Baseball/Softball Association be approved to receive \$850 from the Erickson Fund to sponsor two teams (\$425 each) for the 2015 season.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The motion to adjourn the meeting was approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:35pm. The next scheduled meeting is 7:30pm on March 19, 2015 at the Ecology Center.