



# **GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE BERKELEY PARK DISTRICT**

**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
DECENNIAL COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY ON  
MARCH 6, 2024**

## **I. Purpose**

The Berkeley Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on June 14, 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:

Paul Smith	CHAIR, PARK DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
Teresa Larem	PARK DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
Mari Carpenter	PARK DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
Gloria Denise Sada	PARK DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
Rolanda Sudduth	PARK DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
David Ditchfield	COMMITTEE MEMBER
Angela Ferrentino	COMMITTEE MEMBER

### Support Resources Provided By:

Dan Schimmel	CONSULTING DIRECTOR
Peter Graham	PARK DIRECTOR
Scot Puma	ATTORNEY
Art Schenone	TREASURER

## III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

<b>Meeting Dates</b>	<b>Meeting Time and Place</b>
JUNE 14, 2023, 6:00 PM	LIND PARK BUILDING
OCTOBER 4, 2023, 6:00 PM	LIND PARK BUILDING
JANUARY 3, 2024, 6:00 PM	LIND PARK BUILDING
MARCH 6, 2024, 6:00 PM	LIND PARK BUILDING

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 1974<sup>1</sup>. 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 (5) commissioners. 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 better 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, multipurpose 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 1.93% of the local tax bill for a Berkeley resident. This compares to 53% of the tax bill for local school districts, 33.11% to the Village and 2.92% to the library district.*** Other agencies include township, health services and mosquito abatement to total 100%. Reference: Village of Berkeley website.

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the Park District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

- Community Survey – Completed 2019
- Comprehensive Master Plan – Approved May 6, 2020
- Board Policies and Procedures Manual – Approved October 4, 2023
- Park Ordinances – Approved November 1, 2023
- Strategic Plan – Public Input Meetings were held December 2023, Approved January 3, 2024
- Goals and Objectives

## 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, nonprofit 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.

### Cooperative Services for Individuals with Disabilities

The Berkeley Park District has entered into a long-term agreement with the Memorial Park District for the express purpose of providing recreational services and programs

for individuals with disabilities. This agreement provides these services to Berkeley residents at the same rates enjoyed by the residents of the Memorial Park District.

**Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies.**

The Berkeley Park District has entered into a long-term agreement with the Memorial Park District for the purpose of allowing Berkeley Park District resident access to Memorial Park District programs at its resident rates.

**Intergovernmental agreements and examples of cooperation with other units of local government**

Village of Berkeley – The Berkeley Park District and the Village of Berkeley have enjoyed a long-time supportive relationship. Cooperative projects and intergovernmental agreements benefitting the community can be found throughout the history of the park district. A short listing of Intergovernmental Agreements or contracts follows:

- Summer Concert Series hosted by the Village at Berkeley Park
- Long Term parking lot lease by the Village on Park District property
- Establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee to explore avenues of cooperation between the Village and Park District.
- Village of Berkeley staff assisting the park district in writing grants for OSLAD and for the Berkeley Bikeway grant which will lead to an IGA for the project management of the bikeway grant by the Village as well as them completing the quarterly status reports mandated by the IDNR.
- Negotiating funding from the Tollway Authority for the relocation of the Berkeley ballfield.
- Memo of Understanding to allow the Seasonal Ice Rink construction at Berkeley Park by the Village for its Centennial Celebration.
- Village completing tree trimming and snow removal for the park district. • Lighting project at Berkeley Park Prairie Path

School District

- Access to the park district for program and special event use
- PTA/School Fun Fair held each fall at Berkeley Park
- Access to school facilities when they are available for programs.

Library District

- Storyboards of children's classics in Berkeley Park
- Library story time at the gazebo
- Access to library facilities when available for programs and meetings.
- Cooperative programs and special events.

## Memorial Park District

- The two park districts combine efforts to offer the Annual Turkey Shoot event at the school. In addition, the two agencies provide some of the ballfields for the Hillside Berkeley Youth Baseball League.

### **Intergovernmental agreements with the State of Illinois.**

2023 Bikeway Grant by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the construction of a bike path in Berkeley Park.

The Illinois Tollway Authority recently undertook a widening project of I290 in 2023 which led to them exercise its ownership of Victoria Park. To compensate, the tollway provided substantial funding for moving of a ballfield to allow for the installation of additional bike/walking paths in Berkeley Park. The Village of Berkeley negotiated for this settlement on behalf of the Park District.

### **Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues.**

Agreement with Berkeley/Hillside Baseball for the use of the baseball field at Berkely Park.

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

Though the Park District does not have formal agreements with any non-profits in the community, it does enjoy fruitful relationships with several, well-respected organizations in the community. They are:

- Illinois Prairie Path Cooperative
- VFW/American Legion Post – They host an annual “military re-enactment” series at Berkley Part attended by thousands of people.
- Veterans Memorial and Veterans Events
- Neighborhood Watch – Neighborhood Watch oftentimes lends volunteer support to park district events.
- Local PTA – The local PTA’s for the elementary and high schools host an annual event in the fall at Berkeley Park to distribute school supplies to needy families.

### **Membership with Illinois Association with Park Districts (IAPD)**

The park district is an active member of the Illinois Association of Park Districts. IAPD provides the Board and staff with valuable training opportunities, legislative support and advocacy for leisure services and the preservation of public land throughout Illinois.

## 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. Volunteers provide assistance at several special events planned or co-hosted by the park district. Examples of some of the programs where this occurs is the Halloween Haunted Trail, Holiday Events, Sports Tournaments and Loteria.

**Joint purchasing.** The Park District participates in joint purchasing cooperatives pursuant to the Governmental Joint Purchasing Act (30 ILCS 525/0.01 *et seq.*) thereby saving taxpayer dollars through economies of scale. These include:

- Government pricing on playground apparatus.
- Government pricing on technology.
- State of Illinois Purchasing Cooperative.
- TIPS (The Interlocal Purchasing System – Construction services available that have been “pre-bid” saving the park district valuable time in launching a project and in cost savings through having design and construction services qualified in advance.

**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.

**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. Instead, the Park District provides activities, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from **non-tax sources** such as program registrations and user fees as well as private donations and grants.

**Joint Participation in Risk Management.** The Park District is an active member of the IParks, a risk management cooperative in the State of Illinois. Member districts come together to share the risk of managing park district services and facilities. In addition, IParks provides professional support in designing agency risk management programs, staff training, and inspection services of key facilities.

## VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Park District may be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

<b>Document</b>	<b>Location(s) Available</b> (website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)
• Annual tax levy	Administrative Offices
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	Administrative Offices
• Agendas and minutes	Administrative Offices, Website
• Annual Financial Report	Administrative Offices
• Statement of Receipts and Disbursements	Administrative Offices
• Park Ordinances	Administrative Offices, Website
• Strategic plan	Administrative Offices, Website
• Board Policy Manual	Administrative Offices, Website

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

- The board of commissioners meets once each month. Residents may provide public comment at every meeting.
- 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 also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.]
- Strategic Planning Sessions held in December 2023.
- A community wide attitude and interest survey was completed in 2019 as part of its Park District Comprehensive Plan.



- Ad Hoc Committee with the Village of Berkeley to foster cooperation and explore intergovernmental agreements. Met monthly from January 2021 through January 2023.
- Public Meetings to gather input on the Berkeley OSLAD Grant Project in 2021.
- The Decennial Committee has met at least four times to review park district policies and procedures. As part of this process, they were invited to participate in one of three Strategic Planning Meetings. Decennial Committee Meetings are open to the public and are in full compliance with the Open Meetings Act.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 708-544-1935 or email at [berkeleypark@comcast.net](mailto:berkeleypark@comcast.net).

## VIII. Benefits and Services

The Park District serves the entire community from the youngest child to the oldest adult and all ages in between. It does so in a variety of ways.

### 1. Facilities

The Park District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

#### ***Berkeley Park***

*Baseball Softball*

*Gazebo*

*Tennis Courts*

*Sand Volleyball Court*

*Pickleball Courts*

*Illinois Prairie Path*

*Playground*

*Veterans Memorial*

#### ***Lind Park***

*Community Building*

*Playground*

### 2. Programs

A listing of some of the programs and events offered by the Park District last year.

20-20-20 Fitness

Circuit Training

Cardio Drills and Thrills

Yoga Fusion – exercise

Mid-Day Fitness

Music Together

Loteria

Paint at the Park

Ju Jitsu – ongoing year round  
Glow Sand VB tournament  
VB Tournament  
Sand Volleyball League  
Turkey Bean Bag Tournament  
Pickleball Tournament  
Wiffleball Tournament  
Halloween Haunted Trail  
Turkey Shoot  
Date with Dino Art  
Sign, Skip, Stetch Youth Fitness  
Easter Extravaganza  
Bean Bag Tournaments  
Christmas Santa drop-in  
Holiday Market  
Puzzle Competition  
Valentine Dance parent/child  
Playdates at the Park – Cooperative Special Events

### **3. Other Benefits**

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact to the community is multifaceted and far reaching. For example, the 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. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Park District's open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding. The Park District is particularly proud to be part of the Illinois Prairie Path System. This path travels a total of 61 miles through DuPage County beginning in Forest Park heading west to a split with paths going to Elgin and Aurora. Tens of thousands of runners, walkers, hikers and cyclists use the trail every year.

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

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

Though it may be the experience of park districts in other communities, intergovernmental fees and charges are often waived, if they exist at all. This is due in large part to the reality that the community and the park district are very small and that there is recognition that the agencies need to work together. In Berkeley you will find that governmental entities lean on each other for support because that's the only way to get things done. Of course, fees do sometimes have to be charged. But those fees tend to reflect the actual cost for the service rendered not an attempt to generate additional funds.

## 2. Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates can be a negative. 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.

**a) Non-resident FOIA Requests.** Because of the lack of staff, FOIA requests are normally researched and responded to by the Attorney with assistance by the Treasurer. In essence, this leads to significant in profession time and fees to fulfill FOIA requests. Often the individuals/businesses submitting the FOIA requests are from outside of the park district boundaries, and they appear to be serving a specific agenda, rather than assuring better local government.

Under current law, resident taxpayers end up footing the bill for these nonresident or commercial requests. In order to help alleviate the burden for these non-resident requests the law could be amended to: (1) add a requirement that non-residents identify/explain the purpose of the request for information; (2) add a time limit on how far back a non-resident can request information; (3) staff time and costs could be included in the amount that is reimbursable for non-resident and commercial requests; (4) move back the deadline for non-resident requests 10 business days so that the park district does not have to delay services to its residents in order to comply with a non-resident request.

Sunshine laws are supposed to protect taxpayers by allowing them to shed light on any issue that is not exempt from FOIA. However, local government can be burdened by having to drop everything to rearrange priorities to meet FOIA deadlines, particularly if it has limited resources. Since residents ultimately bear the expense of complying with FOIA, treating resident and non-resident requests differently would be justified.

**b) 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 background checks must be done through the Illinois State Police (ISP). 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.

The Park District recommends studying whether there can be a more efficient background check process implemented through the ISP to reduce the time and expense it takes for background checks. 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.

**c) Prevailing Wage.** 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.

**d) 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 publications would reduce costs.

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

As illustrated above, the Park District is very transparent in its operations. Great strides have been made in updating policies and procedures this past year. Without the Government Efficiencies requirement, many of these updates might not have been pursued. Now, the Berkeley Park District is striving to update its various policies and procedures and to make them available for public access on the agency website. The following are items the Park District is pursuing in FY24 along with how the item will be made available to the public:

- ADA Transition Plan – Website
- Administrative Policies and Procedures – Website
- Short term and Long-Range Goals and Objectives - Website
- Strategic Plan - Website

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

Because Berkeley Park District resources are limited, it is always looking to combine efforts with other governmental entities to meet its mission and to build community. Some areas of potential intergovernmental agreements include:

- Grants
- Marketing
- Special Events

- Projects to enhance the needs of disadvantaged populations.
- Financial services
- Park, facility and equipment inspections and maintenance
- Environmental efficiency projects – lighting and solar initiatives
- Environmental Action – activities that support protecting limited natural resources including initiating a local Environmental Action Committee to support activities such as:
  - Natural control of invasive species on public properties
  - Solar and other alternative sources of energy
  - Incorporating best practices for landscaping and building efficiencies in the design and renovation of public properties. This could include but is not limited to bioswales, choices of plant materials, natural fertilizers, orientation of facilities (new construction), and building materials including insulation.
  - Coordination or volunteer support of recycled waste events.
    - Hosting workshops featuring local experts on residential gardening to explore:
      - Rain gardens
      - Reduction of grass on property to save water and eliminate the use of fertilizers.
      - Building gardens that eliminate invasive species and focus on bringing in perennials that bloom throughout the growing season.
      - Conserving water in the home.
      - Potential experts can be found through:
        - Village of Berkeley Public Works Department
        - University of Illinois Extension Services
        - MWRD - Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
        - Triton College
        - Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability
        - Neighboring park districts

## 5. Opportunities for Savings such as Energy Efficiency Projects, Joint Purchasing

The Berkeley Park District is engaging a local architect to assess all structural and mechanical components of the Lind Park facility. The intent is not only to assure structural stability but to explore ways to redesign the components of the building to be more efficient (roofing, lighting, HVAC, electrical and so on). Whenever appropriate, the park district will seek grant opportunities to help in extending the efficiency of the building.

It would be helpful if more could be done to inform smaller districts of grant reimbursement programs for lighting or energy conservation. Often, the staff capacity is so small at these agencies that they don't have the resources to research these types of projects.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Though typically not a part of the Government Efficiency Report, this Committee feels it is important recognize that the Park District has made great strides in reorganizing its operations this past year. Board Policy Manual, Park Ordinances, a Strategic Plan and Goals and Objectives have been drafted to add structure and vision to the agency. In addition, these have been shared on the website to assure a level of transparency that is refreshing.

However, this Committee also recommends that the Board continue its efforts over the next year to write, approve, publish, and activate the following policies and procedures:

- Americans with Disabilities Transition Plan
- Update of Rental Policies and Procedures
- Business and Accounting Policies and Procedures
- Short Term and Long-Range Goals and Objectives
- Personnel Policy Handbook
- Safety and Risk Management Policies
- Annual Report (Because of the size of the District, and the resources available to compile an Annual Report, it may be more appropriate to do short, "What's Happening in the Parks" from the Board President as part of the quarterly program guide. Just two or three paragraphs talking about successes of the previous quarter and what's coming up in the District.

**The Berkeley Park District Decennial Committee has reviewed and approved this Government Efficiency Report and recommends that the Berkeley Park District Board of Commissioners approve this report as submitted.**

**Dated:** March 6, 2024.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ Paul Smith, Chairman

**Signed by the Chair of the Decennial Committee**