

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE
LITCHFIELD PARK DISTRICT**

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



I. Purpose

The Litchfield Park District ("Park District") formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on June 7, 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:

Jeff Heyen, Board President/Chairperson

Brian Kulick, Commissioner

Katie Cross, Commissioner

Sherry Bergschneider, Commissioner

Kaitlyn Fenton, Commissioner

Chris Bates, Commissioner

Blake Middleton, Commissioner

Shane Grammer, Resident Member

Renee Wynn, Resident Member

Steven C. Bryant, Chief Executive Officer

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
June 7, 2023	6:30pm. - Litchfield Community Ctr.
October 2, 2024	6:30pm. – Litchfield Community Ctr.
November 6, 2024	6:30pm. – Litchfield Community Ctr.

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 1944. 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 **Seven** 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, 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 3.1% 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 has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

- **Operations Manual**
- **Board Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **General Conduct Ordinances**
- **Personnel Policies/Employee Manual or Handbook**
- **Safety and Risk Management Policies**
- **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

- **Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies**
 - **The Park District is a member of the Illinois Association of Park Districts, who is a nonprofit service, research and education organization that serves park districts, forest preserves, conservation, municipal park and recreation, and special recreation agencies. The association advances these agencies, their citizen board members and professional staff in their ability to provide outstanding park and recreation opportunities, preserve natural resources and improve the quality of life for all people in Illinois.**
 - ***The Park District is a member of the Southern Illinois Parks & Recreation Association (SIPRA). SIPRA meets monthly from August through May. Members share ideas, and programming recommendations and other resources with each other regularly in order to increase member knowledge and efficiencies related to each respective park district.***
 - ***The Litchfield Park District is also a member of the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association, whose mission is to provide and promote exceptional standards of education, networking, and resources for all professionals in the Illinois park, recreation and conservation.***
- **Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government**
 - ***The Park District has a shared usage agreement with the City of Litchfield for the operation of Walton Park. The city owns the park. However, the Park District is in charge of the maintenance and upkeep of Walton Park, Walton Park lake and baseball field. The Park District is also responsible for all pavilion bookings and hosting various events in Walton Park. The City of Litchfield is responsible for the light and water bills.***

- **Intergovernmental agreements with the State of Illinois**
 - *The Park District has an Intergovernmental agreement with the City of Litchfield for our Community Center to serve as the City's designated heating and cooling center for the community and surrounding areas during extreme weather.*
 - *The Park District has an Intergovernmental agreement with C.E.F.S. Meals on Wheels to provide them with a shared space within the Litchfield Community Center in order for Meals on Wheels to prepare, serve and deliver meals throughout Montgomery County.*
 - *The Park District has an Intergovernmental agreement with the Land of Lincoln Legal Aid to work in cooperation to provide more comprehensive services to the elderly and to minimize duplication and overlapping of services.*
- **Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues**
 - *The Park District has a field use agreement with Litchfield Baseball Inc. (LBI) to provide ballfields at various parks so that LBI can offer and run youth Blast Ball, T Ball, youth softball, youth baseball within the community. The Park District is responsible for mowing the grass and upkeep of the fields. LBI also shares in the maintenance, and utility expensed involved in the operation of the league.*
 - *The Park District has a field use agreement with the Litchfield Youth Soccer Association (LYSA) to provide soccer fields for youth soccer within the community. The Park District is responsible for mowing the grass and general upkeep of the fields. LYSA shares in some of the upkeep of the fields.*
 - *The Park District has a field youth agreement with the Ladies Adult Soccer League to provide soccer fields for their use. The Park District is responsible for mowing the grass and general field upkeep.*
 - *The Park District has a field use agreement with the Ladies adult softball league for the use of Walton Park baseball field for their league. The Park prepares the field for use and mows the lawn. The league is responsible for ensuring the area is cleaned up after each use.*
- **Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits**
 - *The Park District has an agreement with the Montgomery County Sharks Swim team to use the Litchfield Memorial Pool for the team's practices and swim meets and serves as their home pool facility.*

- **Partnerships with for profit organizations**
 - *The Park District partners with local banks who sponsor the Park District's summer concerts in the park, which is a series of monthly concerts offered free to the public in Walton Park in order to provide family entertainment to those residing in the community and surrounding area.*
- **Informal cooperation with other units of local government which save taxpayer dollars by eliminating redundancy**
 - *Informally, the Park District works with the City of Litchfield whenever equipment and or manpower needs arises for various Park District or City projects within the community.*

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, **44** individuals volunteered **132** 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.

Joint purchasing (if not listed above). 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:

- ***The Park District purchases its agency lawn mowers locally through a joint purchasing agreement.***

The Park District receives local grant fundings from various local trusts including the WD Kilton Trust, Elizabeth S. Baker Trust, James A. Duff/Owen M. Duff and Corwin Memorial Trust. Last year, the combined trusts awarded a total of \$90,789.65 in private grant donations, which help alleviate the burden on taxpayers.

- ***Additionally, Team Victory Lane has been a sponsor of the Park District's annual Trunk or Treat for the past 7 years, donating \$500.00 annually to the event.***

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.

- ***The Park District participates in monthly meetings with the Southern Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (SIPRA) monthly to discuss and share ideas in order to benefit all members of the Association.***

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 hotel/motel, 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 be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

Document	Location(s) Available (website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)
• Annual tax levy	Admin. Office/County Clerk
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	Admin. Office/County Clerk
• Agenda and minutes	Admin. Office/Website
• Comptroller's annual finance report (AFR)	Admin. Office/County Clerk
• Annual audit	Admin. Office/County Clerk
• Statement of Receipts and Disbursements	Administrative Office
• Conduct Ordinances	Administrative Office
• Long range plans	Administrative Office

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

- The board of commissioners meets The First Wednesday of 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.]**

- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at (217) 324-9075 or email at parkdistdirector@litchfieldil.com.
- ***Two community residents serve on the Park District's Committee on Local Government Efficiency.***
- ***During the process of completing a joint master plan with the City of Litchfield and the Park District, a community wide needs assessment survey was conducted in December 2020.***
- ***The Park District held the following Public Hearings in order to obtain public input:***

June 13, 2020
June 3, 2021
May 5, 2022
May 3, 2023
March 22, 2024

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

The Park District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

- *The Park District has been a member of the Illinois Association of Parks and Recreation since 1945*
- *Park District Commissioners and Executive Director have completed Illinois Association of Boot Camp Training in 2021*
- *All Park District Commissioners have completed Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act Training*
- *The Park District Executive Director had Completed Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act Training. Additionally, the Executive Director Annually completed Freedom of Information Act Training.*

IX. 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:

- *Litchfield Community and Senior Citizen's Center – 9000 square foot meeting space for various civic clubs, organizations, community events, banquets and receptions. The Park District's administrative office is also located inside the community center.*
- *Davis Park – Located within Davis Park are recreational facilities including Brubaker playground, 2 lighted tennis courts, picnic shelter, ½ basketball court, outdoor swimming pool, bathhouse and concession stand and dog park.*
- *Echlin Park – Three youth baseball fields, 2 picnic shelters, playground and basketball court.*
- *Plummer Park – Baseball field, 3 shelters, 2 playgrounds, and basketball court.*
- *Schalk Park – Skate Park, batting cage, 2 youth baseball fields with lights, parking lot and concession stand.*

- ***Walton Park (Shared use with City of Litchfield) – On site parking, 2 fishing piers, pathways, lake, 4 picnic shelters; 1 having restroom facilities for the park. 1 lighted baseball field, frisbee golf course, horseshoe pits, outdoor stage with concrete dance floor, 2 maintenance buildings, archery range, basketball court, and a radio-controlled track.***

2. Programs

The Park District offered the following programs last year. Registration numbers are also provided.

- ***Line dance classes, youth yoga class, yoga adult classes, pickle ball, Senior Citizen's club potlucks, dances and general membership meetings.***
- ***The local Girl Scout chapter meets twice a month at the community center.***

3. Additional Services

The Park District provided the following additional services to the community.

- ***Annually the Park District hosts the following events:***

Easter Egg Hunt – Appx. 4000 ages are stuffed annually by staff and volunteers to be provided to community youth during our Easter Egg Hunt. Candy and prizes are donated to the Park District by individuals, groups and various civic organizations.

Visit With Santa – The Park District visit with Santa includes a magic show, crafts, refreshments, and vendors. The public is asked to donate nonperishable food items in order to enter the event. The donated items are given to the local food pantry.

Trunk or Treat – This event is sponsored by a local business. Local organizations, businesses and churches sponsor decorated trunks that hand out candy to participants. Free games with prizes are played on the baseball field. The Park District also hands out free hotdogs, chips and drinks during this event.

4. Other Benefits

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact to the community is multi-faceted 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.

X. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. By way of example, below are amounts that other units of local government charge the Park District even though the Park District's taxpayers are also taxpayers of these other units of local government. Such fees and charges, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the park district's ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases, the unit of government assessing the fee ultimately benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax or other revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are absolutely necessary, general-purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the park district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Park District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees on the Park District not only leads to inefficiency, but it is also shortsighted.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited 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. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. 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. Inefficiency of Other Governments

The Park District is also negatively impacted by the inefficiency of the state and other units of local government.

3. Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates are another cost driver. 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.

- *The preparation and completion of this document is an example of an unfunded mandate.*
- *Required background checks are another example of an unfunded mandate.*

a) Non-resident FOIA Requests. Last year, the park district spent \$50.00 in staff time and legal 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 non-resident 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 local 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). Last year, the park district spent \$300.00 for criminal background checks. 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.

4. Opportunities for Increased Transparency

- *As illustrated above, the Park District is very transparent in its operations. The following are opportunities for increased transparency:*

5. Opportunities for Other Intergovernmental Agreements

- *The Park District understands the importance of Intergovernmental Agreements. To that end, we are seeing opportunities to enter into additional Intergovernmental Agreements that will benefit both the Park District and the Agency we partner with.*

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

- *The Park District has the opportunity to increase savings through increased participation in joint purchasing and comparative shopping before making purchases.*

XI. OTHER

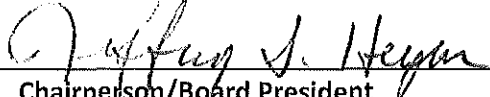
The Park District constantly monitors the overall operation of the agency.

Decisions are made during monthly Park Board meetings that attempt to maximize its efficiency while at the same time being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

FILED

NOV 20 2024

Dated: 11/06/2024

Signed: 
Chairperson/Board President

County Board Admin.