

**EFFICIENCY REPORT  
FOR THE  
ZION PARK DISTRICT**



**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON OCTOBER 17, 2024**

## I. Purpose

The Zion Park District (“Park District”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 17, 2023 via Resolution #905, 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, at the time of formation, consisted of the following individuals:

Bill Hartmann – Park Board President

Carolyn Rivers – Park Board Vice President

Jesse Pye – Park Board Treasurer

Sheryl Magiera – Park Board Commissioner

David Fermaint – Park Board Commissioner

Junayd Latiff – Resident Member

Doug Carlson – Resident Member

Eric Bradley – Executive Director

### III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Meeting Time and Place</b>
October 19, 2023	6:00pm - Zion Park District, Leisure Center
September 19, 2024	6:00pm - Zion Park District, Leisure Center
October 17, 2024	6:00pm - Zion Park District, Leisure Center

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's website or upon request at the Park District's administrative office. ([www.zionparkdistrict.com](http://www.zionparkdistrict.com))

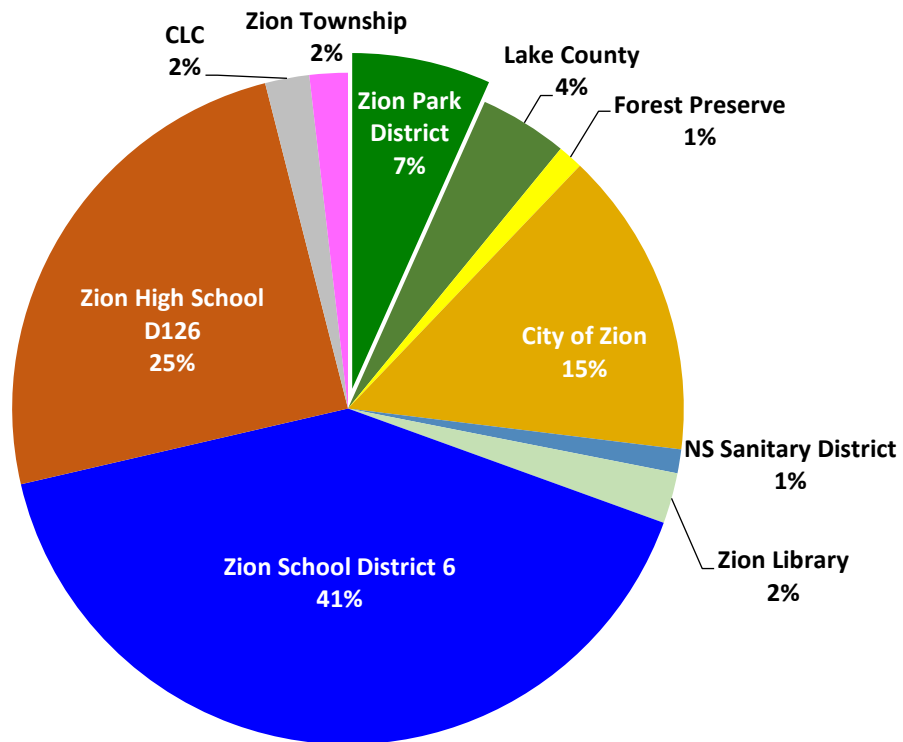
## IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1946. 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. 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 6.7% 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, plans, and procedures:

- **Board Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **General Conduct & Park Use Ordinances**
- **Personnel Policies Manual**
- **Strategic Plan**
- **Capital Replacement Plan**
- **Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports**
- **Safety and Risk Management Policies**
- **Park Ranger Policy Manual**
- **Golf Quality Standards**
- **Park Maintenance Operations Manual**
- **Park Renovation Master Plans**



## 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 a Special Recreation Association (SRA)



The Park District is part of the Special Recreation Services of Northern Lake County (SRSNLC) which is a Special Recreation Association (“SRA”). 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 the SRA, the Park District networks with other local government agencies to provide many more program opportunities for our community members who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in the SRA's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

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

- ***Waukegan Park District – Adaptive Recreation Center***
- ***Zion Park District – Shiloh Center for Special Recreation***



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

In 2023, the SRA successfully served 518 residents in 109 programs. The SRA also supported 15 participants in inclusive programs that were provided by the Park District.

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

- Lake County Forest Preserve District – partner on initiatives pertaining to the Lake Michigan shoreline areas (Hosah Park) to prevent, eradicate, and control invasive species to promote resiliency, watershed stability, and biological diversity in the Lake Plain
- Lake County Storm Water Management – cooperate with to improve water quality, reduce flood damages, and restore and enhance natural drainage.

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

- Zion-Benton Township High School District 126 – shared facility IGA for use of their Natatorium where the Park District programs swim lessons, lap swim, and aqua Zumba
- City of Zion – share revenue IGA in which the City receives payment from the Park District for golf revenue
- Zion Police Department – special duty requests that provide police protection, when requested, for Park District special events
- Zion Township – The Park District participates in the Township's Summer Work Program which provides summer jobs to youth in the community and Shoppers program for Seniors

- Zion Benton Public Library – The Park District supports initiatives of the Library, such as its Summer Reading Program, by offering items such as free pool, fitness, or golf passes.
- Lake County Sheriff's Auxiliary Unit

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

- Illinois Department of Public Health - Childcare payments from the State of Illinois for summer camps. Annual childcare assistance payments average a total of approximately \$18,000 per summer.
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) - Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) provides annual compensation to Zion taxing bodies for the storage of spent nuclear fuel.
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) – Open Space Land Acquisition & Development grants (OSLAD). Our District has secured a total of \$1,000,000 in OSLAD grants over the past two years.

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

- AYSO soccer
- Five Star Sports
- Razzle Dazzles Baton Corps
- Jr. Zee Bee's football
- Lake FC Soccer Association
- Maroon Baseball

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

- Coalition for Healthy Communities
- University of Illinois Extension (master gardeners)
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)
- Office of State Senator Mary Edly-Allen
- Office of State Representative Joyce Mason
- Job Center of Lake County

- The African American Museum at the England Manor
- Scholars Soaring Cultural Center
- Christ Community Church
- Zion Historical Society
- BUZ (Building Up Zion)
- Community 365
- Zion Pageant Committee
- Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
- Kohl's Children Museum
- Alliance for the Great Lakes
- Shining Star
- Kiwanis Club of Zion-Benton
- Zion Area Exchange Club
- Rotary Club of Illinois Beach Sunrise
- Zion-Benton Township High School Booster Club
- Zion District 6 Schools
- Illinois Arborist Association

## **7. Partnerships with for profit organizations**

- Old National Bank
- Wintrust Community Bank
- The District has partnerships with local contractors to complete routine maintenance and small projects. These local vendors, many of which are minority or woman owned, include:
  - Mundo Landscaping

- Acosta & Sons Landscaping
- Martin Landscaping
- Gerrardo Flores Landscaping
- Johnson Landscaping
- Maz Landscaping
- VMG Quality Cleaning
- Santiago Tree
- Guillermo Hernandez Handyman Services
- Bricco Construction
- Becker Masonry Services
- Doetsch Contractors

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

- The Park District mows and maintains many open lands and common areas throughout the City of Zion. Included in the District's 825 acres of land are the large, tree-lined, boulevards between streets throughout town.
- The Park District and City of Zion frequently work together to clean up graffiti and vandalism or remove storm damaged trees.
- The Park District and City partner on events such as the Labor Day parade.
- The Park District and Township partner on events such the Zinnia & Monarch Festival and Senior Resource Day
- The Park District supports the Zion-Benton Public Library's Summer Reading Program with free admission passes to the District's pool, golf course, and recreation facilities.
- The Park District supports local community organizations such as the Kiwanis Club, Zion Rotary, ZBTHS Booster Club by hosting fundraising events at the Park District's golf course
- The Park District partners with Lake County and local legislators to offer services to the community such as job fairs and voting initiatives.

## 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, 20 individuals volunteered over 200 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 35 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.** The Park District participates in multiple 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:

- TIPS Purchasing Cooperative
- Omnia Partners Purchasing Cooperative
- Sourcewell Purchasing Cooperative
- PCA Purchasing Cooperative

**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. 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.

- | <b>Document</b>  | <b>Available Locations</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Annual Tax Levy Ordinance</u></li></ul>   | <p>www.zionparkdistrict.com/about/financial-information</p> <p>Admin Office – 2400 Dowie Memorial Drive, Zion, IL</p> <p>Lake County Clerk’s Office – 18 N. County St, Waukegan, IL</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance and Annual Audited Financials</u></li></ul> | <p>www.zionparkdistrict.com/about/financial-information</p> <p>Admin Office – 2400 Dowie Memorial Drive, Zion, IL</p> <p>Lake County Clerk’s Office – 18 N. County St, Waukegan, IL</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Park Board and Finance Committee meeting minutes and agendas</u></li></ul>            | <p>www.zionparkdistrict.com/meeting-minutes-and-agendas</p> <p>Admin Office – 2400 Dowie Memorial Drive, Zion, IL</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Comptroller’s annual finance report (AFR)</u></li></ul>                               | <p><a href="http://www.illinoiscomptroller.gov/financial-reports-data/">www.illinoiscomptroller.gov/financial-reports-data/</a></p>   |

The following documents and information can be obtained at the Park District main administration office located at 2400 Dowie Memorial Drive, Zion, IL

- Conduct Ordinances
- Park Master Plans
- Strategic Plan
- Capital Improvement Plan
- ADA Transition Plan

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

- The Park Board of Commissioners, comprised of five residents, 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.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 847-746-5500, email at [info@zionparkdistrict.org](mailto:info@zionparkdistrict.org), or stop in at the district's main administrative office.
- Public Hearings are conducted annually to allow the community to provide feedback on the Park District's budget, tax levy, and bond issuance.
- Program surveys are conducted to gather participant feedback and utilized by recreation staff to modify or add program offerings.
- Recent OSLAD grants secured from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources included community input sessions to provide opportunities for feedback on project master plans to ensure the capital expenditures will meet the community wants and needs.
- A community survey was conducted in prior years by ETC Institute to gauge community interest and opinions to help identify opportunities for the District to better serve the community. The statistically valid survey showed that 72% of respondents were satisfied with the overall value received from the Park District and 81% were willing to recommend Zion Park District activities and facilities to a friend.

## 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 offers the following facilities to the community:

	Total Acreage	Administrative Office	Baseball/Softball Diamonds	Basketball Courts	Bike Trails	Fishing Pond	Fitness Center	Golf Course 9 Hole	Golf Course 18 Hole	Gymnasium	Horseshoes/Bocce	Nature Area	Picnic Area	Playground	Pro-Shop	Rest Rooms	Swimming Pool	Tennis Courts	Water Slides
A - Shiloh Park	132		●	●	●					●		●	●		●		●		
A1 - Leisure Center		●		●		●			●							●			
A2 - Port Shiloh Pool																●	●		●
A3 - Shiloh Center																●			
A4 - Shiloh Park Golf Course	60						●							●					
B - Beulah Park	80			●							●		●						
C - Edina Park	54		●	●	●	●						●	●					●	
D - Hermon Park	17.5		●	●	●	●						●	●					●	
D1 - Hermon Park Center						●			●							●			
E - David Park	25.7		●	●									●			●			
F - Sharon Park	4			●							●								
G - Ophir Park	4.5																		
H - Elizabeth Park	2.5			●									●					●	
I - Joanna Park	4.5		●	●									●	●				●	
J - Hebron Park	.7			●									●						
K - Aaron Park	.5												●						
L - Daniel Park	.5												●						
M - Carmel Park	14			●															
N - Hosah Park	22.7			●							●	●							
O - Timothy Park	1.5												●						
P - Jordan Park	16		●	●								●	●		●			●	
Q - Tabor Park	1.3		●									●	●						
R - Caleb Park	3											●	●						
S - Olivet Park	4.2												●						
T - Nazareth Park	2												●						
U - Shepherd's Crook Golf Course	150							●						●	●				
V - Harmony Park	2.1		●									●	●						
W - Salem Play Area	10.5												●						
X - Kellogg Creek Conservancy	35																		



## **2. Programs & Events**

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

### **Programs:**

Senior Holiday Party, Senior Bingo, Senior Dominoes & Cards, Beach Volleyball, Fitness Classes, Youth Dance, Baton, Flag Football, Soccer, Preschool, Youth Track and Field, Nerf Battle, Video Gaming, Youth Basketball League, Basketball Camp, Virtual Fitness Classes, Water Aerobics, Learn to Swim, Summer Day Camp

Last year the District offered 797 total programs or classes and served 2,495 participants according to our recreation registration software, Community Pass.

### **Special Events:**

Adopt- A-Beach, Trail of Treats, Fishing Derby, Turkey Shoot, Hunting at Hosah, Shamrock Hunt, Easter Egg Hunt, Black History, Go Zion, Get Your Play On, Concerts in the Park, Independence Day Celebration, Pokémon, Christmas Trail of Lights, Tree Lighting,

Last year we offered 15 different types of community events, serving 8,083 attendees.

## **3. Additional Services**

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

- American Red Cross Blood Drives
- Job Fairs
- Youth Summer Work Program
- Cooling & Warming Center
- Emergency Center
- Voting Site
- Food Drives
- Toy Drives
- Community Vegetable Garden

- Pollinator Garden
- Children’s Museum
- Back to School Supply Drives

#### **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. 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. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Park District’s open space and trees help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.

When neighbors gather for special events, they create opportunities for meaningful connections. These interactions build trust, empathy, and understanding among community members, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of unity.

## **IX. 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.

The Park District routinely pays fees and charges to other local units of government for building permits, stormwater permits, construction permits, food permits, liquor licenses, health inspections, and utility fees such as water costs for the District's golf course and outdoor community pool. Total costs associated with these expenditures can amount to over \$50,000 per year for the Park District.

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.

- The Park District has experienced delays in grant reimbursements from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. As part of the CEJA act, local Zion taxing bodies were awarded compensation for the spent nuclear fuel rods that will be permanently stored in Zion. The Park District's

annual allocation of these funds is \$897,841. During the first year of the grant in 2023, the grant window opened on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The Park District submitted its budget and all grant documents on time. Acknowledgement communication was not received from DCEO for multiple months. Additionally, six months into the grant, the Park District was notified that the grant had a BEP requirement to utilize woman and minority owned businesses. This required the Park District to revise its initial budget and get further approval by DCEO. Working with DCEO through this change took over one year. Ultimately it took a year and half for the Park District to receive its first installment payment of \$105,099. As of the date of this report, the Park District is waiting to receive the remaining \$792,742 for which it has already incurred expenses and submitted for reimbursement.

- The Park District has two OSLAD grants currently in progress. One of the grants, for a project at David Park, experienced a three week permitting delay from Lake County Stormwater Management. This caused the contractor to move onto other work and delayed the start of Park District's project by over one month. Because grants have strict completion timelines, permitting delays resulting from other agencies has a detrimental impact of the District's ability to timely complete projects and risks the reimbursement of grant funds.

### **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.

For example, in 2024 the State of Illinois passed legislation for trail signage that required the Park District to install additional warning signs at the intersections of all its bicycle trails. To meet the unfunded mandate, purchasing additional signs and staff time to install them throughout the District cost the Park District thousands of dollars.

**a) Non-resident FOIA Requests.** Last year, the park district spent approximately two thousand dollars of 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. Some routine FOIA requestors include:

- Smart Procure – requests vendor detail information each quarter for their online procurement database
- Open the Books – requests vendor detail information each quarter for their online database
- Local trade and contractor unions – requests bid information each time a project is publicly bid

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 \$1,462 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.

### **Park District Value:**

At less than 6.7% of a resident's tax bill, the Zion Park District provides significant value to the citizens of Zion. The Park District manages and maintains 825 acres of parkland and open spaces as well as 23 parks and five major facilities. The facilities include a recreation center, community center, senior / special recreation center, outdoor pool, nine-hole golf course, and eighteen-hole golf course. The District's golf operations are 100% funded by user fees and provide money to be used for free special events for the community.

**Statistics published by the National Recreation and Parks Association show people's overwhelming support for parks and recreation: ([www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org))**

- 88% of US adults agree that parks and recreation provide good opportunities to interact with nature and the outdoors.
- 91% of U.S. adults seek entertainment and social events centered around parks
- 62% of U.S. adults are more likely to support politicians who prioritize funding for parks and recreation
- 66% of U.S. adults support government revenues, taxes, and levies specifically dedicated to parks and recreation operations and investments
- 83% of U.S. adults agree it is important to have access to indoor and outdoor recreational areas and activities to help lead a healthy lifestyle
- Parks promote positive mental health by providing access to nature and encouraging recreational and physical activity

In addition to providing parks, programs, special events, and open spaces for people to enjoy and improve their quality of life; park districts help stimulate economic growth. A recent study from *Trust for Public Land*, showed that as large cities become increasingly challenged with population sprawl and workforce flexibility, a comprehensive park system within a city is a key factor in attracting companies and new residents. Nearly three in four U.S adults believe that access to a nearby park, playground, green space or recreation center plays an important factor in deciding where to they want to live.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: 10-22-24