

2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

Growing Greatness

MORTON GROVE
PARK DISTRICT

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Dear Community Member,

It is my pleasure to present the Morton Grove Park District's Strategic Plan for 2023–2028.

We appreciate the valuable feedback provided by residents through our 2022 Community Survey. This information, along with input from the Board, staff and other key stakeholders formed the basis for this plan.

This plan built on the prior strategic plan. Many of the objectives from the last plan have been accomplished and several have been carried over.

Over the past six months, the Board and staff worked in three phases to update the plan:

1. Data review and distilling 2022 Community Survey findings, Comprehensive Master Plan recommendations, status of initiatives from the previous strategic plan, and identifying the strengths of the District, challenges ahead, and opportunities to grow and improve our service to the community.
2. Staff planning and development of initiatives, tasks, and timelines to move the District forward.
3. Board of Park Commissioners review and approval

This updated plan establishes a roadmap guiding the Park District to achieve success in key areas of its operation and provide the community with an increased sense of pride in their Park District and community.

Thank you for taking the time to review this plan. If you have any questions, please feel free to call Jeff Wait, Executive Director, at 847-965-0383 or jwait@mgparks.com.

Sincerely,

Keith White

President, Board of Park Commissioners

Executive Summary



Morton Grove…

The Village of Morton Grove, Illinois (pop. 23,256) is a progressive, family-oriented community located 15 miles northwest of downtown Chicago in Cook County. Morton Grove's unique location (between I-94 and I-294), combined with its dedication to delivering the highest level of services to its residents, excellent schools, and abundance of park and forest preserve land, make it an ideal community in which to live and work. Nearly 20% of the land in Morton Grove is owned by the Cook County Forest Preserve and is dedicated to open space and recreation. Although primarily residential in nature, Morton Grove's 5.2 square miles also includes a healthy commercial and industrial base. The community is bordered by the Villages of Glenview and Golf on the north, Skokie on the east, and Niles on the south and west.

Morton Grove Park District



The Morton Grove Park District has been providing memorable experiences in parks and recreation since its inception in 1951. As a separate municipal governing agency, the District is responsible for providing parks, facilities and recreational programs for the community. The organization is led by five (5) elected park commissioners, 24 full time staff and nearly 200 seasonal and part time employees. The District owns and maintains ten facilities including two outdoor pools, a museum, four field houses, a 50,000-square foot community center and 14 parks totaling over 70 acres. The District is a member of the Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA) and the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD). The District also contracts with the Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation to provide recreational services to individuals with special needs.

In the past five years, the Morton Grove Park District has achieved many successes. It has transitioned several key leadership positions on the Board of Park Commissioners and administration. Park District finances remained stable despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The District demonstrated innovation and the ability to quickly adapt by successfully working through the pandemic to offer recreational opportunities while complying with restrictions on group gatherings.

The District continued its commitment to engaging the community in its planning by holding numerous community outreach meetings and also conducted two statistically valid community surveys in 2016 and most recently in 2022 to obtain feedback from the community that guides the board and staff in decision-making. Results of these surveys revealed:

- Strong community support
- Most residents have a favorable view of the District, its parks, facilities and recreation programs.
- Individual comments expressed extreme satisfaction with the agency and its services.
- Positive feedback regarding the quantity and quality of programs provided, reasonable fees and with staff.
- The District is inclusive, providing opportunities for participation by all ages and groups.
- The community of Morton Grove is seen as favorable to draw newcomers to the community.

The District also continues its commitment to working in the "spirit of intergovernmental cooperation". This was demonstrated by working with the Morton Grove Public Works Department to:

- Repair a water line break at the old Harrer Park Pool, sanitary line break at the Park's garage and a drainage line break at Oriole Park
- Continue to support the Morton Days setup, operation and take down
- Joint purchase of all gas and diesel fuel through the Village

The Board and staff worked collectively with the community and a citizen's committee to pass a referendum to replace the Harrer Park Pool. The pool was 54 years old and was well beyond the 35-year life span of an outdoor pool facility in this part of the country. The pool experienced significant water loss and had frequent breakdowns. A new pool was constructed and is set to open for the 2022 season.

The Morton Grove Park District has been recognized by the park and recreation and government finance industries. The District has achieved designation as an Illinois Distinguished Agency by a committee of the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association. The District has also maintained its status as an accredited member of the Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) with an "Excellence-Level A" rating for safety. For 20 consecutive years, the District received the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Excellence in Financial Reporting Award and has received a –AA bond rating

Morton Grove Park District Strategic Planning

In January 2022, the Morton Grove Park District Board and staff initiated the following process to update the 2017-2022 plan. There were three phases to this process:

- **Phase 1: Review and Issue Identification** –This included data review and distilling feedback from the 2022 Community Survey and the newly updated Comprehensive Master Plan. The process focused on those items that were most important to the future success of the Park District over the next five years, along with identifying the strengths of the District, challenges ahead and opportunities to improve Park District services to the community.
- **Phase 2: Strategic Initiative Development** – Park District staff clarified and developed the strategic initiatives and identified associated goals, objectives, tasks, and action timelines.
- **Phase 3: Review and approval** – The Morton Grove Board of Park Commissioners approved the plan.

About the strategic planning process…

As part of the Strategic Plan updating for 2023-2028, the District sought input that included:



- Conducting a community survey
- Several meetings with the Strategic Plan Executive Steering Committee (ESC). The ESC consisted of senior-level Park District leadership.
- A feedback session with the Park District Board of Commissioners
- Review and reference of the *2022 Comprehensive Master Plan*. This extensive research effort included: Community visioning, individual park site evaluations, assessment of existing facilities, and analysis of practices and procedures.

This process and the recommendations from the District's 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan allowed the District to identify major issues/initiatives/projects that need to be addressed over the next five years. Issues were grouped by themes. These themes were consolidated into six forward-looking strategic initiatives for the 2023-2028 timeframe.

1. **Invest in the Future of Our Community Through Revitalized Parks and Facilities**
2. **Reimaging Program Offerings**
3. **Attract and Retain Highly Qualified Employees**
4. **Foster Proactive Community Engagement and Support**
5. **Using Technology to Streamline Operations and Create Customer Friendly Processes**
6. **Financial Planning that Supports High Quality Services and Growth**

A team leader was assigned to each initiative to:

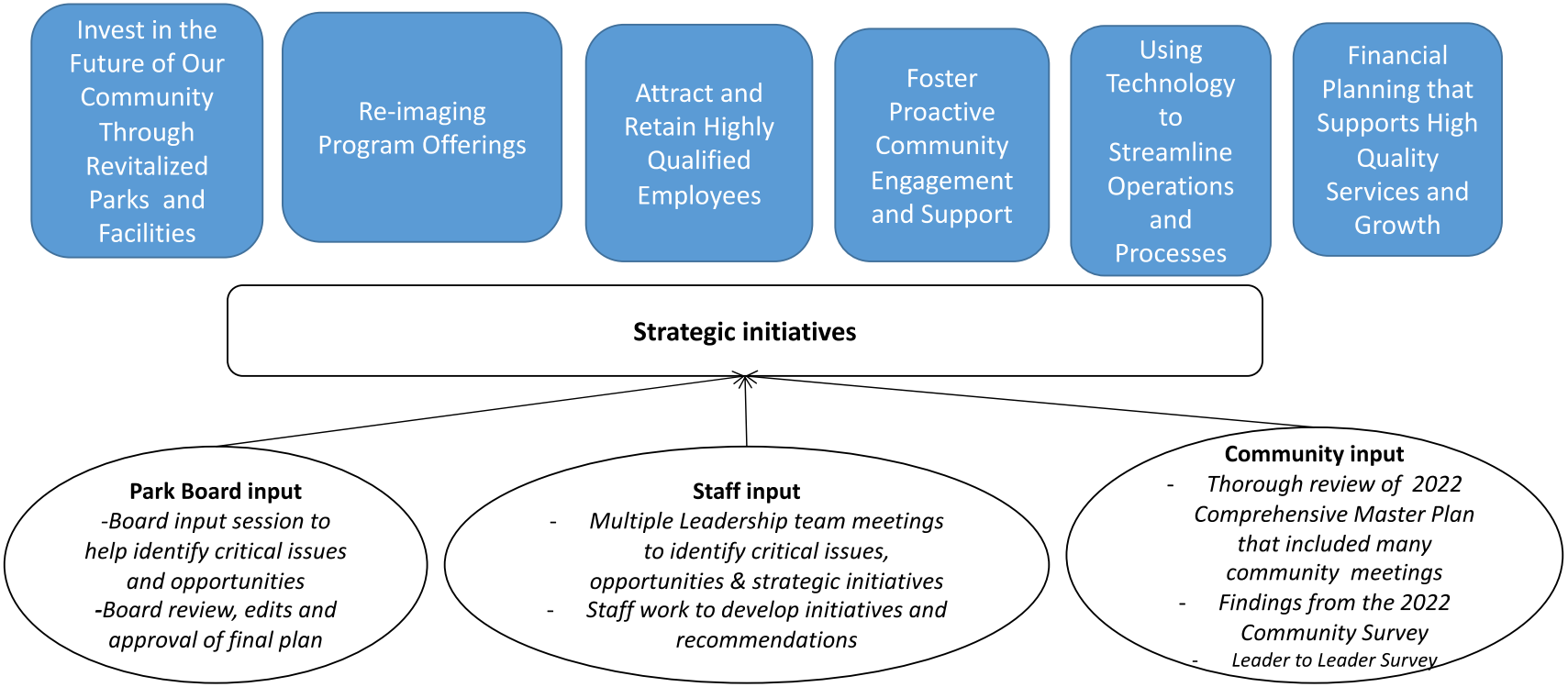
- Study, receive input, and analyze each initiative.
- Clarify and define the initiative.
- Identify internal and external factors that may impact the District's ability to move forward on the initiative.
- Develop recommendations with specific steps that must be taken to address the stated initiative.

Drafts of these initiatives and recommendations will be presented and reviewed at the June 15, 2022 Park Board meeting.

The illustration on the following pages summarizes the input and the resulting strategic initiatives.

Morton Grove Park District Strategic Planning (2023-2028)

Mission: The Morton Grove Park District is committed to enrich the quality of community life and promote recreational activities through creative programming for people of all ages and abilities, while protecting open space and natural resources for future generations.



Morton Grove Park District Strategic Planning (2023-2028)

Invest in the future of our community through revitalized parks and facilities	Re-imaging program offerings	Attract and retain highly qualified employees	Foster proactive community engagement and support	Using technology to streamline operations and create customer friendly processes	Financial Planning that supports high quality services and growth
1. Identify and explore use options for the future use of the Prairieview Community Center 2. Identify and explore options for consolidating preschool into one location 3. Identify and explore options for the District 's four field houses 4. Evaluate all park sites from a use, maintenance and improvement standpoint	1. Leverage metrics and research to optimize programming mix 2.Introduce more inclusive and diverse programs and park enhancements to our residents	1.Provide a continuous learning environment 2.Motivate improvement, empowerment and accountability by active leadership 3.Continue/ maintain transparent and trusting management practices and relationships 4.Strengthen internal communication and customer service standards	1. Improve professional relationships through engagement and outreach 2. Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing efforts to enhance community outreach	1. Provide a stable technology environment to reduce downtime and improve transaction processing 2. Collect and analyze feedback to improve operations	1. Annually review and update long-term plan 2. Update financial policies and procedures 3. Maintain current tax rate 4. Build more alternative sources of funding such as program fees, grants sponsorships

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Morton Grove Park District Strategic Planning (2023-2028) continued

Invest in the future of our community through revitalized parks and facilities	Re-imaging program offerings	Attract and retain highly qualified employees	Foster proactive community engagement and support	Using technology to streamline operations and create customer friendly processes	Financial Planning that supports high quality services and growth
5. Operate more efficiently to control and/or reduce costs 6. Address selected General Park improvements 7. Conduct a feasibility study to repurpose a closed facility for a community recreation center, if one becomes available	3. Maintain financial sustainability in program offerings 4. Enhance our communications and customer service to our diverse population to enrich program participation	5. Provide competitive compensation, benefits and incentives 6. Enhance human resources onboarding program 7. Increase interest in working for Morton Grove Park District 8. Formulate the District's vision for a successful organizational culture	3. Develop and/or update agreements 4. Strengthen Board competencies to enhance engagement	3. Strengthen internal communication and customer service standards 4. Evaluate and implement communications tools	5. Develop the Morton Grove Parks Foundation 6. Evaluate contracted services 7. Enhance the dissemination of financial information

Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #1: INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH REVITALIZED PARKS AND FACILITIES

The Morton Grove Park District will endeavor to provide relevant, well maintained, safe and updated parks and facilities to its users that appropriately reflect the interests and needs of its residents within the financial ability of the Park District.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

The Morton Grove Park District provides a comprehensive system of public parks, fieldhouses, two outdoor pools, a museum, a 50,000 square foot community center, and recreation amenities that greatly contribute to the quality of life of its residents. The park and recreation facilities are well used and are a highly regarded element of life to its residents. They serve as the foundation of the Park District by promoting community activity through programs, services, events, and all manner of active/passive recreational pursuits for the community and visitors.

Morton Grove is a mature community with no opportunity to expand beyond its current borders. Therefore, it becomes critical to protect and preserve its existing parks and facilities by continually conducting preventative maintenance, repairs, and renovations to assure that these community assets will be attractive and available to its residents now and in the future. As residents seek new recreational space to expand recreational programs and services, it further becomes imperative to seek out and consider re-purposing or revitalizing existing space within the community and/or acquiring available space through partnerships.

The District's existing facilities present a challenge in that many of them are aging and in need of renovation, revitalization, replacement, or maintenance. To date, the District has maintained park properties, including athletic fields, playgrounds, sport courts and passive areas in a consistent and appropriate manner. They, along with the recreation center, outdoor pools and museum can continue to be maintained at a high level with continued diligence, a comprehensive preventative maintenance plan and the planned repair/replacement of major park and facility components. The 2022 "Growing Greatest" Comprehensive Master Plan did an excellent job of identifying areas where parks and facilities were in need of attention. Implementation of the Comprehensive Master Plan's action plan and the funding for the identified maintenance, repairs, renovation and revitalization of parks and facilities needs to be a priority for the District over the next few years.

As community demographics change and new recreational trends evolve, community members desire new or upgraded facilities. The District must be positioned to adapt and explore options to meet the interests of residents. Based on those responding to the 2021 Community Survey, residents expressed a need or interest in:

- An indoor walking/running track (58%, down from 69% in 2018 – pre-COVID)
- An indoor pool (51%, consistent with 52% in 2018)
- Fitness Center (43%, down from 55% in 2018).

At least one in five are also interested in:

- Rental space for meetings, events, etc. (32%, up from 25% in 2018)
- Gym space (28%, nearly consistent with 32% in 2018)
- Space for arts, crafts, theater programs, etc. (26%, not tested in 2018)
- Program space for group fitness (25%, down from 33% in 2018)
- Dedicated space for seniors (21%, down from 32% in 2018).

Funding for future capital improvements continues to be a significant challenge for the District. The District's non referendum bonding authority has been dedicated to debt retirement of the Oriole pool project and is committed until 2032. While there is a planned funding program for many of the District's assets, the program is limited to replacing existing furniture, fixtures, and equipment. It does not address funding for new capital development. A successful referendum in 2020 provided for renovation and ongoing maintenance at Harrer Pool. Any significant new capital projects however, will take efforts to secure grants, public/private partnerships, etc. The last resort would be a referendum.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What things within the Park District (both positive and negative) will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- The lack of non-referendum bonding power to fund a larger project.
- Potential lack of funding as available funds get earmarked for other purposes.
- The need for staff and Board support for those projects selected vs. ones that may not make the cut.
- Communication to staff and residents to keep them informed and involved in the process.
- The cost of operation and maintenance of new facilities and the opportunity for the District to generate new revenues through operations (cost/benefit analysis).
- What impact will decisions have on existing operations?
- Space necessary to build new facilities
- Needs met through the availability of similar use facilities (private sector businesses or other local public agencies)
- Ability of staff to take on new projects considering their current workload.
- Impact to existing facilities/parks – potential loss of open space already at a premium in the community
- Long-term effect of new facilities on capital repairs and replacement program funding.
- Incorporating latest technology, eco-friendly systems, and accessibility into new facility designs

- Potential need for additional parking facilities to accommodate increased use of new or expanded facilities.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What things outside the control of the District (both positive and negative) will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Availability and increased costs of materials and labor due to inflation and both commodity and labor shortages
- Availability of potential buildings/sites to repurpose for recreational needs
- Local government support/oversight (permitting, zoning, potential partnerships, etc.)
- Cost/accessibility to local utilities (gas, water, electricity, sewer)
- Level of competition within the community and/or service area
- Resident and stakeholder support for projects
- Availability of public/private partnership opportunities and both state and federal grants.

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Identify and explore options for the future use of the Prairieview Community Center and park.			Fiscal Yr.	Assigned to:
		Explore the feasibility of a building addition/expansion.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Explore the feasibility of building renovations.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Explore the feasibility of public requests for: • Pickleball courts • Peewee Gym • Updated playground • Renovated tennis courts • Additional parking • Dog park		Supt Parks/Facilities
Objective: Identify and explore the options for consolidating preschool into one location.			**Fiscal Yr.**	**Assigned to:**
		Develop a cost/benefit analysis to explore potential cost savings.		Supt of Finance
		Conduct a site study for future locations.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Develop plans to construct a Preschool and Daycare center to consolidate and expand existing programs into a centralized, state-of-the-art facility.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Conduct a needs assessment and investigate licensures and costs of infant care.		Supt of Recreation
Objective: Identify and explore use options for the District's four fieldhouses.			**Fiscal Yr.**	**Assigned to:**
		Review use levels and cost analysis to maintain and operate the field houses.		Supt Parks/Facilities

		Explore feasibility, costs and safety measures to add outside access bathrooms with possible automated opening and closing devices to the field houses.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Investigate and conduct a feasibility study on the need and estimated construction costs of renovating and repurposing one or more of the field houses to reduce operating and maintenance costs and to serve camp and picnic uses.		Supt Parks/Facilities

Objective: Evaluate all park sites from a use, maintenance, and improvement standpoint			**Fiscal Yr.**	**Assigned to:**
		Identify park sites for future amenities.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Evaluate and create a list of current park amenities for repairs or replacement (i.e., paths, benches, backstops etc.).		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Investigate options for new amenities.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Investigate lighting Field #4 at Harrer Park.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Plan for the revitalization of National Park, leveraging OSLAD funds to achieve this.		Executive Director
Objective: Operate more efficiently to control and/or reduce costs			**Fiscal Yr.**	**Assigned to:**
		Identify and explore ideas, processes, and equipment for operating more efficiently.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Identify and explore ideas for controlling and/or reducing maintenance costs.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Decrease environmental impacts and sustainability through green initiatives.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Create an hoc environmental task force.		Executive Director

Objective: Address selected General Park Improvements			Fiscal Yr.	Assigned to:
		Explore suggestions from the community input survey.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Explore park sites for additional shelters or shade structures.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Conduct a condition assessment of shelters and pavilions.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Explore the feasibility of adding new technology to park system i.e., wi-fi in parks, solar path lighting and electric vehicles.		Supt Parks/Facilities
Objective: Carry out recommendations and action items from existing plans			**Fiscal Yr.**	**Assigned to:**
		Commit to asset replacement as per replacement plan.		Supt Parks/Facilities
		Prioritize and address the Priority 1 recommended action items from the 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan.	2023-2026	Supt Parks/Facilities
		Prioritize and address the Priority 2 recommended action items from the 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan.	2025-2028	Supt Parks/Facilities
		Prioritize and address ADA Priority 1 improvements as per ADA audit.		Supt Parks/Facilities

Objective: Conduct a Feasibility Study to Repurpose a Closed Facility for a Community Recreation Center, if one becomes available			Fiscal Yr.	Assigned to:
		Hire an architectural firm to evaluate the cost of renovating and repurposing the building.		Executive Director
		Develop a list of proposed uses, demand projections and an operational pro forma identifying potential revenues and expenses to determine financial feasibility.		Executive Director
		Identify potential partners and grants (neighboring agencies, private partners, support groups) that might assist in funding.		Executive Director
		Explore funding options and community support.		Executive Director

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE #2: RE-IMAGINING PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Changing demographics and rising customer expectations require that the Morton Grove Park District continually gains insight into its residents' interests, adapt its programming to meet those needs and broaden the appeal of program offerings to all segments of the population. In doing so, the District seeks to instill a culture of continual improvement and creativity as it works to differentiate itself from other local agencies and be the "go-to" organization for recreation opportunities in the area.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

Park and recreation agencies are continually faced with new challenges in meeting the needs of a changing community. An understanding of recreation trends as well as patterns of demographic change is important to the continued programming success of the Morton Grove Park District. Future recreation programming must represent the demographic diversity of Park District users to ensure ongoing customer satisfaction, inclusivity, and support throughout the community. The Morton Grove Park District solicited community input as part of its 2022 Comprehensive Master Planning process to help assess community interest when planning future programs and events across various segments of the population.

The Village of Morton Grove's population has seen a slight increase in population since 2010, although the rate of increase has decreased since 2015. Great schools, low crime rates and competitive cost-of-living makes Morton Grove a desirable place to live. The age segment of Morton Grove residents ages 55 to 84 years old is growing rapidly while those in the 0-25 years of age bracket are declining. While the population has remained stable, the subtle demographic changes within Morton Grove's population require a review of park services in order to meet a variety of needs. For example, many seniors within the community have an increased interest in different types of recreation activities and amenities than those currently provided, such as more senior recreation, mid-day programs, and volunteer opportunities. The desire for increased senior and active adult programming was also re-affirmed in the feedback from the most recent community survey and provides an opportunity to better meet the interests of this segment.

The community is also ethnically diverse. The largest demographic shift has been an increase in Asian residents, representing a wide-ranging group of nationalities. As of 2019, residents who identified as "Asian alone" represented 30% of the population (up from 22% in 2000). Culturally, Morton Grove has 53.3% of residents that speak a language other than English. Of these non-English speaking languages, Chinese, Tagalog, Korean and other IndoAsian languages make up one of the largest groups. Ethnic diversity provides an opportunity to create events that recognize and celebrate inclusion and diversity of various groups within the community.

Based on the results of community input gathered as part of the 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan, the Morton Grove Park District enjoys a high satisfaction rate among residents related to program offerings and events. Nearly half of those responding reported that someone in their household participated in a District program or event in the past year. The most frequently cited participation occurred at summer outdoor concerts (25%), special events such as the Egg Hunt, Daddy-Daughter Dance, etc. (14% -- down

from 27% in pre-COVID 2018), youth sports and/or athletics (13%) and fitness/exercise/training programs (13%).

Satisfaction with MGPD programs and events overall is also especially high and has increased since the previous survey in 2018. Relatively few respondents to the survey could offer specific suggestions for improvement. Residents did offer, however, a wide range of suggestions for potential programs and events for all ages. Topping the list of suggestions for programming and events were more/better fitness and sports programs, more offerings/activities geared for seniors (7%), more youth programming (6%), more special events (5%) and more programming for adults (5%). The recent renovation of Harrer Pool also provides opportunities for new aquatics-related programs such as scuba and aqua fitness. In general, programming space is limited and impacts the number and types of programs that can be offered.

The National Recreation and Park Association's detailed report on Park and Recreation Trends for 2021 suggests that educational programs (62.2%), holiday and other special events (up to 81.6%) and adult sports teams (59.1%) are the trends to look out for.

A list of the 10 top-most planned programs within the parks and recreation industry are:

- Group exercise programs
- Teen programming
- Fitness programs
- Mind-body balance programs such as yoga
- Programs for active older adults
- Educational programs
- Environmental education programs
- Holidays and other special events
- Adult sports teams
- Special needs programs

The pandemic with its restrictions on group gatherings demonstrated the District's ability to quickly adapt and be innovative as it shifted from traditional program offerings to develop and implement 11 new creative opportunities to engage the community. Nationally, the pandemic also brought about the growth of e-sports, including virtual team competitions. In Morton Grove, there was limited community interest in the Park District's initial attempts to provide E-sports programs. This is a program area that should continue to be monitored for increased interest.

One of the external challenges in providing recreation programs is that there are a number of other agencies that offer recreational opportunities that may compete with programming offered by the Morton Grove Park District. This competition leads to a duplication of services that dilutes participation and adds additional burden to the taxpayers to support the operation of multiple agencies. The District should continuously look for opportunities to collaborate on potential partnerships, especially with other governmental agencies.

In order to continue to enhance the quality of life for our residents, the District must continue its success in providing recreational programs and events to the community by instilling a culture of continual improvement, seeking continuous feedback, utilizing available data for analysis and benchmarking, being

adaptable, creative, and re-imagining the programs and events that can be offered. Program offerings should bring value to the community where the benefits received exceed the costs to the participant. In addition, the core program offerings will remain focused on *what the District does* best for each major program area while adding new and exciting opportunities when facilities are available, and a new program can be financially sustainable.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What things within the Park District will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Availability of program space
- Staff turnover rate
- Data analysis and financial reporting capabilities
- Ease of registration process
- Effective marketing to reach all segments of the population
- Changing the perspective that Park District offerings are primarily for youth
- Keeping fees affordable
- Developing innovative and creative program offerings
- Complacency
- Affordability for the residents

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What things outside the control of the District (both positive and negative) will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Ability to find/train qualified program instructors/leaders
- Ability to find/retain quality independent contractors
- Cooperation from other agencies
- Competition from private business and other agencies
- Duplication in community programs; potential for "mission creep"
- Diversity of population
- Health and safety concerns (virus transmission, concussions etc.)
- Lack of participant feedback to program surveys

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Leverage metrics and research to optimize programming mix.			FISCAL YEAR	ASSIGNED TO:
		Continue to provide customer-oriented recreation activities that address diversity and changing demographics. i. Include basic, core, instructional and specialized programming. ii. Annually review program offerings and identify areas of deficiency. iii. Evaluate programs that are not reaching targeted participation and/or revenues and modify or discontinue.		Supt of Recreation
		Send out program evaluations every quarter to evaluate existing programs and identify trends.		Supt of Recreation
		Survey facility users to evaluate usage, customer service, amenities, and equipment.		Supt of Recreation
		Collect demographic information and use it to help make programming changes.		Supt of Recreation
Objective: Introduce more inclusive and diverse programs and park enhancements to our residents.			**FISCAL YEAR**	**ASSIGNED TO:**
		Expand evening and weekend programming and scheduling.		Supt of Recreation
		Implement a "loyalty" program to reward patrons that are frequent users of District programming.		Supt of Recreation
		Research possibility of additional program space at schools, building additions, under-used outdoor space.		Executive Director
		More inclusive in our outdoor play areas. Expand opportunities to offer more diverse options such as cricket pitch, dedicated soccer field.		Supt of Recreation
		Enhance program offerings for active adults and seniors.		Supt of Recreation
		Explore opportunities for programming at the outdoor pools.		Supt of Recreation
		Expand fitness and sports programming for youth and adults including outdoor fitness.		Supt of Recreation

Objective: Maintain financial sustainability in program offerings.			FISCAL YEAR	ASSIGNED TO:
		Identify and contract with independent contractors to provide programming where specific/advanced skills or specialized equipment is required.		Supt of Recreation
		Coordinate programs with other agencies to provide comprehensive recreation opportunities.		Supt of Recreation
		Increase Recreation Department portion of District's total revenue over a five-year period by establishing pricing philosophies using categories of services guidelines.		Supt of Finance
		Reinstate and/or develop new revenue producing programs.		Supt of Recreation
Objective: Enhance our communication and customer service to our diverse population to enrich program participation.			**FISCAL YEAR**	**ASSIGNED TO:**
		Increase guest service hours for in-person registration.		Registration Coordinator
		Expand further onto other social media platforms.		Marketing Manager
		Cross-promote with other businesses.		Marketing Manager
		Create an inclusive environment by recognizing various other cultural traditions and holidays that our residents celebrate.		All Staff

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #3: ATTRACT AND RETAIN HIGHLY QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES

Attracting and retaining high quality, engaged employees requires the Park District to be innovative and creative in seeking out new avenues to reach potential employees, and assuring that the leadership, culture, organizational values, compensation, and benefits encourage employees to consider the Morton Grove Park District as a place they would recommend to their colleagues and friends to work.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

As a service-based organization; the best way to ensure positive experiences for Morton Grove residents is by hiring, developing, and retaining the most qualified staff to provide those services. The labor market is more competitive than ever. The onset of the pandemic has accelerated what had been a steady increase in the rate of people leaving state and local government employment. Nationwide, the annual separation rates increased from 6.1 percent in 2010 to 9.7 percent in 2016, then seemed to stabilize from 2017 through 2019. In 2020, that separation rate shot up to a record 11.7 percent, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Separations, which includes retirements, stabilized in late 2020. But that changed in 2021, with the monthly rate more than doubling between April and August.

The Morton Grove Park District faces competition for employees not only from neighboring park districts but also from retail and other private businesses. As with many businesses and organizations, the Morton Grove Park District is finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain talented employees due to a shrinking candidate pool. This is especially true with part time and seasonal staff. Competition for lifeguards and seasonal maintenance staff is particularly tight. At the same time, increases to minimum wage, the cost of benefits and the competition for employees is driving up labor costs. Additionally, competition for recreation professionals is also increasing. Fewer individuals are choosing to enter the public recreation field due to historically lower pay rates and the need for evening and weekend work hours.

Many park districts have a relatively flat organizational structure with limited upward mobility. For recreation professionals seeking advancement opportunities, it is often necessary for individuals to move from smaller park districts to larger ones to gain broader experience and increasing levels of responsibility. While some turnover is inevitable, there are other fundamental changes taking place in the overall workplace. More full-time employees are seeking meaningful work, better work/life balance and opportunities for working from home.

In recent years, the Morton Grove Park District has worked diligently to build a core team of professionals to provide programs, maintain Park District physical assets and provide business services to support the

mission of the Park District. One key to its ongoing success will be the continued ability to attract, develop and retain staff.

It has long been recognized that an organization's culture and values have a direct impact on its ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff. It has been reported that at least one-third of job seekers would pass up the perfect job if the organization's culture was a bad fit. In one survey more than 70% of workers cited culture as a factor influencing their decision to work at a particular organization. A positive workplace culture contributes to better employee satisfaction and engagement, reduced employee turnover and higher employee retention. A positive organizational culture also embeds a clear set of positive values into an organization, fosters employee engagement, promotes professional development, and recognizes employee contributions to the success of the organization.

Successful customer-focused organizations seek out active leaders who are committed to serving others and are directly involved with their employees, form genuine connections, provide encouragement, support personal development, and generally become their cheerleaders. In an effort to continue to attract and retain a team of highly qualified, trained and motivated staff, the District has to explore innovative and creative ways to attract new employees, ensure that its compensation and benefits are competitive in the marketplace, continue to drive a positive culture throughout the organization and keep a pulse on employee expectations to assure that the Morton Grove Park District is an employer they can recommend to colleagues and friends. The District needs to further refine its core values, striving for a work environment that continues to create trust, delivers quality parks and services and influences a positive culture throughout the organization. The credit for the success and growth of the Park District goes to the staff who work hard to serve the community.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What things within the Park District will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- *Need for more innovation and creativity.* There is a need to think outside the box and understand employment trends to find new and effective ways to recruit, retain and recognize employees.
- *Ineffective communication.* Effective listening and communication lead to stronger employee engagement by increasing staff cohesion, reducing silos and providing a better understanding of what motivates and retains employees.
- *Funding constraints*. Overall operating costs continue to rise at a faster pace than the ability to raise revenue to offset those costs. There is increasing demand for the use of the Park District's available funds which requires that the District set priorities that include investments in staff, technology, infrastructure and other business needs.
- *Outdated recognition program.* Consistent, genuine efforts to recognize employees for their contribution inspires and motivates employees to do their best work, increases

employee engagement and contributes to a positive work culture.

- *Lack of upward mobility.* Due to the nature of our business with a relatively flat organizational structure, the potential to move upward, or be promoted is limited, therefore causing staff to look elsewhere.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What things outside the control of the District (both positive and negative) will affect our ability to move forward on this initiative?

- *Competition for employees*. As a smaller agency, it may appear that a larger district has more to offer to an employee. Larger districts have more employees which allow upward mobility, and growth or promotions into higher positions. There is limited opportunity for advancement within the Morton Grove Park District. In addition, competitors are no longer only neighboring park districts but also any private business, such as retail operations, food service and private fitness centers that also rely heavily on part-time or entry level workers.
- *Labor Costs.* Minimum wage increases, competitors offering starting wages higher than minimum wage and the increasing cost of employee benefits
- *Weather dependent facilities*. High school and college age students rely on summer jobs to fund their activities throughout the year. Reduced staffing or pool closures due to weather conditions make summer earnings unpredictable and make jobs less attractive.
- *Resident expectation*s. Our residents expect us to deliver excellent customer service, not only with our programs and special events, but equally with our staff.
- *Demands of the recreation profession*. It is often said that recreation professionals work so that our community can play. This means that staff must be available to work weekends, holidays, and evenings when our patrons are able to use the recreational opportunities that we offer. We are also a business that relies on direct interaction with our patrons. These realities limit our flexibility to provide work from home opportunities or jobs that offer a stable 9-5 core business day that contribute to a more desirable work/life balance.
- *Growing the future park and recreation lea*ders**.** There is a need more than ever to develop interest in working for the Morton Grove Park District by attracting, training, and retaining a diverse staff that better reflects the diversity of our community.

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Provide a continuous learning environment			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Develop core competencies for leadership positions.		HR Generalist
		Provide staff opportunities to participate in ongoing training.		Executive Director
		Provide preschool teachers opportunity to participate in CEUs through the District.		Supt of Recreation
		Evaluate and revise new employee orientation and training program.		HR Generalist
		Continue participation in State and National organizations to develop strong leaders and increase knowledge of industry best practices.		Executive Director
		Conduct quarterly District wide staff trainings to include part and full time staff. (Below are specific examples) • Safety • Equity, Inclusion and Diversity • Technology Integration • Hiring practices and compliance		Executive Director
Objective: Motivate improvement, empowerment, and accountability by active leadership			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Clearly define and communicate goals and expectations.		Executive Director
		Ensure accountability-monitor and report on progress of individual, department, and agency goals. Provide encouragement and recognition.		Executive Director
		Develop a leadership development program		Executive Director

		Revise performance evaluation to include core competencies and goals-integrate discussion on employee aspirations and what they can do to help gain additional experience		HR Generalist
		Create new guest service and standards trainings to motivate continuous improvement and empowerment.		Registration Coordinator
Objective: Continue/maintain transparent and trusting management practices and relationships			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Develop a purpose statement and objectives for a District-wide customer service committee.		HR Generalist
		Conduct Annual Employee Survey for both full time and part time.		HR Generalist
Objective: Strengthen internal communications and customer service standards			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Conduct an annual all-staff training session on customer service to standardize methods and techniques of service provided to community.		HR Generalist
		Improve communication between staff members by: i. Conducting an annual survey. ii. Holding quarterly meetings with staff to provide updates and a forum for staff feedback.		Executive Director
Objective: Provide competitive compensation, benefits, and incentives to attract and retain staff			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Identify opportunities to provide and communicate availability of incentives/perks to part time staff.		HR Generalist
		Conduct a comprehensive salary and benefits analysis every 3-5 years.		HR Generalist
		Develop an internship and/or lifeguard-in-training program.		HR Generalist

Objective: Enhance Human Resources Onboarding Program			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Onboard and mentor Human Resource Professional to lead recruiting efforts, hiring and retention of employees.		Executive Director
		Enhance the on boarding for all employees i. Welcome packet ii. Identify training requirements for each job iii. Develop tracking procedures to monitor progress		HR Generalist
Objective: Increase Interest in working for the Morton Grove Park District			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Explore ways to offer more high school and college-based job shadowing and leadership development.		HR Generalist
		Develop more attractive recruiting materials.		Marketing Manager
		Work more closely with community organizations to recruit staff for part-time jobs (schools, churches, Park District volunteers).		HR Generalist
Objective: Formalize the District's vision for a successful organizational culture			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Define and formalize organizational values.		Executive Director
		Develop plan to communicate and instill values throughout the organization.		Executive Director

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #4: FOSTER PROACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Fostering community engagement requires a commitment and plan for keeping community members informed, consulted, and proactively involved in order to build trust as well as support, create effective governance, and assist the Board of Park Commissioners and staff to make the best decisions toward fulfilling its mission to the community. Building strong relationships with other governmental agencies and local organizations brings value to the Morton Grove Park District and the community at large.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

The Morton Grove Park District's mission is a commitment to "complementing the community's quality of life, economic capacity, health and wellness through recreational opportunities while protecting natural resources". To help fulfill its mission, the Morton Grove Park District's elected officials and staff need and value community input and engagement. This helps build trust and cooperation. The District is finding it increasing difficult to get more members of the community proactively involved in the Park District whether through volunteerism, providing input on the direction and priorities for the District, or other means.

The concept of community engagement is based on community members being informed, consulted, and involved in order to build trust and support, create effective governance and provide input to make the best decisions for the community. Success can be maximized by ongoing engagement with both community members-at-large as well as key community stakeholders and leaders at the Village, local school districts and other community organizations.

Engagement with leaders and stakeholders of local public jurisdictions provides an opportunity to address organizational interaction, clarify roles and responsibilities, explore opportunities for shared space, collaborate on environmental sustainability issues and work together to conserve and appropriately use the finite resources that public agencies have been entrusted with, even if at times the primary goals, objectives and needs of each agency may not always completely align. Going forward, communication and engagement with other public agencies needs to evolve into being more proactive and forward-looking, rather than reactionary. It also should take a more global view on how to best meet the community's needs and resources rather than address issues primarily within individual silos of responsibility. To be successful, dialogue needs to be open, consistent, and ongoing with effective listening with the intent of mutual respect and trust for the good of all stakeholders. Feedback from other local agencies suggests a common interest in re-opening dialogue to improve communication and identify opportunities for collaboration. Leadership is needed to push the initiative forward. The Morton Grove Park District can "work in the spirit of intergovernmental cooperation" by setting up an agenda and scheduling an initial meeting of the agencies.

The Morton Grove Park District also seeks to increase community engagement with the community-at-large to best meet the needs and aspirations of the community. The information provided through community input will be considered along with other factors as the Board and staff work together to make the best decisions for the community and set the direction and priorities for the District. Public involvement contributes to better decision-making, provides an opportunity for diverse perspectives to be heard, increases transparency, and creates a greater sense of community ownership. An environment that fosters trust, open communication and good governance is essential to achieving a high level of community engagement and support.

As the Village of Morton Grove continues to attract more new residents with highly diverse backgrounds or cultures and the needs of existing residents change, it is also essential to increase outreach to the community to educate, solicit feedback and create awareness of opportunities for community involvement. Marketing plays a key role in getting the message to the community. The Park District should create a plan using multiple platforms/tools for informing and educating both new and existing community members. This plan can set communication plans for the programs, services, and value that the Park District brings to our diverse community as well as the many ways the public can become involved and included in the Park District through volunteerism or by providing input that can be considered by the Board and staff during the decision-making process.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things within the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Effective communication and marketing campaigns
- Effective and respectful exchange of dialogue and listening to the feedback provided
- Clearly defined roles and expectations as to how the feedback will be used
- Making community engagement a priority
- Time constraints; difficulty in scheduling
- Lack of follow-up
- Using multiple platforms to find the best ways to reach out to various segments of the community

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things outside of the control of the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Personal Commitments
- Complacency and lack of willingness to do more
- Special Interest groups that do not reflect the interests of the community-at-large
- Inability to break down “silo” thinking
- Lack of a commitment to collaboration with some agencies and organizations

- Parks, open space and a safe, healthy community environment are important “economic drivers” for home values

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Improve professional relationships through engagement and outreach.			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Strive to become the Village agency of choice and a trusted partner in the community by developing trusting working relationships with all stakeholders-adding this requirement to the leadership team’s annual performance plan.		Executive Director
		In time of need, provide other agencies with support in the most effective and efficient way possible.		Executive Director
		Coordinate leadership meetings with other local taxing agencies to enhance communications and partnerships.		Executive Director
		Annually update the Park Board on the Park District’s private/public partnerships.		Executive Director
		Increase community engagement by completing an annual review of accomplishments and/or the development of an annual report.		Executive Director
		Encourage Park district leadership to participate in at least one community service club.		Executive Director

Objective: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing efforts to enhance community outreach.			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Update the website		Marketing Manager
		Maintain the monthly Social Media schedule to ensure distribution across all channels		Marketing Manager
		Create and release Brand Standards and Graphic Style Guide to all staff. This guide will give staff the tools to ensure that the Morton Grove Park District materials are consistent.		Marketing Manager

		Utilize other social media platforms to promote District and programs other than Facebook.		Marketing Manager
Objective: Develop and/or update agreements			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Review and update agreements with Village of Morton Grove • Morton Grove Days (new) • Joint Access and Parking Lot Sharing (Expires 2021) • Museum ground (Expires 2025) • Shared services and equipment (Open-ended)		Executive Director
		Review and update agreements with School Districts • #63 (new) • #67 (Open-ended) • #70 (Open-ended) • #219 (Expired)		Executive Director
		Administrative Contracts • Executive Director Contract • Corporate counsel (open-ended)		Executive Director
		Niles Park District – Resident rates for certain programs		Executive Director
		Museum agreement with Historical Society (Open-ended)		Executive Director
		Morton Grove Baseball Softball Association		Executive Director
		American Youth Soccer Organization		Executive Director
		Explore potential agreement with Morton Grove Library		Executive Director
		Explore a potential agreement with Niles Township		Executive Director

Objective: Strengthen Board competencies to enhance engagement			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Compile or develop a comprehensive board policy handbook to strengthen decisions and to ensure long-term adherence to those decisions.		Executive Director
		Provide pre-election packets and new Board member orientation.		Executive Director
		Make available state and national park and recreation conferences.		Executive Director
		Participate in Board member training opportunities.		Executive Director
		Closely monitor and provide timely legislative updates to Board regarding state legislation impacting parks and recreation.		Executive Director
		Attend Legislative Conference annually and share information with Park Board and leadership team.		Executive Director
		Seek opportunities for legislators and Park Board members to meet to build stronger relationships.		Executive Director

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #5: USING TECHNOLOGY TO STREAMLINE OPERATIONS AND CREATE CUSTOMER FRIENDLY PROCESSES

The use of technology to streamline operations is essential to providing cost effective solutions to business needs, creating effective tools for decision-making, and freeing up staff time to concentrate on core business functions like program development and implementation.

Customer-friendly processes are those avenues, and the steps residents must take, to conduct business with the Park District. Customers want processes that make it quick and easy to find program information, sign up, and pay for services offered by the Morton Grove Park District.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

In today's environment, where consumers are seeking more high quality, value-oriented services than ever before, it is critical that the District continually seeks to improve the level of service and convenience offered throughout the organization. The District's success will depend on taking resident needs and input into consideration while continuously improving processes using technology that make it easier for the customer to do business with us.

Based on information from the November 2021 community survey, focus is particularly needed on easier navigation of the District's website and the program registration process. 28% of responses indicated that the website is the preferred source of information for Park District information (up from 21% in 2018) and that the printed Program guide is now preferred by 31% of responses (down from 45% in 2018). In addition, the 2021 survey showed that only 19% of residents reported registering for programs on the District's website. Of those, 62% had a positive experience with 30% expressing some dissatisfaction with the experience. Shifting to more online customer-friendly methods to provide information about the Park District and to encourage online registration will allow more timely communications and lower operating costs.

Emphasis is also needed on maximizing the cost-effective use of technology to streamline internal operations that make it easier for staff members to do their jobs and have more time available for their core business functions like program development, program implementation and staff training. Currently, the District relies on outdated practices to gather the necessary paperwork for newly hired employees and to track hours worked for payroll purposes. These processes become increasingly cumbersome during the peak hiring season for summer employment and takes valuable time away from preparing for summer programs, opening the pools, and training new staff members. Staff has identified unreliable internet service, lack of timely decision-making data and software systems as some of the barriers to increased efficiency in performing their jobs.

Focusing on the District's technology resources is one of the most effective tools to address these issues. Also, using technology-driven social media to communicate internally and externally in a more effective

manner needs to be a high priority if the District wants to better reach the next generation of users and relate to the younger population.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things within the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Inadequate funding for investments in technology
- Complacency of staff
- Lack of knowledge and expertise to identify potential technology tools that could best support business needs
- Staff training on ways to maximize use of software applications
- Time and lack of leadership to implement new technology and processes

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things outside of the control of the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Willingness of staff and residents to use technology
- Spam blocking
- Rapid changes in technology and customer expectations (fast and convenient)
- Resistance to change
- Threats of computer hacking
- Legislative issues that require short-notice changes to business operations
- Cost of technology improvements
- Availability of software applications that support specialized businesses, provide useable metrics, and easily integrate many lines of business into overall park district accounting and reporting systems.
- Vendor support
- Demand for mobile technology and on-demand services

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Provide a stable technology environment to reduce downtime and improve transaction processing			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Work with vendors to improve credit card processing.		Supt of Finance
		Examine the need for a dedicated IT professional or other options to support operations and maximize use of technology.		Supt of Finance
		Streamline new hire, timesheet, and payroll processes.		Supt of Finance
		Identify ways to make it easier to gather and compile metrics for decision-making.		Supt of Finance
		Streamline program registration process.		Registration Coordinator
		Explore options for maximizing current registration software or replacing.		Supt of Finance and Recreation
		Identify opportunities to use technology to better reach program participants to notify of program changes and cancellations.		Supt of Finance and Director
		Make website more compatible for use on mobile phones.		Marketing Manager
		Work with Rec Trac to clean up the brochure interface so class enrollment is easier.		Marketing Manager
		Identify and implement ways to make website easier to navigate and evaluate the need for an intranet/web page for employees.		Marketing Manager
		Explore the need to expand use of mobile technology (i.e., tablets, GIS to increase efficiency.		Supt of Finance
		Develop a technology report to help implement improvements and spread costs over a five-year period.		Supt of Finance

Objective: Collect and analyze feedback to improve operations			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Conduct customer service satisfaction survey annually to monitor the need for changes in processes and procedure. • Attach a survey with every e-blast • Develop meaningful, but limited, incentive program to ensure residents participate in surveys.		HR Generalist
Objective: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing efforts			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Streamline brochure process to improve coordination and communications between Recreation, Front desk, and Marketing departments.		Marketing Manager
		Conduct annually targeted patron surveys using Constant Contact.		Marketing Manager
		Replace front entrance marquee sign for better visibility of PVCC via better technology.		Marketing Manager
		Explore opportunity to install quality produced, temporary signs for special events at entrance to the Village.		Marketing Manager
Objective: Strengthen internal communications and customer service standards			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Conduct an annual all-staff training session on customer service to standardize methods and techniques of service provided to community.		
		Improve communication between staff members by: • Conducting an annual survey. • Holding quarterly meetings with staff to provide updates and a forum for staff feedback.		
		Conduct regular informational meetings to coincide with seasonal activities guide.		
		Consider an interdepartmental customer service ad-hoc committee to help create a sense of urgency to move forward technology and customer service initiatives.		

Objective: Evaluate and implement communication tools			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Expand the use of social media channels.		Marketing Manager
		Improve communication with community by: • Targeting specific interests and demographics using Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. • Seek opportunities for cross promotions with other community organizations • Develop automated reminders with incentives/discounts for repeat customers and early sign up.		Marketing Manager
		Monitor the cost effectiveness of printing the seasonal activities guide.		Marketing Manager
		Develop a District-wide marketing plan.		Marketing Manager
		Investigate communication tools to allow non-native speakers to better communicate with the District.		Marketing Manager

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #6: FINANCIAL PLANNING THAT SUPPORTS HIGH QUALITY SERVICES AND GROWTH

The Morton Grove Park District will continue to utilize sound financial planning to maintain its fiscal health and ensure that scarce resources are allocated where they will provide the most benefit to the community. We will work closely with governmental entities to achieve optimal utilization of community resources and seek opportunities to grow revenue to better serve our community.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

Fiscal responsibility is a key factor in the Morton Grove Park District's financial planning. The Morton Grove Park District has historically taken a conservative and long-term approach to managing the District's finances.

The District's main sources of revenue are property taxes and user fees. The reliance on tax revenue to support Park District operations has been increasing in recent years due to less revenue generated from user fees. The pandemic was a key reason for the loss of user fees as well as a lack of available programming space and the desire for free or low-fee programs. Tax revenue is allocated to the various funds based on the need and use of the service by a large percentage of residents as well as the ability of the service to generate user fees. Under the tax cap, the District is limited in its ability to increase taxes without a referendum, to the lower of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or 6%.

User fees are viewed as a barrier to some families to signing up, at times with low-income families getting priced out of our programs. However, we continue to see a high level of participation in our programs and use of Park District services. The District works diligently to balance the need for affordable programs with the need to generate revenue from program fees and offers a limited financial aid program. Competition among other providers of services is a key factor in our ability to increase user fees. Surveys of user fees are conducted on a regular basis to assure that we remain competitive in the marketplace. In addition, the District strives to return value to our residents by enhancing property values and meeting the recreational needs of the community by providing quality parks, facilities, and programs. It is important to note that a compelling reason we can offer the wide-ranging facilities and programs is because of our residents' income levels and abilities to pay user fees. There are some funding challenges in the development of the financial plan. The community has expressed a desire for more special events which typically are no cost to the public. In addition, the District has acquired many assets like parks and open space that provide many public benefits but have a limited ability to generate user fees. Until the current debt is paid down, major investments in capital will require identifying a payment stream to finance the projects or passing a referendum.

The District has several important components in place which contribute to our financial stability:

Investment Policy: The District's investment policy is conservative to protect the principal and only allows for investments in Certificates of Deposit, Government Agencies and Money Market Accounts.

Long Term Financial Plans: The District also has a long-term financial plan that identifies funds available for future capital projects after considering the effects of the debt already incurred. It also has a long-term financial plan for funding the operational needs of the Park District. The Park District operating expenses are primarily for the maintenance of parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and field houses which have limited, if any, ability to generate user fees.

Fund Balances: The District has fund reserves with sufficient balances overall to cover short term delays in tax receipts, temporary shortfalls in meeting budget expectations, or moderate unexpected expenses.

Staff: The majority of our employees are part time or seasonal staff. The purpose of this plan is to provide more flexibility in adjusting staffing levels, as needed, based on weather and participation levels.

Debt: The District has invested heavily in rebuilding the two aquatic facilities and renovating its other existing facilities. Through careful long-term planning, the District identified and segregated certain funds to be used to repay the existing debt. We will continue to use this approach until the current debt is paid down.

Categories of Park Services: In the last strategic plan, the board adopted a process that guides how fees will be assessed as follows:

- BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES - The community pays through taxes, no or minimal user charges. Includes services provided by the Park District which are available to all people. Used by a high percentage of residents. Usually, all age levels benefit either directly or indirectly. Examples include parks, playgrounds, sports fields, field houses.

- EXTRA PUBLIC SERVICES - Meets direct and part of indirect costs. Includes services provided by the Park District which are an embellishment of a basic service. The individual participant benefits most and all members of the community benefit somewhat. Examples include recreation programs, fitness center, rental facilities.

As economic conditions and the District's priorities change, existing financial plans must be continually monitored and adjusted to reflect the District's short-term and long-term needs. One of the challenges is to develop plans that meet both the ongoing operational needs of the District in conjunction with the desire for new investments in technology, capital items or increased services. Inflation and the cost of labor are rising dramatically which means that a larger percentage of available funds will be needed just to maintain existing facilities and services at current levels. The District will need to continue to effectively set priorities for investments in technology, marketing, staff development, capital repairs and improvements, acquisition of program space and enhanced services. In addition, the District will strive to have each program area cover its direct costs using the approved Categories of Services as a guide, while making sure basic services are affordable to the community at large. Potential ways of increasing revenue include partnerships, grants, and sponsorships, cost control through operational efficiencies, and repayment of debt.

What will financial stability for the Morton Grove Park District look like?

- The District will be able to afford the upkeep and improvement of their assets to acceptable standards that is expected by the community.
- Financial mix of resources from both taxes and alternate revenues (50/50 split) to meet operating expenditures as well as funding for growth.
- Margin of reserves to cover unforeseen expenditures including law changes and unfunded mandates.
- Focus the use of financial resources and debt financing to maintain current assets before embarking on something new unless new funding sources are identified.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things within the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Realignment of Revenue: Split between fees for services and property tax revenue changed due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Financial Policies and Controls: Well-developed financial policies and controls are in place to guide path of continued financial stability.
- Part-time Employees: High percentage of staff are part-time employees which provides more flexibility in adjusting staffing levels, as needed, based on weather and participation levels.
- Aging Infrastructure: Fieldhouses, playgrounds and asphalt infrastructure are in need of renovation.
- Lack of ability to issue debt without referendum
- Fees: Fees for some recreation programming may limit participation, especially by low-income residents.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

What are the things outside of the control of the Park District that will affect its ability to move forward on this initiative?

- Inflation
- Cost of labor and employee benefits
- Unfunded Mandates: State of Illinois unfunded mandates
- Tax Levy: Possible tax levy freeze
- Competition: Growing competition from private sector service providers.
- Weather: Poor weather in the summer has a negative effect on pools and the management of outdoor events.
- Property Tax: Property tax cap limits increases are based on CPI (Consumer Price Index) for all goods and services while the Park District's main expenditures are in the area of personnel and contractual services.

ACTION PLAN

Objective: Annually review and update long term plan			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Educate all departments on the budgeting process		Supt of Finance
		Encourage each department to take ownership of their budget		Executive Director
		Work with each department to properly track their equipment even those items that are under the threshold		Supt of Finance
		Develop a plan to pay off Oriole Pool debt certificates early		Supt of Finance
Objective: Update Financial Policies and Procedures			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Formalize, develop Financial Policies in accordance with those required for GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association) Best Practices. • Contingency Planning • Guide the Design of Programs and Services	2023	Supt of Finance
		Strengthen internal controls and increase internal operational audits.	2023	Supt of Finance
		Explore option of limiting sale period of pool passes		Supt of Finance
		Re-evaluate the policy on resident/non-resident rates and make recommendation to maximize program participation.	2023	Supt of Finance
		Review policies, procedures, marketing, and funding of the financial aid program.		Supt of Finance

Objective: Maintain Current Tax Rate			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Strategize on how to maintain the current tax rate during this time of property reassessments.		Supt of Finance
		Put the rollover bond proceeds to better use besides paying down the Oriole Pool bond.		
Objective: Build more alternative sources of funding such as Program Fees, Grants and Sponsorships			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Promote the sponsorship program to the entire business community.		Marketing Manager
		Pursue all possible grant opportunities.		Supt of Finance
		Re-evaluate all programs and fee structures.		Supt of Finance
Objective: Develop the Morton Grove Parks Foundation			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Recruit board members.		Executive Director
		Conduct regular meetings that invite the public to participate.		Executive Director
		Educate the community.		Executive Director
Objective: Evaluate contracted services			**Fiscal Year**	**Assigned to:**
		Prepare a Request for Proposal for banking services.		Supt of Finance
		Prepare a Request for Proposal for auditing services.		Supt of Finance
		Establish a policy to guide fee setting for contracted services.		Supt of Finance

Objective: Enhance Dissemination of Financial Information			Fiscal Year	Assigned to:
		Develop a formal budget presentation to the board to increase transparency and to educate the board on fiscal direction of District.		Supt of Finance
		Develop/Distribute a Fiscal Year End financial review for the community.		Supt of Finance
		Develop and distribute an annual report on programs' finances.		Supt of Finance

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats Analysis

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis was completed to summarize feedback and information from:

- Board workshop
- Meetings with the Morton Grove Leadership Team

SWOT is a basic and straightforward tool for understanding the internal and external factors facing the Morton Grove Park District in the delivery of recreation services. The tool is useful in showing the opportunities and threats facing the Park District going forward. Please review the following chart to better understand the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Morton Grove Park District.

Insert updated photo



MORTON GROVE PARK DISTRICT-DRAFT

SUMMARY "QUADRANT ANALYSIS" OF SWOT ITEMS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Strong financial stewardship, control, and planning • Well -maintained and used parks and facilities • Variety of amenities and desirable outdoor space and facilities; New pool • Great special events for the community • Board and staff relations • Community support • Village of Morton Grove's location, economic development is attracting more residents • Knowledgeable staff; great work environment • Improved customer service	• Financial constraints and limited resources (debt ceiling limit, property tax caps on non-referendum tax authority, minimum wage increases, ability to operate facilities/programs at break-even point) • Inadequate technology to meet operational needs, provide timely decision-making and create efficiency • Need for enhanced internal communication to increase cohesion and reduce silos • Programming and new facility space limitations; landlocked • Competitive position with neighboring park districts • Insufficient staffing levels and staff turnover • Availability of program offerings that reflect cultural diversity • Outreach to increase community involvement

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Sponsorships, grants, business partnerships • More Intergovernmental agreements • Develop relationships with legislators to enhance grant opportunities • Grow program offerings (i.e., evening programs, adult programs, lacrosse, scuba, golf instruction, programs at pools, pickle ball, cricket, and more programs reflecting cultural diversity • Enhance community outreach and involvement • Increase social media presence; enhance District's branding/image • Community desire for new facilities (recreation center with indoor pool, walking trails, additional lights on athletic fields)	• Uncertain economy, inflation, and potential pandemic restrictions • Competition from private business and public agencies • Ability to attract and retain qualified staff Changing employee expectations and smaller candidate pool • Aging, outdated facilities • Duplication in community programs; potential for "mission creep" • Complacency; Lack of big thinking/creativity • Uncertainty and inconsistency because of the reliance on schools for programming space-school programs take priority

Attachments:

Attachment A- Morton Grove Park District Proposed Strategic Plan Projects for Consideration

Attachment B- National Recreation and Park Association-"Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services"

Insert updated photos







Attachment A

Morton Grove Park District Strategic Plan: Projects/Improvements for Consideration 2023-28

Input from:

- Board
- Staff
- Public

Consideration by:

- Board
- Leadership Team

Research Input:

- 2022 Community Survey
- 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan and Community Meetings

Projects for <u>Consideration</u> 2023-28

<u>Projects:</u>

- Identify and explore use/renovation options and cost/benefits for field houses:
  - Oketo
  - Mansfield
  - Austin Park
  - National
- General Park Improvements

Projects for Future Consideration-
will be revisited if new information comes forward or situations change

<u>Projects:</u>

- Prairieview Community Center and Park Improvements
- Consolidation of Preschool into one location
- Indoor Sports Complex
- Indoor Track
- Study feasibility to repurpose a closed facility for a community center, if one becomes available

National Recreation and Park Association- **Attachment B**

"Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services"

National Recreation and Park Association

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Ashburn, VA 20148-4501
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www.nrpa.org

Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services

Parks and recreation have three values that make them essential services to communities:

1. Economic value
2. Health and Environmental benefits
3. Social importance

Just as water, sewer, and public safety are considered essential public services, parks are vitally important to establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community, ensuring the health of families and youth, and contributing to the economic and environmental well-being of a community and a region.

There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment.

Economic Value

- Parks improve the local tax base and increase property values. It is proven that private property values increase the value of privately owned land the closer such land is to parks. This increase in private property value due to the proximity to parks increases property tax revenues and improves local economies.

- A Texas A&M review of 25 studies investigating whether parks and open space contributed positively to the property values of surrounding properties found that 20 of the 25 studies found that property values were higher. "The real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity."

- American Forests, a national conservation organization that promotes forestry, estimates that trees in cities save $400 billion in storm water retention facility costs.

- Quality parks and recreation are cited as one of the top three reasons that business cite in relocation decisions in a number of studies.

- Parks and recreation programs produce a significant portion of operating costs from revenue generated from fees and charges

- Parks and recreation programs generate revenue directly from fees and charges, but more importantly, provide significant indirect revenues to local and regional economies from sports tournaments and special events such as arts, music, and holiday festivals. Economic activity from hospitality expenditures, tourism, fuel, recreational equipment sales, and many other private sector businesses is of true and sustained value to local and regional economies.

Health and Environmental Benefits

- Parks are the places that people go to get healthy and stay fit.

- Parks and recreation programs and services contribute to the health of children, youth, adults, and seniors.

- According to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, creating, improving and promoting places to be physically active can improve individual and community health and result in a 25 percent increase of residents who exercise at least three times per week.

- A study by Penn State University showed significant correlations to reductions in stress, lowered blood pressure, and perceived physical health to the length of stay in visits to parks.

- Parks and protected public lands are proven to improve water quality, protect groundwater, prevent flooding, improve the quality of the air we breathe, provide vegetative buffers to development, produce habitat for wildlife, and provide a place for children and families to connect with nature and recreate outdoors together.

Social Importance

- Parks are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They provide identity for citizens and are a major factor in the perception of quality of life in a given community. Parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most important factors in surveys of how livable communities are.

- Parks provide gathering places for families and social groups, as well as for individuals of all ages and economic status, regardless of their ability to pay for access.

- An ongoing study by the Trust for Public Land shows that over the past decade, voter approval rates for bond measures to acquire parks and conserve open space exceeds 75%. Clearly, the majority of the public views parks as an essential priority for government spending.

- Parks and recreation programs provide places for health and well-being that are accessible by persons of all ages and abilities, especially to those with disabilities.
- In a 2007 survey of Fairfax County, VA, residents of 8 of 10 households rated a quality park system either very important or extremely important to their quality of life.
- Research by the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods indicates that community involvement in neighborhood parks is associated with lower levels of crime and vandalism
- Access to parks and recreation opportunities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and to reduced juvenile delinquency.
- Parks have a value to communities that transcend the amount of dollars invested or the revenues gained from fees. Parks provide a sense of public pride and cohesion to every community.

National Recreation and Park Association
For more information on the value and benefits of parks go to www.nrpa.org