

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE**



**APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON DECEMBER 4, 2024**

## I. Purpose

The Effingham Park District formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on March 6, 2024, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the "Committee").

## II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Russ Sehy \_\_\_\_\_ BOARD PRESIDENT

Mike Cunningham \_\_\_\_\_ VICE PRESIDENT

Angie Kronewitter \_\_\_\_\_ COMMISSIONER

Kevin Palmer \_\_\_\_\_ COMMISSIONER

Matt Dasenbrock \_\_\_\_\_ COMMISSIONER

Eric Kalber \_\_\_\_\_ RESIDENT MEMBER

Scott Moeller \_\_\_\_\_ RESIDENT MEMBER

Jeff Althoff \_\_\_\_\_ DIRECTOR OF PARK DISTRICT

### III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
___ March 6, 2024 _____	6pm Ron Diehl Center _____
___ October 2, 2024 _____	6pm Ron Diehl Center _____
___ November 6, 2024 _____	6pm Ron Diehl Center _____
___ December 4, 2024 _____	6pm Ron Diehl Center _____

Minutes of these meetings are available on the Park District's website or upon request at the Park District's administrative office.

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

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1940. All Illinois park districts, including the Effingham 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 Effingham 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 8.5% of the local tax bill.

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

- **Operations Manual**
- **Board Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual**
- **General Conduct Ordinances**
- **Personnel Policies**

## **V. List of Shared Services and Partnerships**

The Effingham 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. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government**

- *City of Effingham TIF*
- *City of Effingham Emergency Alliance*
- *Unit 40 School District*
- *Teutopolis Park District*

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

- *Effingham County Heaters Baseball*
- *Effingham Flame Softball*
- *Effingham County Rugby Club*

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

- *Southeastern IL Community Foundation*
- *American Red Cross*
- *CEFS*
- *Community Support Systems*

## 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, 144 individuals volunteered 864 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 77 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 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.

**Southeastern Illinois Community Foundation.** Last year, the Foundation raised \$5,495.00 in private donations, which help alleviate the burden on taxpayers.

**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, sponsorships 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>Location(s) Available</b> <small>website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)</small>
• Annual tax levy	Park Office
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	Park Office, Website
• Agenda and minutes	Park Office, Website
• Annual audit	Park Office

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

- The board of commissioners meets on the first Wednesday 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.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at 217-342-4415 or email at [office@effinghampd.org](mailto:office@effinghampd.org)

## VIII. Benefits and Services

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

### 1. Facilities

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

#### **HENDELMAYER PARK (18 acres)**

- A. Recreation Center (21,300 sq. ft.)
  - 1. Batting Cages (75' x 75')
  - 2. Gym (105' x 90')
    - 1 Official Size Basketball Court *or*
    - 2 Short Court Basketball Courts *or*
    - 2 Official Size Volleyball Courts
  - 3. Fine Arts Room with Stage (65' x 45')
  - 4. Kitchen Facility (30' x 30')
  - 5. Administrative Offices(44' x 30')
- B. Pickleball Courts (10)
- C. Restroom Facilities (2)
- D. Picnic Areas
- E. Pavilion
- F. Playground Equipment
- G. Softball Diamonds (3)
- H. Free Play Area
- I. Skate Park

#### **COMMUNITY PARK (35 acres)**

- A. Lighted Tennis Courts (4)
- B. Restroom Facilities (2)
- C. Picnic Areas (4)
- D. Pavilions (5)
- E. Playground Equipment
- F. Baseball Fields
  - Lighted (4)
  - Unlighted (1)
- G. Free Play Area
- H. Nature Trails
- I. Outdoor Ice Skating Pond (Seasonal)
- J. Basketball Court
- K. Sledding Hills (Seasonal)
- L. Bike Paths
- M. Eighteen-Hole Disc Golf Course
- N. Wonderland in Lights (Seasonal)



-Drive-Thru Christmas Light Display

## EVERGREEN HOLLOW PARK

- A. Outdoor Swimming Pool
- B. Four Lighted Tennis Courts
- C. Playground Equipment
- D. Picnic Area
- E. Pavilions (2)
- F. Open Play Area
- G. Lighted Ball Diamond (3)
  - 2 Softball
  - 1 Baseball
- H. Restroom Facilities (2)
- I. Soccer Fields (7)
- J. Harmony Playground
  - All-Inclusive Playground
  - Pavilion w. Restrooms
- K. Evergreen Bark Park
  - Large Dog Park (1)
  - Small Dog Park (1)

## 2. Programs

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

- **Fall Soccer (4 years – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade): 293**
- **Spring Soccer (4 years – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade): 361**
- **T-Ball (4 – 5 years): 160**
- **Baseball (K – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade): 331**
- **Softball (K – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade): 213**
- **Flag Football (3 – 4<sup>th</sup> Grade): 159**
- **Girls Volleyball: 66**
- **Adventure Camp: 1,182 (over 11 weeks)**
- **School's Out Days: 46**
- **Christmas Camp: 14**
- **Special Needs Baseball: 90**

## 3. Additional Services

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

- **Open Gym**
- **Facility Rentals (Ball Diamonds, Pavilions, Indoor Event Spaces, etc)**
- **Cardinals Kids Clinic**
- **Challenger Soccer Camp**

#### **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.

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

#### **1. Inefficiency of Other Governments**

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

#### **2. 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.

##### **a) Non-resident FOIA Requests.**

Last year, the park district spent staff time and legal fees to fulfill FOIA requests. Often the individuals/businesses submitting the FOIA requests are from outside of the park district boundaries, and they appear to be serving a specific agenda, rather than assuring better local government.

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

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

**b) Criminal Background Checks.**

All park districts are statutorily required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees pursuant to Section 8-23 of the Park District Code. The background checks must be done through the Illinois State Police (ISP). Last year, the park district spent \$1200 on 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.

**Dated:** 12/4/24

**Signed:** 