

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE OF THE PLEASURE DRIVEWAY AND PARK DISTRICT OF PEORIA, HELD AT 4:00 P.M., WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024 AT THE NOBLE CENTER FOR PARK DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, 1125 WEST LAKE AVENUE, PEORIA, ILLINOIS.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Trustee and Chair Joyce Harant, Trustee Steve Montez, and Executive Director Emily Cahill

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**TRUSTEES PRESENT:** Trustees Bertschy, Covington, Harant, Montez, Vice President Sierra (v), and President Johnson (in at 4:23 pm)  
Note: (v) = attended virtually

**STAFF PRESENT:** Executive Director Emily Cahill, Brent Wheeler, Becky Fredrickson, Matt Freeman, Scott Loftus, Nick Conrad, Brianna Cobb (v), Kristi Shoemaker, and Alicia Woodworth.  
Note: (v) = attended virtually

**OTHERS PRESENT:** None.

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Trustee Harant presided and called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

**2. ROLL CALL**

**3. MOTION TO PERMIT COMMITTEE MEMBER TO ATTEND MEETING ELECTRONICALLY**

No request to attend meeting electronically was received.

**4. MINUTES**

**4.A. Approval of Minutes of October 24, 2023 Programming Committee Meeting**

Trustee Montez MOVED TO APPROVE the minutes of the October 24, 2023, Programming Committee meeting. Motion seconded by Executive Director Cahill and carried on a unanimous aye of those present.

**5. NEW BUSINESS**

**5.A. Third of July Discussion**

In regards to the July 3<sup>rd</sup> information packet that she compiled, Executive Director Cahill stated that Board members have seen all of the information previously in other spaces. *Please see Attachment A.* She merely compiled it all in one cohesive working document, with an overview provided for the data inputs.

Trustee Harant stated that a discussion was had concerning the stakeholder meeting on January 17. Since then, a survey has been distributed to residents and East Bluff schools. The results are varied at this point and do not point to a clear direction on what the neighborhood wants. The answer is not obvious and support from the community, staff time, and when a Board decision can be made, all contribute to the final outcome.

Trustee Harant asked the committee and Trustees in attendance if they would like staff to provide an overview of the data inputs that were provided in the information packet.

Trustee Bertschy stated that given the data and information presented, there is a clear answer as to what the course should be.

Executive Director Cahill provided an overview of the information provided. It starts with a process overview to show the different steps and efforts put into place to gather as much information as possible. This included data and info gathered from the community stakeholder discussion, distribution of the survey sent via email to a purchased list of 61603 emails, community survey results, Peoria Police and Fire, and input from staff and volunteers and other participants in the event.

Trustee Harant stated that in regards to the community survey, the results are evenly mixed between keeping the event as is, reimagining the event, and cancelling the event altogether. To her, it is not clear cut. She believes people are reflecting concerns but also do not want to lose an event at Glen Oak Park.

Trustee Bertschy stated that he respectfully disagrees because it is pretty clear. Only 28 people said keep the event as is, 78 said change it. Of the 78 who said change it, 23 want it reimagined or cancelled. He doesn't believe it's even a close call. He's not interpreting that those that want it reimagined are saying not to have something in GOP on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, he's saying that reimagining means remove the fireworks. Trustee Harant stated that to her, it means don't keep the event the same, with or without fireworks. Trustee Bertschy stated that there are no responses that include ways to make the event safer.

Trustee Montez stated that some of the answers included putting more activities in the area for adults and kids. Trustee Bertschy asked if having more activities on top of everything else that is going on that day, would change the risk of violence which exists there? Trustee Montez stated that the history of any Park District event that provides more family-friendly activities and draws adults to the area, there are fewer incidents of the type experienced on 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. Having said that however, in the past there weren't many night time events held and that seems to be a major factor.

Trustee Bertschy stated that it's surprising to him that out of 5,300 emails sent, only 224 responses were received. Executive Director Cahill stated that for this type of targeted email survey, a response rate of 15-20% is expected.

Trustee Covington stated that although it's not counted, there were probably 200 people on social media saying they thought the event should be stopped due to the violence. She does not see how a decision to have the event can be made based on such small number of responses, where safety and lives are at risk. Everyone has a stake in Glen Oak Park. All taxpayers pay for Glen Oak Park and not just the neighborhoods surrounding it.

Executive Director Cahill stated that the youth survey was distributed to Peoria Public Schools and Foundation, PPD facilities, and Carl Cannon/Elite. A total of 179 responses were received. Of those 38 reported that they were part of the groups of unaccompanied youth at the event. When asked why they joined in, 26 responded, with 17 selecting that they wanted to be with their friends. 25 responded to the question asking if the groups caused a dangerous situation and only 5 stated that they thought the groups were dangerous. The other data points remaining for collection as planned at the outset of the process include having a youth focus group and to reconvene the community stakeholders meeting. The remaining information included in the packet is police data as presented by Peoria Police Chief Echevarria on their social media sites and to the public. Of note is there was no data collected in 2020 and 2021 as there were no fireworks on 3<sup>rd</sup> of July those years due to COVID.

After compilation of the data as collected and a review of standard processes for evaluation, she feels strongly that this process has clarified, that this discussion related to the Third of July Fireworks in Glen Oak Park is not really about the Third of July nor is it about Fireworks. It is about Glen Oak Park and what it means to this neighborhood, this Park District, and this community. It must be honored throughout this discussion that staff believes that it is a mission-driven effort to contribute to the vibrancy of our community through events and programming that complement our spaces and places.

To that end, the District supports more than 2,000 events and programs each year and prioritizes the tradition and following that our signature events have developed over time. It has been suggested by some that programming to include drop-in sports competitions, local bands and entertainment leading up to the traditional municipal band performance, followed by fireworks, would be sufficient. Others assert that adding more security or charging admission and adding fencing would be sufficient to change the event.

Staff believes that these changes are not sufficient or wholly viable ways to ensure the safety of patrons given that much of the risky behavior takes place outside of the bowl area where programming has generally been offered. Further, as time continues to progress through this evaluation process, the likelihood of building out a model for this July 3rd becomes more difficult, especially with more proposed steps in data collection still outstanding. Taken together with the data provided in this document as collected and combined with prior data points shared from staff, volunteers, and law enforcement, staff does not recommend proceeding with the Third of July Fireworks at Glen Oak Park in 2024.

Instead, in 2024, staff recommends a targeted engagement of community leaders, local police officers, and friends of the Peoria Park District to implement the Pull Up Peoria concept. Pull Up Peoria is a call to action encouraging the establishment of a positive presence in public spaces and at key community events wearing bright colored t-shirts and showing collective support for quality, vibrant events that showcase and celebrate the diversity of our community and the positive impacts of the same.

Pull Up Peoria could kick off as early as June and promote a day of the month (like First Friday or Third Thursday, etc.) as a time to gather and use public spaces for social engagement inspired by the need to change the perceptions that have been highlighted as part of the Third of July public feedback process. The first event should feature a coordinated Pull Up effort in Glen Oak Park that features extended hours at Peoria PlayHouse, Peoria Zoo, and Luthy Botanical Garden, with live music, food, and activities. The event, and subsequent gatherings, could/should be conducted in collaboration with Peoria Police Department's Safe Zone and the Park District's Streets Belong To Me activities, which could increase their reach and impact if better coordinated.

As part of these events, the District can work to build collaboration with local social service providers to engage with residents/patrons and not only share resources, but also gather simple information about future engagement opportunities to showcase parks and public spaces as safe places to gather and socialize.

As we celebrate 130 years of service to this community, it is critical that we evaluate this event, and the more than 2000 others that we provide annually, through the lenses that we have established.... DEIA, environmental sustainability, and vibrancy. Staff believes that our investment and commitment to Glen Oak Park must be prioritized over the one-day impact, both positive and negative of the Third of July Fireworks. We recommend that our focus in 2024 should be on rebuilding relationships that anchor the neighborhood as we have for more than a century. Our commitment does not and will not waver, but must refocus if we are to have the impact that our mission expects.

Alternatives to having the event could include having an East Bluff Festival featuring Music and dance performances, Concert, East Bluff fishing derby, a Taste of the East Bluff food event, free admission to PlayHouse/Zoo with 61603 ID, sports skills competitions, and flower pot planting to take home for neighborhood beautification. It could also include Multi-Date "Central Park" style programming on summer evenings that invites the neighborhood into the park for food, music, and entertainment/activities, some of which could be applied from previously noted activities.

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Trustee Bertschy stated that if someone were to be seriously injured, he's not concerned just about future 3<sup>rd</sup> of Julys, his concern is later in following months if people decide to not go to Glen Oak Park at all because it's a danger. It could have a carryover effect on people's willingness to go to Glen Oak Park any other time.

Trustee Covington stated that she has similar concerns. The Peoria Zoo is getting ready to start a capital campaign where willingness to donate could be affected. She does not want the perception of Glen Oak Park being unsafe out in the community.

Vice President Sierra stated that he is a bit confused with the strong positions being communicated now as he didn't think Trustees and staff were at that point yet. He hasn't had an opportunity to review all of the data presented but he agrees that reimagining is a broad term and he doesn't necessarily think that means move the date or cancel the event completely. Additionally, he has serious concerns as to how we got to where we are now. Vice President Sierra stated that without going into details, previous conversations initiated by staff about the future of the event were always painted in a negative light. In addition, with media attention, a negative perception was placed about the event. As such, he's not confident about the true validity of the survey responses as he's of the opinion that the survey process was compromised. His next concern is that he doesn't want to set a precedent as it comes to any organization's response to events that the Park District holds throughout the community, by cancelling this event in its entirety.

President Johnson stated that since he first had a conversation with the Chief of Police, he was aware that the Park District staff didn't want to have the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July event. While the staff can recommend not to have the event, the Board has the final vote on the matter. It is not all youth that are participating in the bad behavior, and as such, the event should not be cancelled as entire neighborhood should not have to pay for the actions of very few. He's concerned about the reputation of the Park District. It's not the Park District's fault if someone is a victim of a crime perpetrated by another on Park District property. The city has to find a way to address the crime in Peoria, regardless of whether or not the event continues. As such, President Johnson stated that his position on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July event is that it should continue to be held, he will do what the people tell him to, and he will vote accordingly. President Johnson stated that he has all the information he needs and does not want the issue drawn out. Therefore, he would like the Board to vote on it at the next Board meeting so that the matter is put to rest and everyone can move on.

Vice President Sierra stated that he feels that with the crime that is occurring, the Park District is unfairly placing that weight onto not only the community, but on Park Board Trustees. This crime is not a new phenomenon however, Trustees need to be thoughtful about how to have this conversation and not place the weight of it all solely on the Park District. He does not believe the messaging behind this conversation is fair to him, with the reactions based totally on fear without considering any of the positive aspects of the event.

Trustee Bertschy restated a comment he made earlier, in that before a decision was to be made, the District would define a process and then that process would be followed. It's his understanding that the process has been followed and the staff recommendation presented tonight is a result of following the full process in its entirety that the Board directed staff to follow. He agrees with President Johnson that a Board vote needs to be made on this issue soon. The information has been assimilated and discussed and there's not much more to add to the conversation in order to make a decision.

Trustee Harant stated that her suggestion is that it is placed on the next Board meeting agenda for vote. Trustee Montez stated that it is clear to him that staff already had a negative position about the event. The Park District has been painted in the media as the cause of the crime on July 3<sup>rd</sup> at Glen Oak Park. He's confident that staff could have a great event regardless of the vote. He therefore, believes the event should be voted upon at the next Board meeting on March 13.

After full discussion, consensus was given by Trustees Bertschy, Harant, Hill and President Johnson to place the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July event on the 3.13.24 Board meeting agenda for vote.

**6. PENDING BUSINESS**

None at this time.

**7. OTHER BUSINESS**

None noted at this time.

**8. ACTION ITEMS REVIEW**

1. Place 3<sup>rd</sup> of July event on the 3.13.24 Board agenda for vote.

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

At 5:28 p.m., Trustee Montez MOVED TO ADJOURN. Motion seconded by Executive Director Cahill and carried on a unanimous aye of those present.

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Respectfully Submitted by Alicia Woodworth  
Executive Assistant and Board Secretary