



**Peoria Park District
Commitment to
Vibrancy**



PEORIA PARK DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO VIBRANCY

The Peoria Park District is committed to our mission to contribute to healthy and vibrant communities by responsibly using our resources to offer high quality parks, recreation, and education experiences to those who live, work, or play in our District.

Many of the elements in the District's mission are clear and direct, but the concept of vibrancy can be defined in many ways and measurements. Today, in local urban planning, it is commonly tied to the intensity of activities offered, the diversity of land-use configurations, and the accessibility of a space or place. Most readily, these suggestions for scope most naturally tie to consistent and convenient access to green space and walking trails, accessible and engaging events and programming, and ongoing services and supports that engage and promote health and wellness.

As the District seeks to focus its efforts to have the most impact possible on the positive trajectory of the communities we serve, our staff and elected Board of Trustees are committed to continuing its tradition of providing important building blocks to engage and inspire people to live healthier, happier lives. With this document, the District seeks to provide a framework for evaluation of these efforts.

To that end, the District's Commitment to Vibrancy focuses on four key components:

- 1. Connection**
- 2. Resiliency**
- 3. Health**
- 4. Inspiration**

Annually, the Peoria Park District leadership is committed to developing an action plan tied to these points of emphasis and will present them to the District's programming committee and to the Board of Trustees for review. Depending on the data points, progress reports will be provided to both groups at least quarterly.

For questions about the District's Commitment to Vibrancy, please call (309) 682-1200 or e-mail contactus@peoriaparks.org

OUR DISTRICT FOCUS

Pillar #1: Connection

The tie that binds communities is all about connection; and linking people goes beyond our infrastructure.

Social engagement is essential to the increased connectivity between people, places and things that can impact quality of life and develop loyalty to a community and sense of place... and the spaces and places cared for and provided by park and recreation agencies like ours provide the backdrop for these connections.

Our Peoria Park District owns or manages nearly 9000 acres of land. This land is used to provide access to green space across our network of regional and neighborhood parks. The quality of life in the Peoria region is significantly impacted by the Peoria Park District and its long-standing commitment to providing access to high quality parks, facilities, and programs that offer spaces for engagement. If you've lived in Peoria your whole life, you might still not think about how big that number is or you might take that 9000 acres of stewarded land for granted and think that every community is like this one. But in fact, it isn't.

The typical parks and recreation agency in the United States maintains an average of 9.9 acres of park land for every 1000 residents it serves. By contrast, the Peoria Park District maintains more than 66 acres of park land for those 1000 residents. This is significant... and it positively impacts the quality of life for those who live in our communities.

Looking forward, the District must focus on how to not only improve the connections that it helps to build and their impact, but also on how to tell this story and advocate for the role of parks and recreation as a building block for economic and population growth in the Greater Peoria area.

Points of emphasis will include:

1. Develop a dashboard to better collect and share data regarding usage and reach of the District.
2. Gather and evaluate feedback from users to include a survey disseminated every other year in the community.
3. Refine the arguments for the impact of parks and recreation on the quality of life in the communities we serve.
4. Evaluate the benefits of seeking accreditation through either or both state and national associations that would help to enhance and support a positive reputation and build our capacity for sharing our story.
5. Improve collaboration with public officials focused on highlighting the Peoria Park District in the efforts to attract and retain new residents and economic development.

OUR DISTRICT FOCUS

Pillar #2: Resiliency

Resiliency is reflected in the ability to adapt to change in ways that allow faster recovery from environmental, social or economic shifts.

At its foundation, the notion of resilience acknowledges that communities will face change – sometimes dramatic change – and that they must be prepared to not only survive the challenge, but to use these as opportunities to get better during these difficult times.

In the last ten years, our Peoria communities have changed and the District is working to change with it. With a smaller, more agile workforce, combined with growth in its inventory, the District must find ways to use its resources diversify and stabilize its revenue sources to include investments and partnerships with the private sector.

Likewise, as climate change is causing more volatile weather events, the District is especially susceptible to incidents that could impact our ability to provide consistent, quality services and must be prepared to shift quickly and effectively.

To make solid plans for responsiveness, the District must focus its efforts on better data collection and evaluation in order to ensure that it is meeting the needs of those it serves. Data points must include both inputs from those who access the District's supports and those who don't.



Points of emphasis will include:

1. Update financial policies that focus on sustainability of the District financially through responsible stewardship of investments and reserve balances.
2. Develop a more specific curriculum focused on the impacts of climate change on our communities.
3. Revisit and reaffirm processes for acquisition of resources AND divestment of assets where it supports long-term impact on the communities.
4. Similarly, analysis of programs should also be considered that allows for innovation and impact through modification of program inventory to meet the changing needs of our communities.

OUR DISTRICT FOCUS

Pillar #3: Health

In addition to providing for all of our basic needs, healthy communities work to ensure residents benefit from access to education, housing, jobs, the ability to live without fear of violence, freedom from environmental hazards, and access to a meaningful built environment.

In addition to spaces and places focused on improving physical health, the District's outdoor amenities support mental health as shown during the pandemic.

Education has been a hallmark of District programming and is highlighted by our support of GED education in the 61605 zip code, as well as quality out-of-school programming that features STEAM and life skill training. An added emphasis on workforce development, especially career exposure and engagement, is a newer space for the District, but one that can have significant impact.

At its very core, the District must have positive impact on health and wellness to be an effective part of the communities we serve. Its willingness to expand its work to emphasize education and violence prevention make it an innovator in this space.

Points of emphasis will include:

1. Develop a workforce development continuum that starts with exposure to careers, followed by education and engagement, will be a key focus of our work to show our youngest patrons that they can “be anything” that they want to be.
2. Evaluate the impact of the “Summer of Fun” effort and recommendations on its role in future access to vibrant programming for youth in our communities.
3. Create a campaign to highlight the impact that parks and recreation has on mental health to include collaboration with local health providers to engage and encourage use of our many assets.
4. Formalize education goals and expectations for programming across the District, with emphasis on utilizing the expertise of Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum staff across our variety of programs.
5. Build an inventory of programs that compliment each other and allow for clear communication to the public for their participation.



OUR DISTRICT FOCUS

Pillar #4: Inspiration

In the most livable of cities, arts and culture blend with bustling business, shopping, and entertainment districts to create desirable places to live, work and play.

These cities inspire and connect inhabitants, while promoting the healthy lifestyles that make them places where people enjoy spending time and achieve prosperity. Not just in our nation, but around the world, people are moving to urban cores, drawn there by a desire to belong and engage with communities of distinctive, authentic character.

There are so many possible elements of the Peoria Park District's past, present, and future that fit in this description! The District strives to be authentic and distinct in its supports of our communities. It works daily to enhance the lives of those who live, work and play here. Inspiration can come in the form of programming, events, or facilities supported by the District that would not otherwise be in a community of our size. It can come through collaboration or provision of space for private initiatives that meet shared goals.

Because of the depth and breadth of the work we do in this space, it is critical that the District manage its resources and creativity in ways that are most beneficial to our community and that call upon the energy and supports that can come with collaboration.

The District must focus on finding that mechanism that will help it to effectively evaluate its program offerings such that it is able to allocate resources to those endeavors that have the greatest impact. That statement must honor that impact comes in different forms, the identification of which must be the first step in creating a consistent process for prioritization.

Points of emphasis will include:

1. Facilitate the First Annual Park-A-Palooza in 2023 and work to build on it in future years with the help of tourism grant funds as available.
2. Build a quality, consistent evaluation process for programming that encourages participant feedback. This evaluation process should be founded in an overall focused consideration of how program resources in the District have the greatest impact.
3. Continue to seek out public-private partnerships that will support innovation and sustainable programs and opportunities for those who live, work, and play in the communities served by the District.
4. Inspire and encourage of the PPD workforce through training and fostering of an internal culture that values innovation, creativity, and collaboration.

