



PEORIA PARK DISTRICT

Strategic Plan

2024 REVIEW



As we reflect on 2024, the Peoria Park District remains steadfast in our mission to build a healthier, more connected community through parks and recreation. This year, our Strategic Plan has guided our efforts to expand access, enhance sustainability, and strengthen the impact of our programs and facilities.

Through thoughtful planning and community-driven decision-making, we have made significant strides—improving infrastructure, fostering new partnerships, and increasing opportunities for residents of all ages to engage with our parks and programs. Our commitment to equity remains at the forefront, ensuring that every person in Peoria has access to high-quality recreation and natural spaces.

While we celebrate our progress, we also recognize the work ahead. The challenges we face—economic, environmental, and social—reinforce the importance of strategic investment and responsible stewardship. As we look toward the future, we remain dedicated to fulfilling our mission: to contribute to a healthy, vibrant community by responsibly stewarding our natural and recreational resources.

Thank you to our community, partners, and staff for your passion and support. Together, we are shaping a Park District that continues to serve Peoria for generations to come.

Emily Cahill
Executive Director
Peoria Park District



OUR MISSION

We 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.

OUR VISION

Building on our commitment to our PRAISE model for customer service, we agree to uphold the following values in our work. We will be:

Professional: well-trained and proficient at all levels of our organization.

Respectful: considerate of others and honest in our interactions; focused on opportunities for collaboration.

Accountable: transparent and responsible for our decisions and their short- term and long-term impact on our District, our community, and our environment.

Innovative: open to new approaches that achieve better outcomes and that make our District more financially secure while promoting sustainability of our resources; as we support innovation, we will prioritize environmental sensitivity in all of our activities.

Safe: proactive in providing safe spaces and places for those who work, learn or play in our District parks and facilities.

Equitable: focused on equitable access to parks, facilities, and programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles across our diverse community, while also prioritizing a workforce, both internally and through collaboration and contracting, that looks like the communities we serve.

OUR COMMITMENTS

At the Peoria Park District, we have prioritized our initiatives to ensure we are the best possible stewards of the incredible resources entrusted to us.

VIBRANCY.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY.

These guiding principles shape both our strategy and daily operations, serving as the foundation for everything we do.

In an ever-changing world, adaptability is key. That's why our staff and elected Board of Trustees develop annual action plans rooted in these commitments. Our progress is measured monthly and shared with the community at least quarterly—because accountability and transparency are just as important as the work itself.

4 | CORE COMMITMENTS



OUTCOMES MEASURED:

We define success through measurable outcomes that reflect our commitment to vibrancy, environmental sustainability, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. By setting clear goals and evaluating progress, we ensure our efforts create meaningful, lasting impact in the community.

DATA:

Data-driven decision-making guides our strategy, helping us allocate resources effectively and respond to community needs. Through consistent data collection and analysis, we track progress, identify trends, and adjust initiatives for continuous improvement.

CORE COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Peoria Park District is driven by three core commitments—Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA); Environmental Sustainability; and Vibrancy—each of which plays a crucial role in shaping our strategic priorities. These commitments serve as the foundation for our decision-making, ensuring that every initiative, program, and investment is aligned with our mission to serve the community in a meaningful and impactful way. See our website for a commitment document for each pillar.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY (DEIA)

At the heart of our work is the belief that parks and recreation should be for everyone. Our commitment to DEIA ensures that all individuals, regardless of race, color, gender, disability, age, or culture, feel welcome and represented in the spaces we maintain and the programs we offer. By fostering a diverse workforce and actively seeking community voices, we create opportunities that reflect the needs of those we serve. This commitment is integrated into our strategic priorities by shaping policies, improving access to facilities and programs, and strengthening partnerships with organizations that support underserved populations.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

As stewards of more than 1,600 acres of natural areas, the Peoria Park District is committed to protecting and enhancing the environmental health of our community. Sustainability is more than a responsibility—it is a guiding principle that influences our approach to resource management, facility operations, and long-term planning. By prioritizing conservation, preservation, and restoration efforts, we ensure that future generations can enjoy the beauty and benefits of Peoria’s natural spaces. This commitment is embedded in our strategic priorities by promoting eco-friendly practices, reducing our carbon footprint, and educating the public about environmental stewardship.



VIBRANCY

A thriving community is one that is active, engaged, and inspired. Our commitment to vibrancy means creating dynamic spaces, programs, and experiences that enhance quality of life. Whether through recreational opportunities, cultural events, or wellness initiatives, we strive to provide meaningful experiences that encourage social connections and personal growth. By aligning this commitment with our strategic priorities, we focus on innovative programming, infrastructure improvements, and partnerships that contribute to the overall vitality of Peoria.

These core commitments are not standalone ideals—they are interwoven into every aspect of our strategic vision. By measuring our progress, adapting to changing needs, and maintaining a steadfast focus on DEIA, sustainability, and vibrancy, we ensure that the Peoria Park District remains a valuable and lasting resource for all who live, work, and play in our community.

6 | 2024 IMPACT REPORT BY THE NUMBERS



6

MAYOR YOUTH INTERNS HOSTED IN 2024

\$4.6M

OR 33% MINORITY CONTRACTORS DIVERSE SPEND

4500

ATTENDED PNC WORLDWIDE DAY OF PLAY AND HAD EXPOSURE TO BE ANYTHING CAREER EXPO

148

AVERAGE FULL-TIME WORKERS WITH 22% MINORITY WORKFORCE

17

STAFFERS ARE PART OF OUR UNDER 30 AFFINITY GROUP

779

AVERAGE TOTAL WORKFORCE WITH 25% MINORITY WORKFORCE

30

MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN REDEVELOPMENT OF GLEN OAK PARK PLAYGROUND

26

PAID INTERNSHIPS



12.5

ACRES CONVERTED TO NO MOW AREAS

5928

VOLUNTEER HOURS FOR RESTORATION WORK

5

NEW ENGAGING INTERPRETIVE AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE THAT PROMOTES RESTORATION AND ITS BENEFITS

950K

IMPRESSIONS ON FORREST, PPD SUSTAINABILITY MASCOT, CAMPAIGN

7

SUSTAINABLE PERENNIAL FLOWER BEDS ESTABLISHED AT VARYING PARKS

1.4M

SOLAR KW HOURS PRODUCED IN 2024

93

TREES PLANTED IN 2024



71

VOLUNTEERS ATTENDED THE FIRST VOLUNTEER APPRECIATE EVENT

383K

VISITORS TO PPD ADMISSION BASED FACILITIES

6

PARKS ARE HOME TO REC 'N ROLL THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER

12K

PROGRAM REGISTRATIONS PROCESSED IN 2024

1.5M

LOCAL ECONOMIC INPUT FROM EVENTS HOSTED ON THE RIVERFRONT

2119

RENTALS SUPPORTED IN 2024

30K

ATTENDEES OF PPD SIGNATURE EVENTS IN 2024

12K

INTERACTIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

3026

RESPONSES FOR COMMUNITY INPUT/ FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES

780K

UNIQUE WEBSITE VISITORS



On the following pages, you'll see the full impact of our strategic plan, broken down by each commitment. From enhancing community access to preserving natural spaces, every initiative reflects our dedication to making a meaningful difference. Dive in to explore the progress, achievements, and future direction that bring our vision to life.

To view the full commitment documents, implementation guiding principles, and the 2025-2027 Strategic Plan, visit our website.



PILLAR ONE: EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. As part of an established calendar for program development, the District's Signature and Community Events Steering Committee will review all proposed programs and events on at least a quarterly basis and evaluate for geographic spread and reduction of internal conflicts. They work with programming and events teams to balance the calendar prior to finalizing the District's calendar of events on at least a quarterly basis.
2. In 2024, the District celebrated the opening of the fully inclusive Glen Oak Playground and also completed the replacement of the slate roof project at the Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum. District staff also oversaw improvements at Peoria Zoo tied to AZA accreditation including the development of outdoor spaces for swift foxes, spider monkeys, and lemurs.
3. HISRA staff and patrons were engaged in the design and development of the Glen Oak Playground. HISRA staff were a part of the team that has informed the design of the accessible restrooms that will be built adjacent to the new playground in 2025.
4. Staff are in the process of streamlining all rental contracts throughout the District. The plan is to roll out some of the newly designed contracts by Q1 2025.
5. In Q4, staff from Peoria Zoo, PPD administration, and IT to stay on track for a February 1, 2025, go live date for implementation of RecTrac software at Peoria Zoo.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

1. Develop and implement a process for evaluating asset management and job costing tracking to reduce administrative burden and cost.
NOTE: This will be folded into the software analysis and resource allocation identified in the 2025-2027 plan.
2. Build out and implement a plan for purchase of and use of Track Chairs.
NOTE: Staff has submitted two grant applications to underwrite the purchase and first year operational support of Track Chairs. One was denied; one is outstanding.





PILLAR TWO: FOCUS ON THE PPD WORKFORCE

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. In 2024, the District combined the Peoria PlayHouse Be Anything! event with PNC Worldwide Day of Play. Staff had a post event meeting in June 2024 and has already begun to plan for the 2025 event, with the goal of providing more clear promotion of the Be Anything! auction as a fundraiser to support the PlayHouse. The effort to grow the visibility of this work continues to be a priority of the District. It is highlighted on the District's newly revamped website and a cross-departmental group meets at least monthly to support event and program planning.
2. In Q4, select staff participated in the filming of commercials that will be used to promote the diverse, vibrant opportunities that come with PPD employment.
3. 2024 also saw the prioritization of supports for middle school and early high school students to consider the PPD as their "first" employer. 6 students from the Mayor's Summer Youth Internship Program participated in a multi-week career exposure experience that included support of multiple District locations and programming types. Over the course of 2024, District staff engaged with nearly 5,000 youth across our service area with education and information about workforce opportunities with the Peoria Park District
4. Grounded in the planning efforts that took place in 2024, staff has developed a Counselor In Training program for youth ages 14-15 that is being promoted in the Camps and Sports Guide for Summer 2025.
5. A new District-wide patron service training was unveiled in Spring 2024, with refinements continuing. This training was offered in both in-person and online/on-demand formats.
6. Staff led a team effort to implement Learning Management Software that is housed in our Paycom time tracking software and will allow for on-demand training and more accountable tracking of onboarding and annual training requirements. This will officially launch with staff on January 15, 2025.
7. An employee resource group was established for staff under the age of 30, which has met twice and offers trainings that are self-selected by participants.





PILLAR THREE: ACTIVELY PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSIVENESS OF PPD-FUNDED CONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

Many efforts in this pillar were operationalized in 2024, including:

1. Identification of general categories of goods and service regularly purchased and any projected procurements by year.
2. Development of annual diverse spend reports (operationalized the provision of this by end of Q1 each year)
3. Compliance with HB453
4. Monthly Qualifying Construction Contract reporting provided to DEIA Committee
5. Development of a checklist for staff to include touchpoints with contractors including mid-project follow up on workforce goals
6. Updating of PPD's M/WBE Business Directory using multiple sources including State of Illinois, City of Peoria, MDBC, IDOT, other diverse vendor business directories, and diverse vendor data from reports published by other park districts and governmental units
7. Creation of a user-friendly form-fillable registration database for vendors online.
8. Staff also collaborated with the Board of Trustees to revise EEO forms that are included in bid packages to include emphasis on utilization analysis and affirmative actions by vendors.

PILLAR FOUR: SUPPORT COMMUNITY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

Staff worked to capture video and photos to be used in forward facing promotions in Q1/Q2 2025. These assets will be used in strategies to show the variety of career paths available in the District.





PILLAR ONE: PROTECTION OF THE BIOSPHERE

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. Staff reviewed and revised the District's land acquisition and divestment policies.
2. Staff completed nature preserve management plans to the Nature Preserve Commission for review and approval
3. Staff developed and implemented a management plan for the Springdale Savanna. In December 2024, staff met with the new leadership of Springdale to review operations. Staff recommended operations with the current plan for 2025 until the Springdale director is more established before considering any changes.
4. Staff completed more prescribed burns in 2024 than in the prior 10 years combined.
5. Staff built out a clear strategy for engaging interpretive and educational signage in parks that promotes restoration and its benefits. Children's interactive signage was placed in Glen Oak Park, Tawny Oaks, Detweiller Riverside, Trewyn Park, and Forest Park Nature Center. Staff is also working to place signs in areas where recent ecological restoration explaining what is taking place.
6. Progress was made at Newman, Grand View Drive, and Bradley Park. Staff has added a new layer in GIS to identify and track no mow areas.
7. Staff also learned to use and implemented the use of a new seed drill.
8. Staff was also able to build out measurable goals for volunteer stewardship of some PPD restoration areas. In 2024, volunteer workdays were promoted and conducted that supports Tawny Oaks, Camp Wokanda, and Grandview Drive, among others. In Q3, staff hosted volunteer work days for RLI in Glen Oak Park doing invasive species removal on hillsides and for Caterpillar, whose staff worked on Robinson Park hill prairies.
9. Staff operationalized requirements for maintaining level one arboretum status at Donovan Park.
10. In Q3, the Park Board of Trustees approved a consultant proposal to provide a plan for mitigation efforts of climate change across District operations. This work will begin in 2025.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

1. Staff will evaluate and make a recommendation for the transitioning of the Merkle Ford house/ property.
2. Staff will also evaluate and make a recommendation for the Tawny Oaks house, which required major septic system repairs this fall in advance of the NCCC students living there during their support of the District.
3. A statistic focused on restoration efforts will be added to the 2025 PPD monthly impact report.



PILLAR TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. Staff developed an inventory sheet that tracks all sustainability programming across the District. A rubric was created to determine whether or not each program meets “sustainability targets”. An overview of this effort was provided to the District’s Programming Committee in September.
 2. Staff from EIS and Marketing collaborated on the Forrest environmental awareness and anti-littering campaign.
 3. Strategies for utilizing Friends groups were development and continues to be refined. Agreements that define scope of work and liability will be implemented for all groups.
 4. Staff have developed a draft MOU with Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves, which when finalized, could be used as a template for other groups.
 5. EIS staff and the marketing team created a video entitled “What Earth Day Means To Me” which was shared on social media and at an April Park Board meeting.
-

PILLAR THREE: CONSERVATION OF ENERGY

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. In 2024, staff utilized grant funding to establish sustainable perennial flower beds at RiverPlex, Logan, Morton Square Park, Gwynn Park, Trewyn Park, Proctor Recreation Center and Logan Park. Staff is also building strategies to transition the PlayHouse landscaping to include pollinator friendly perennial plants and annuals.
2. In April, the Park Board of Trustees approved purchase of groundskeeping equipment for Golf that included two hybrid gas/electric models. Many parks have switched to battery/electric leaf blowers, string trimmers, and chain saws.
3. An electric utility vehicle was added to both the RiverFront and Zoo fleets.
4. In Q3, the Park Board of Trustees approved the purchase of a fully electric delivery van to be used by Purchasing staff to make inter-office deliveries.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

After completion of consultant work on conservation of energy, build out a plan to track energy cost savings.



PILLAR FOUR: USE OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AND SAFE PRODUCTS

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. In 2024, staff completed a trial use of Fiesta, an iron-based organic herbicide that kills broadleaves at Bradley Park and with Rec Maintenance team. In Q4, this trial was expanded to Donovan Park. Staff will assess usability for broader use in 2025.
2. Staff worked to develop a centralized, universal tracking sheet for chemical use which will be implemented as of January 1, 2025 across all departments.
3. Purchasing staff developed an assessment tool for the eco-friendliness of consumable products used across the District. This is in the data collection phase and will result in recommendations for change in use in 2025.

PILLAR FIVE: REDUCTION AND PROPER DISPOSAL OF WASTE

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. Staff has built out a plan for composting at Krause. Signs were posted letting staff know where to put landscape waste by size and type. In Q4, leaves and landscape debris were sorted.
2. Staff implemented a community accessible wood chip and mulch distribution effort in Q2. Mulch was provided to patrons at Glen Oak, Gwynn, FRC, Kellogg and Detweiller Parks.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

1. As a result of staff turnover and leave of absence, goals for composting and bio-char will be implemented in 2025.
2. Staff was unable to gather data related to District recycling from GFL and will reassess this opportunity in 2025.





PILLAR ONE: CONNECTION: BUILD OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING TIED TO PPD EFFORTS.

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. Staff was able to budget to transition the Volunteer Coordinator from a part-time to full-time dedicated position beginning in January 2025.
2. In 2024, the Volunteer Coordinator was able to facilitate a restoration effort on Grand View Drive along with a Parks on Tap event.
3. Staff also hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Event at Peoria Zoo during National Volunteer Week that had 71 attendees!
4. The Signature Events Working Group met at least monthly. With the departure of Brent Wheeler, this structure was modified and is now led by Nick Conrad and Scott Loftus with the support of Director Cahill.
5. A more inclusive signature event sponsorship program was implemented in 2024 and will be refined for 2025.
6. Signature events are promoted year-round on the District's restructured website!
7. A staff survey focused on technology needs was completed in Q2 and as part of the 2025 budget process, staff evaluated the viability of implementing Microsoft 365. A hybrid approach was established for 2025.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

Efforts to build a naming policy were not completed. This may be revisited in 2025.

PILLAR TWO: RESILIENCY: IMPROVE OUR ABILITY TO ADOPT TO CHANGE IN WAYS THAT SUPPORT FASTER RECOVERY FROM ECONOMIC, SOCIAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL SHIFTS.

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. In 2024, the Zoo master plan was updated by Ace Torre Designs and schematic design is nearly complete.
2. A fundraising consultant was retained to complete both a Development Assessment and a Feasibility Study for Zoo/PZS. Recommendations regarding structure were provided to staff/board volunteers in October 2024. These include restructuring of staff and the need for clarity in operational agreements between the entity. Staff and Board are working on these recommendations in anticipation of a February 2025 presentation of feasibility study findings.
3. An RFQ for architect/engineering for the ice plant renovation and other improvements at Owens Center was published in late Q4.
4. Development of major giving/development strategies was integrated into the fundraising consultant evaluation mentioned above. Efforts will refocus in 2025.
5. The District's Legacy Fund was the focus of the District's fall fundraising/awareness campaign.



PILLAR THREE: HEALTH: SUPPORT ACCESS TO EDUCATION, HOUSING, JOBS, SAFETY, AND EQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO SUPPORT A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY.

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. In August 2024, staff presented metrics for quantitative analysis of the sustainability of the RiverPlex.
 2. These included, but are not limited to, OSF's termination of its lease at the facility, loss of the OSF mission grant, a membership decline of 10 percent or more, increased subsidy levels, additional major capital needs, or the termination of the joint operating agreement with the Greater Peoria Family YMCA.
 3. Staff also focused on improving the safety of community public events and hosted public input sessions and community survey data requests tied to July 3. Results were presented to the Park Board of Trustees on June 24 and rules were posted at the July 3 Streets Belong to Me event setting forth clear expectations for behavior.
 4. These rules and expectations have been applied to other PPD events as well.
 5. A matrix assessing safety, sustainability, and accessibility of major events was also developed and implemented for use in event planning and evaluation.
 6. A programming working group has been established to review and reduce internal competition and maximize opportunities for engagement and promotion. This group met in Fall 2024 and reviewed first quarter events and activities and will begin to meet monthly with this focus.
-

PILLAR FOUR: INSPIRATION: PRIORITIZE OUR ROLE AS A CULTURE BUILDER IN OUR COMMUNITY ON PROVIDING A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY.

2024 PROGRESS NOTES:

1. One of 2024's highlights was the expansion and growth of Mobile Recreation. With the leadership from PPD staff, this program, which is facilitated in collaboration with the Greater Peoria Family YMCA, maintained a regular presence across six neighborhood parks in under-represented parts of Peoria.
2. Efforts to inspire were catalogued and presented to the Park Board of Trustees for 2023. This will be revisited and shared for 2024 in Q1 2025.

OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS:

Play it Forward sustainability will be addressed in athletics working group which meets bi-monthly..

