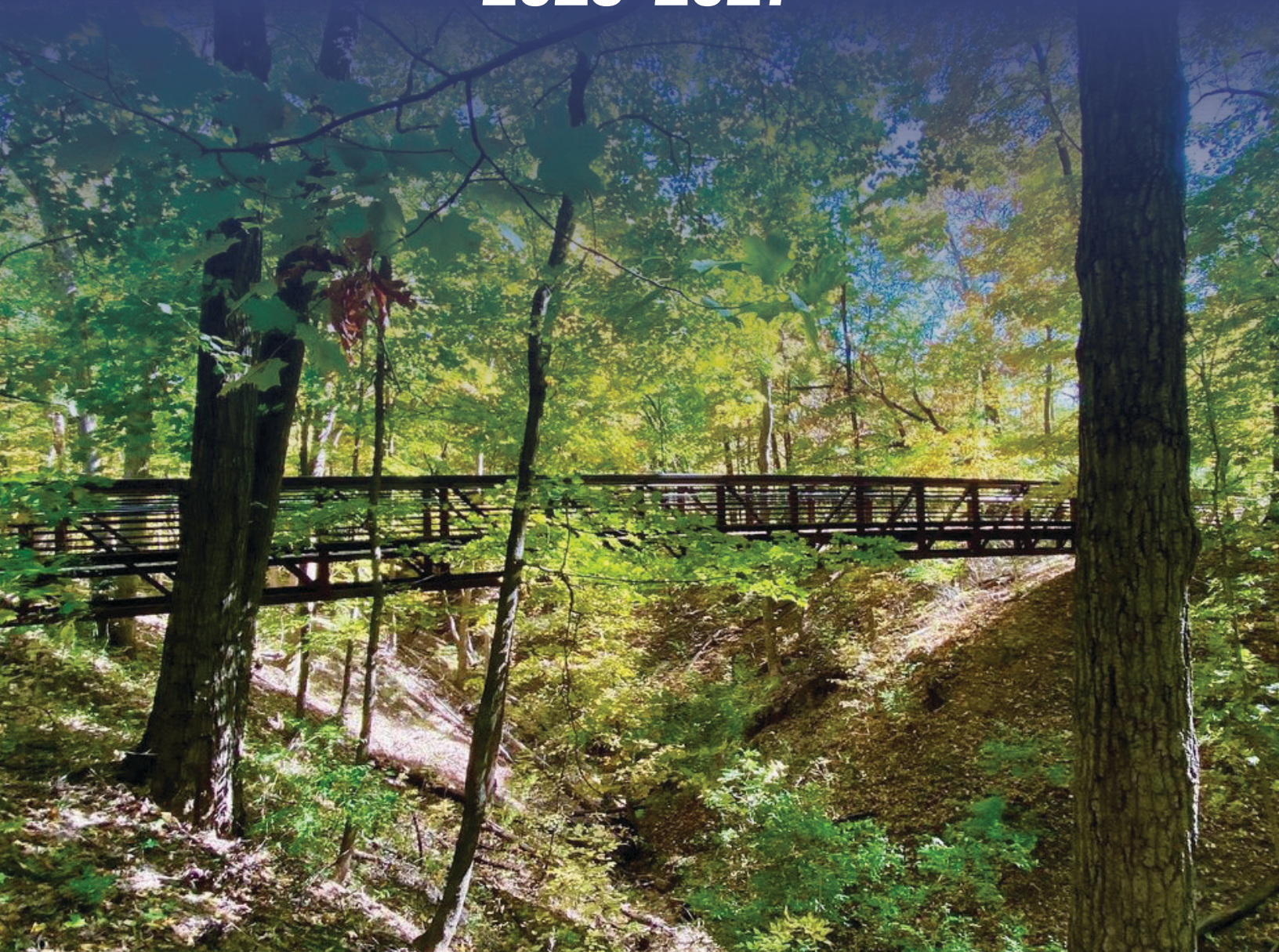




# **PEORIA PARK DISTRICT**

## **Strategic Plan 2025-2027**





## 2 | WELCOME

At the Peoria Park District, our mission is 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. As we launch our Strategic Plan, we do so with a deep commitment to equity, sustainability, and innovation—principles that ensure we remain responsive to the evolving needs of our residents.

This plan is built on a foundation of community input, data-driven decision making, and fiscal responsibility. It outlines clear priorities for improving access to parks and recreation, enhancing environmental stewardship across our 1,600+ acres of protected natural areas, and maintaining and modernizing our facilities to serve all ages and abilities. Through partnerships, creative programming, and responsible resource management, we will continue to expand opportunities for engagement, wellness, and connection.

Most importantly, this plan reinforces our promise: that the Peoria Park District is where everyone belongs. Together, we will strengthen our impact, grow in ways that reflect our community's vision, and ensure that our parks and programs remain an essential part of life in Peoria for generations to come.

Emily Cahill  
Executive Director  
Peoria Park District





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## 4 | DISTRICT OVERVIEW

### 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.

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### 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 environmentally 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

Parks and recreation are powerful forces that shape our lives every day. They bring energy, connection, and support to every corner of our community. But with great impact comes great responsibility—we must channel our efforts to create meaningful, positive change for those we serve.

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.

JURISDICTION POPULATION



121,805  
JURISDICTION  
POPULATION

\$52,796  
JURISDICTION MEDIAN  
HOUSEHOLD INCOME

25.6%  
PERCENTAGE OF  
JURISDICTION POPULATION  
THAT IS YOUNGER THAN 18  
YEARS OF AGE

17.7%  
PERCENTAGE OF  
JURISDICTION POPULATION  
THAT IS OLDER THAN 65  
YEARS OF AGE

DISTRICT WORKFORCE



7  
ELECTED BOARD OF  
TRUSTEE MEMBERS

154  
FULL-TIME  
STAFF

850  
YEARLY AVERAGE  
TOTAL WORKFORCE

26  
YEARLY AVERAGE  
PAID INTERNS

5,465  
VOLUNTEER HOURS  
IN 2024







## 6 | DISTRICT OVERVIEW

Founded in 1894, Peoria Park District was the first park district formed in the state. The District encompasses nearly 60 square miles. We believe the value we provide to the community can be found in the ease of access to our parks and recreational programs.

We are proud to be able to provide access to the great outdoors through our parks system and nature centers that host more than 50 miles of hiking and biking trails in and around Peoria.

Our variety of events and facilities throughout our community will keep you engaged and active. Glen Oak Park is home to Peoria Zoo, Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum and Luthy Botanical Garden. Throughout the District, we host all kinds of sports including softball, soccer, volleyball, tennis and more while Owens Center offers ice skating year-round! Annually, hundreds of concerts, festivals and special events are featured on the Peoria RiverFront and in our parks, in addition to fun activities at Franciscan, Lakeview, Logan and Proctor Recreation Centers. And, of course, the RiverPlex, our state of the art, medically-based fitness center focuses on healthy and active lifestyles.

  
**ROCKY GLEN**  
PEORIA'S "SMALLER STARVED ROCK"  
ENCOMPASSES  
**OVER 70 ACRES**  
**PEORIA PARK DISTRICT  
OWNS/MANAGES  
8,900+ ACRES**  
Major Part of the  
**Largest Oak-Hickory  
Woodlands** north of the  
Shawnee National Forest in Illinois  
**1,600 ACRES**  
OF WHICH PEORIA PARK DISTRICT  
**OWNS/MANAGES**  
are permanently protected as  
Illinois Nature Preserves  
**DETWEILLER  
PARK OFFERS  
5+ MILES  
OF HIKING  
TRAILS**  
Transversing the Illinois River Bluffs  
**HOME TO OVER**  
  
**1,000** species of plants  
  
**900** species of insects  
  
**175** species of birds**15**  
Unique habitats  
found on  
PEORIA PARK DISTRICT'S  
**CONSERVATION  
PROPERTIES**



## 7 | 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.

## 9 | STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**Priority 1:** Allocate sufficient staff and financial resources to build strategies focused on re-imagining of the Golf Learning Center/PPD Golf, Peoria Zoo/Glen Oak Park, and Owens Ice Center to focus on modern, innovative approaches that engage and inspire, while also improving revenue generation potential that can support the long-term sustainability of the Peoria Park District.

### OBJECTIVE

Build out and facilitate a strategic approach and process timeline for the following major projects facing the District in 2025-2027:

1. Opening of the GLC project in PPD Golf.
2. Implementation of a capital campaign effort focused on Peoria Zoo that contemplates connectivity and growth in Glen Oak Park.
3. Replacement of the ice plant at Owens Center with a focus on how to use this construction project to expand and modernize the facility.
4. Identify other capital investment strategies across the District that have the potential to generate revenues that reduce the District's overall reliance on tax subsidy to maintain its current inventory of community supports in long-term sustainable ways.

### 2025 ACTION STEPS:

#### 1. PPD Golf:

1. GLC
  - Finalize Operating Agreement with food/beverage provider.
  - Formalize staffing plan and operating structure for the facility
  - Establish clear marketing objectives for the facility to support. engagement and revenue generation, while also capturing more golfers across other PPD locations.
2. Sustainability
  - Evaluate and develop strategies to reduce reliance on public water sources.
  - Build timeline and identify funding sources for irrigation modifications/updates.





**Priority 1:** Allocate sufficient staff and financial resources to build strategies focused on re-imagination of the Golf Learning Center/PPD Golf, Peoria Zoo/Glen Oak Park, and Owens Ice Center to focus on modern, innovative approaches that engage and inspire, while also improving revenue generation potential that can support the long-term sustainability of the Peoria Park District.

## 2025 ACTION STEPS (continued):

### 2. Peoria Zoo/Glen Oak Park:

1. Evaluate feedback provided by Skystone Partners in February 2025 related to feasibility of capital campaign.
2. Build a fundraising plan and timeline in accordance with recommendations.
3. Review and revise organizational structure of Peoria Zoo to support this effort and to support effective collaboration and revenue generation.
4. Revise PZS/PPD Annual Operating Agreement and revenue share to support selected structure.
5. Identify and implement opportunities to provide shared programming across Glen Oak Park facilities to engage communities.
6. Establish capital plan and timeline for updates at Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum and Glen Oak Amphitheatre. This should be developed with the goal of enhancements to a daylong destination experience at the forefront.
7. Prioritize how development of East Bluff Community Center will be a connector for the East Bluff neighborhood to the experiences offered at the Park.

### 3. Owens Ice Center

1. Determine clear scope of work for the capital project that modernizes not only the physical ice plant, but also the visitor experience, such that revenue generation is amplified where possible.
2. Select and facilitate work with architect/engineer to finalize plan.
3. Finalize budget and work with finance staff to build out a timeline and plan for issuance of Alternate Revenue Bonds in 2026.
  - Work with Municipal Advisor to ensure that District uses best practice to limit fees and long-term impact on District financial position.
  - Use M/A resource to evaluate and implement other sustainable financial practices as identified.

**Priority 1:** Allocate sufficient staff and financial resources to build strategies focused on re-imagination of the Golf Learning Center/PPD Golf, Peoria Zoo/Glen Oak Park, and Owens Ice Center to focus on modern, innovative approaches that engage and inspire, while also improving revenue generation potential that can support the long-term sustainability of the Peoria Park District.

## 2025 ACTION STEPS (continued):

4. Work with the Board of Trustees to set expectations/goals for use of District bond issue, state and federal grant dollars, private fundraising and other sources that will support maintenance of existing amenities, while also evolving to meet the changing needs of our community and providing new opportunities for engagement that include ways to generate sustainable revenue.

## METRICS FOR SUCCESS/WORK PRODUCT:

1. Performance vs. established pro forma budget for GLC.
2. Progress made on above action steps to include specific goals for revenue generation at Peoria Zoo focused on memberships, fundraisers, and capital fundraising as established through restructuring discussion. This expectation related to revenue generation should be tailored to other facilities/programs as well.
3. Prioritized capital needs list with goals for funding sources not limited to District bond issue.





**Priority 2:** Establish clear and measurable expectations for District mission-driven efforts in all sectors.

### **OBJECTIVE:**

Determine clear metrics and procedures for assessing what “success” looks like in the Peoria Park District and communicate the same.

### **2025 ACTION STEPS:**

#### **1. Set clear, measurable goals for performance and develop strategies for evaluation and accountability.**

1. Build out an annual process for establishing, non-budgetary targets for quality and quantity of efforts. These targets should track with service provided and their connection to the District’s commitments.
2. Facilitate subject-matter specific meetings to assess performance and provide cross-departmental support and access to District leadership and expertise.
3. Improve internal communication strategies that encourage inputs and feedback, as well as encouragement and recognition of successes, while also providing a collaborative opportunity for dealing with challenges.

#### **2. Organize and communicate a process for administrative procedure/policy that is accessible and clear.**

1. Catalog current policy and organize in a consistent format and structure.
2. Identify policy that needs to be updated/clarified.
3. Build out process for ongoing maintenance of procedure/policy documents.

### **METRICS FOR SUCCESS/WORK PRODUCT:**

1. Documented goals for all departments/programs across District that are outside of budget process; review of and response to these goals.
2. Progress in establishment of administrative procedure establishment, communication, and understanding as reported in fall annual staff survey.

**Priority 3:** Promote our value to our community... and each other.

### **OBJECTIVE:**

Provide evidence of our value through shows of credibility (Putting policy commitment into practice and CAPRA accreditation) and ease of engagement (software upgrades/coordination). Inform and engage staff in this process and find opportunities to support their individual growth in ways that benefits both them and the District.

### **2025 ACTION STEPS:**

1. Strategically identify and build timeline for implementation of operational changes that amplify our commitments to DEIA, environmental sustainability, and vibrancy.
2. Complete the CAPRA self-assessment process in 2025, with the goal of hosting an on-site accreditation visit in spring 2026.
3. Plan and implement community engagement strategies that focus on connections to youth and under-represented populations
4. Prioritize software upgrades that support user access and transparency, as well as data evaluation and tracking.
5. Support individual staff growth through the development and implementation of a district-wide Learning Management System (LMS) and a tuition reimbursement process.

### **METRICS FOR SUCCESS/WORK PRODUCT:**

1. Documented operational changes that tie to the pillars in each of the District's three commitment areas.
2. Completed CAPRA self-assessment.
3. Identified and implemented timeline for software acquisition/updates.
4. Data related to LMS participation and staff feedback on impacts of the same.
5. Tracking of retention impact of LMS and tuition reimbursement.



## 14 | IMPLEMENTATION GUIDING PRINCIPLES

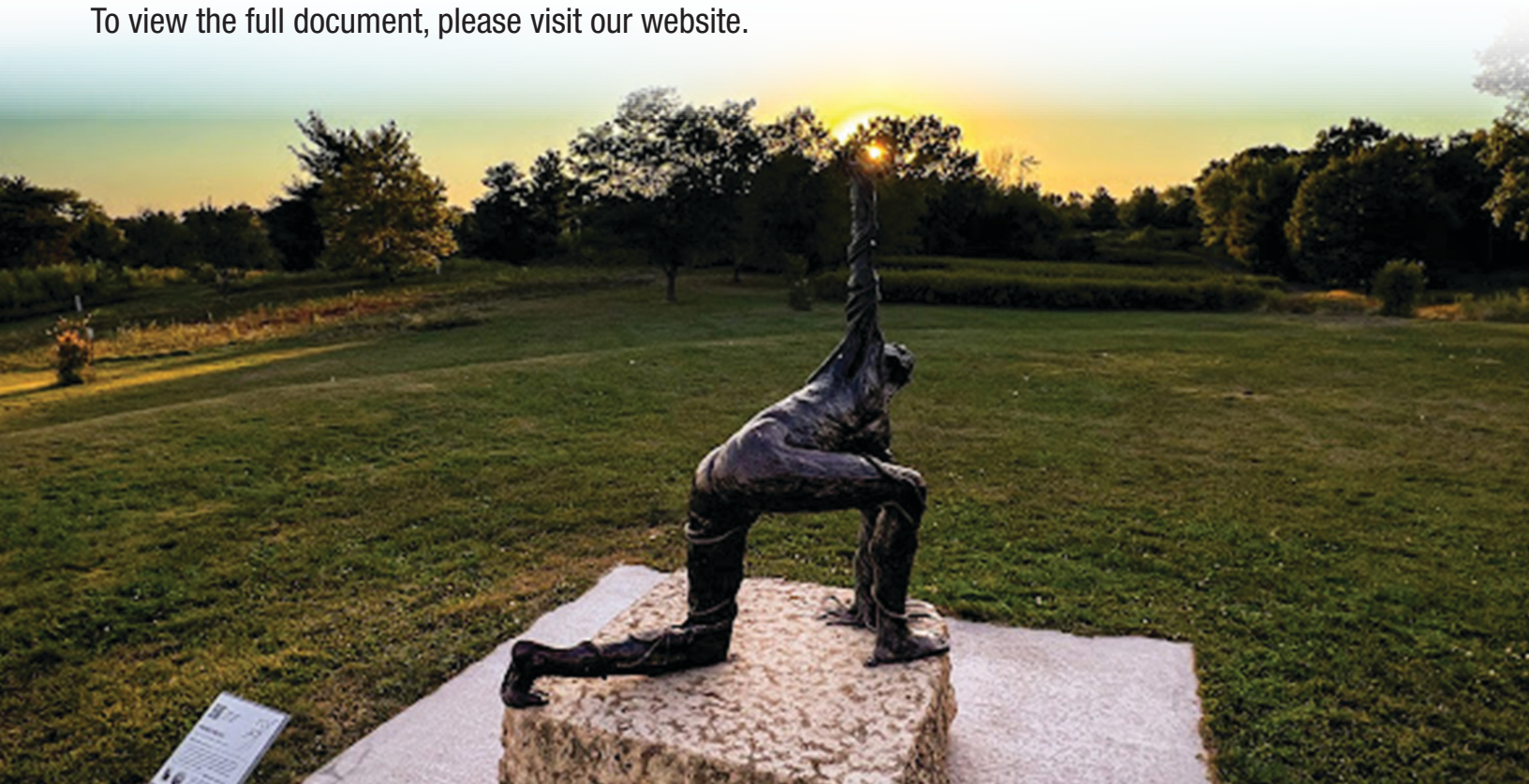
As the Peoria Park District shapes its approach to serving and supporting our community, it is essential to consider how our vast network of public spaces contributes to our mission of enhancing quality of life, fostering connections, and ensuring equitable access to recreation and nature.

Guided by our Strategic Plan, the District's elected Board of Trustees and professional staff have developed the Implementation Guiding Principles—a framework designed to align open space stewardship and development with our long-term vision. These principles balance flexibility with best practices, ensuring meaningful community engagement and sustainable growth across our entire inventory of parks and facilities. Rather than focusing on individual parcels or amenities, this approach provides a universal toolkit that supports strategic decision-making and maximizes community benefit.

A key component of this document is the classification of park spaces, providing clear distinctions in how different areas within the District are utilized and maintained. Additionally, the Implementation Guiding Principles establish a step-by-step process for evaluating and engaging in outside partnerships. Whether assessing a program's potential impact or conducting an environmental analysis, this structured approach ensures that collaborations align with the District's mission and contribute positively to our shared spaces.

By emphasizing adaptability over rigid planning cycles, the Implementation Guiding Principles allow the District to respond to emerging opportunities while maintaining alignment with our strategic priorities. Sharing this framework with the community fosters transparency, accountability, and collaboration, ensuring that together, we continue to create welcoming, vibrant, and resilient public spaces.

To view the full document, please visit our website.







**From enhancing community access to preserving natural spaces, every initiative reflects our dedication to making a meaningful difference. We invite you to dive in to explore the progress, achievements, and future direction that bring our vision to life.**

**View the individual commitment documents, implementation guiding principles, and the 2024 strategic review, on our website, [PeoriaParks.org/about](https://PeoriaParks.org/about)**



