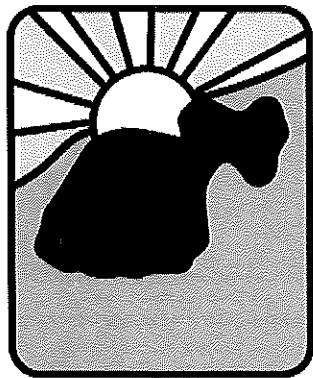


Efficiency Report For The Wauconda Park District

Approved by the Park District's
Committee on Local Government Efficiency
on November 12, 2024



Wauconda
Park District

I. Purpose

The Wauconda Park District formed a Committee on Local Government Efficiency to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50ILCS, *et seq.*

II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Glenn Starkey, Board President/Chairperson

Cari Berrelez, Commissioner

James Carr, Commissioner

Adam Tallman, Commissioner

Kathy Bianco, Commissioner

David Jakubek, Resident Member

Monica Glavey, Resident Member

Tim Staton, Executive Director/Board Secretary

Cindy Babicz, Director of Recreation

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Dates	Meeting Locations
October 8, 2024	Community Center, 600 North Main Street, Wauconda
October 22, 2024	Community Center, 600 North Main Street, Wauconda
November 12, 2024	Community Center, 600 North Main Street, Wauconda
November 26, 2024	Community Center, 600 North Main Street, Wauconda (Cancelled Due to report completion and approval on November 12, 2024)

Agendas and Minutes for these meetings are available on the Park District’s website or upon request at the Park District’s administrative office.

<https://www.waucondaparks.com/general/district-board/>

IV. General Overview of Governing Statues, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, and Jurisdiction

The Wauconda Park District was established by referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1959. The Wauconda Park District is comprised of eighteen (18) parks and parcels of approximately 110 acres of, including trails and open space. The Wauconda Park District serves approximately 14,084 residents of the Village of Wauconda according to the 2020 census.

All Illinois Park Districts, including the Wauconda 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 reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Wauconda Park District is governed by a board of five commissioners, elected at large for overlapping four-year terms. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the Wauconda 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. This governing body is responsible, among other things, for passing ordinances, adopting the budget, appointing committees, and hiring the Wauconda Park District Executive Director.
- **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 parks 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 Wauconda 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 Wauconda Park District is held in trust for the residents of the Wauconda 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 body.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Wauconda 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 Wauconda 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 Wauconda Park District share is only 4.5% of the local tax bill.

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

- Park District Ordinance Manual
- Policies and Procedures Manual
- Comprehensive Master Plan – The Wauconda Park District
- Annual Audit
- ADA Transition Plan
- Personnel Policies Manual
- Safety Manual
- Affiliate Policy

V. List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Wauconda 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 Wauconda 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 of Illinois, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Wauconda Park District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our residents.

1. Membership in Special Recreation Association

The Wauconda Park District is part of the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA). Special recreation associations are a form of intergovernmental cooperation among units of local government that are authorized under the Illinois Constitution, the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, the Park District Code, and the Municipal Code. Their Formation is rooted in a fundamental belief and recognition that "Recreation is for Everyone." They are shining examples of local government efficiency.

The park districts and municipalities that form the NISRA cooperative support the activities of the association are:

- Barrington Park District
- Cary Park District
- Crystal Lake Park District
- Dundee Township Park District
- City of Elgin
- Hampshire Township Park District
- Huntley Park District
- City of Harvard
- Village of Lake in the Hills
- Marengo Park District
- City of McHenry
- Wauconda Park District
- City of Woodstock

By partnering together; local communities are able to efficiently and effectively deliver more successful program opportunities to community members who have special needs. Furthermore, by participating the SRA, the Park District networks with twelve (12) other local governments to provide more program opportunities for our community members

who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in the NISRA programs or in the programs that are provided by the District.

The Park District and NISRA also achieve efficiency by utilizing existing facilities that are owned and operated by the Association members, including the Wauconda Park District. Utilizing these existing facilities allows NISRA to deliver services to its member communities at a lower cost. Currently the Wauconda Park District provides NISRA access to the following facilities for their program offerings.

- Community Center Multipurpose Rooms/Gymnasium
- Fitness First Facility
- Arthur Farley Handicap Accessible Fishing Pier
- Handicap Accessible Pontoon Boat
- Access to Wauconda Fest
- Use of Cook Park for picnics

On the other hand, NISRA has provided the Wauconda Park District with the use of a fifteen-passenger van when it is not practical for the Park District to rent a van or if the District's van is not operational.

NISRA also provides the support needed for participants with special needs who choose to register for Wauconda Park District programs or inclusive programming. NISRA collects information on the registered participant and determines what supports are needed for the participant to be successful in this inclusive setting. This could include additional training of the supervisory staff, additional training of support staff, the use of adaptive equipment, behavior management, and/or other measures that will assist in the successful participation of an individual in the Wauconda park District program. Although success may not look the same for everyone, NISRA works with Wauconda Park District's staff to ensure the best results for all participants in the program. The Wauconda Park District cost of providing these services would be much greater without its participation and partnership with NISRA.

In 2023, NISRA successfully served twenty (20) residents one hundred and ten (110) programs. NISRA also supported seven (7) participants in inclusive programs that were provided by the Wauconda Park District.

The Wauconda Park District is very proud of the ongoing collaboration with NISRA. By working cooperatively with other local governments, not only are we able to collectively serve all citizens within our community, including persons with disabilities, but we are able to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

2. Other intergovernmental agreements with other park districts, forest preserve Districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies.

The District doesn't currently have any of these types of agreements. One goal in the District Comprehensive Plan is to have more nature based programs. A partnership with the Lake County Forest Preserve would be a good partnership to explore in order to accomplish this goal.

Another area for collaboration is by creating an agreement with a local park District to offer sim lessons during the winter or to obtain resident rates at park district golf courses.

3. Intergovernmental agreements/relationships with other units of local government

Wauconda School District 118 – Intergovernmental Agreement for Use of Facilities including Robert Crown School and Wauconda Grade School for the Club program.

The District works with the Drama Club at Wauconda High School to offer a haunted house and games at the annual Trick or Treat on Main Street event.

The District also works with the Wauconda High School Choir to provide caroling at the annual Tree Lighting event.

Village of Wauconda – The Wauconda Park District has an intergovernmental agreement with the Village of Wauconda for the enforcement of District ordinances, including permitted parking by high school students at Cook Park.

Most Village of Wauconda permitting fees are waived.

Cook Park plays host to the Village of Wauconda's annual July 3rd Fireworks. Park District staff help with logistical aspects of this event.

Wauconda Police Department – The Wauconda Park District partners with the Wauconda Police Department to offer various recreational programs that develop awareness and a sense of community. These programs include monthly Kids vs. Cops sessions (a variety of sports activities after school) and a fishing program called Cops and Bobbers.

The Park District also donates Marina space to the Police for the storage of the Wauconda Police Boat. This boat enforces lake rules and regulations.

The District participates in National Night Out, a community event sponsored by the Wauconda Police Department.

Wauconda Area Library – The Wauconda Park District partners with the Wauconda Area Library to bring a summer concert series to the community. This relationship has led to other collaborations including Fall Festival, Scarecrows on Main Street and Story Stroll.

Senior Programming Partnership – This partnership between the Wauconda Park District, Wauconda Area Library, and Wauconda Township offers several special

events throughout the year and many one-time informational sessions on a variety of different topics and interests.

The biggest event planned by this group is the senior picnic which brings together over one hundred (100) senior citizens for a picnic, wellness fair, and boat rides on Bangs Lake. Elected officials from around the community normally assist with grilling lunch and server the participants, along with members of the Wauconda Fire District and Wauconda Police Department.

Wauconda Fire Protection District – The Fire District cadets man the parking duty at our annual festival every June. This saves the District thousands of dollars in paid manpower. In return, the Park District makes a small contribution to this program. Many of the cadets have gone on to be full-time firemen for the Wauconda Area Fire District.

4. Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues.

Affiliate Agreements – The Wauconda Park District renews its affiliate agreements annually with Wauconda Baseball and Softball, Northern Ice Girls Fastpitch, Bulldog Youth Sports, and Wauconda Area Youth Soccer. These agreements outline the relationship and guidelines between these organizations and the Wauconda Park District. User fees paid by these organizations help minimize the cost of maintenance to the playing fields.

5. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits

Wauconda Chamber of Commerce – The Wauconda Park District is an active member in the Wauconda Area Chamber of Commerce. The District partners with the Chamber to provide the community with holiday events such as Trick or Treat on Main Street and Holly Jolly Christmas.

United Partnership for a Better Community – As a founding member of the United Partnership for a Better Community, the Wauconda Park District has played a key role in this organization's success. The partnership has in the past provided seed money and been a catalyst for grants to promote healthy lifestyles, and English as a Second Language at various park district events and facilities.

Illinois Park And Recreation Association – All recreation staff are members of this state recreation association. This organization provides valuable training to our parks and recreation staff that would normally not be possible with our small size. Collaboration between staff and other professionals provides insights into best practices, thus helping the District operate more efficiently.

Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) – The Wauconda Park District is also a member of the Illinois Association of Park Districts. IAPD provides the District with guidance in changes to laws affecting the District and provides many training opportunities for commissioners and staff.

Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) – As a member of PDRMA the Wauconda Park District is able to purchase liability insurance coverage and health insurance through a much bigger pool than going out for these services on our own. PDRMA also provides the Park District with limited legal resources and provides numerous safety training opportunities throughout the year.

Choose Your Path Coalition – The Wauconda Park District is a member of the Choose Your Path Coalition. This coalition’s focus is on youth and community engagement to develop strategies to prevent youth substance use and increase community collaboration.

VI. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of Volunteers. One way the Wauconda Park District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through the use of volunteers. Last year, approximately 150 individuals volunteered over 2000 hours of service to the Wauconda Park District.

Youth employment. – Over the years, the Wauconda Park District has provided many Wauconda residents with their first job. The District employs approximately twenty (20) 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds annually to work seasonally as concession workers and lifeguards at Phil’s Beach and as Day Camp Counselors. The District also hires four or five (4-5) 18-22-year-olds seasonally to help with park maintenance. These part-time jobs give the youth of our community a chance to enter the workforce, develop skills, and save for their future.

Joint Purchasing and Energy Efficiency. Over the years, the District has purchased vehicles and playground equipment through a joint purchasing co-op. These co-ops have saved the District time and money by having the bid process already completed and approved.

The Wauconda Parks Foundation (501C3) The Wauconda Parks Foundation was founded in 2018 with a mission to “enhance the quality of life for all by championing public parks as vital community assets. We are a dedicated foundation committed to raising funds, fostering partnerships, and advocating for the preservation, enhancement, and accessibility of green spaces. Through our collaborative efforts, we aim to inspire active lifestyles, environmental stewardship and a strong sense of community engagement. Together, we create legacies of well-maintained, vibrant parks that enrich the lives of individuals, families, and generations to come.

Since its inception, the Parks Foundation has raised over \$225,000 for various projects including:

- Redevelopment of Phil's Beach
- Memorial brick paver program at Phil's Beach
- A Memorial Bench
- Park District Scholarship Program
- Redevelopment of Osage Park

The Foundation's efforts have helped save the taxpayers by allowing the District to make improvements without burdening the tax payer with rate increases.

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 Revenues. Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Wauconda Park District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Wauconda Park District is an economic engine for the community that generates revenue for the state and our community in the form of 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 Act (CARES) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Park District did not receive any such direct federal aid. The Wauconda 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 Wauconda Park District provides all 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 registration, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Wauconda Park District may be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

Document	Location(s) Available <small>(website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)</small>
• Annual tax levy	County Clerk
• Annual budget and appropriation ordinance	Website, Community Center, County Clerk
• Agenda and minutes	District Website
• Comptroller's annual finance report (AFR)	State of Illinois Comptroller Site
• Annual audit	Website, State of Illinois Comptroller Site
• Conduct Ordinances	District Website
• Capital improvement plan	District Website
• ADA transition plan	District Website
• Board meeting dates	District Website
• Public notices	District Website
• General use policies	District Website
• FOIA request	District Website

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

- The board of commissioners meets twice each month. (one time in June and July). 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 Wauconda 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. The Wauconda Park District's annual levy is also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Park District by phone at (847) 526-3610 or email at tstaton@waucondaparks.com.

The Wauconda Park District website (www.waucondaparks.com) also has a "Contact Us" tab for residents to submit questions or comment on parks, programs, and services.

- The Wauconda Park District also has two committees made up primarily of residents chaired by the Executive Director or his/her designee to coordinate the two primary special events the District plans annually. Updates from these committees are given monthly at the Board of Commissioners Meeting. These committees are:
 - Wauconda Fest Committee
 - Wauconda Triathlon Committee
- Other ways the Wauconda Park District has connected with the community include surveys and public hearings. Surveys and public hearings completed in the past five years include:
 - 2022 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment
 - Recreation programs receive a program evaluation at the end of each session
 - Osage Park Master Plan Public Input Meeting 2022
 - Bangs Lake Marina Master Plan Public Input Meeting 2024
 - Annual Tax Levy Public Hearing
 - Annual Budget and Appropriation Public Hearing
 - Various Ordinances discussed in open session during Park Board of Commissioners Meetings
 - Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency
 - Special Meetings to fill a Board Vacancy 2023
 - Participate in Wauconda Township Senior Fair
 - Participate in Wauconda Chamber of Commerce Business Expo
 - Participate in National Night Out
 - Career Day at Wauconda High School

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

The District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

- The Executive Director and Director of Recreation are Certified Parks and Recreation Professionals (CPRP)
- The Executive Director and Director of Recreation are graduates of the Illinois Park and Recreation Association Leadership Academy.
- Director of Recreation received the Marcy Adams Spirit Award (IPRA 2005)
- Four Recreation Staff have graduated from IPRA Professional Development School
- The Director of Parks is a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI)
- Annually PDRMA Accredited Agency by completing self-reviews and SMART Goals.
- Recipient of several OSLAD Grants throughout the last fifteen years
- Staff annually attends the IPRA/IAPD conference for professional development
- Administrative Staff annually attend IAPD Legal Symposium
- Aquatic Staff attend Aquatic Risk Management Institute
- Staff attends PDRMA Risk Management Institute every November

IX. Benefits and Services

The Wauconda 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 including the following:

1. Parks and Open Space

- **Beach Park** – playground, picnic area, open space, and home to **As We Grow Preschool** - Offers preschool classes to children aged 3 and 4 as of September 1 annually
- **Cook Park** – playground, picnic shelter, gazebo, (2) soccer field, football field, (5) baseball/softball fields, sand volleyball court, fishing, canoe/kayak launch, open space
- **Lagoon Park** – (2) baseball/softball fields, Park District maintenance garage
- **Larkdale Park** - playground, Basketball Court, Open Space
- **Memorial Park** – War Memorial
- **Osage Park** – playground, (2) tennis courts, (2) pickleball courts, basketball court, outdoor fitness stations, pavement soccer, and open space
- **Country Ridge Park** – playground, open space
- **Meadow View Park** – playground and Gazebo
- **Oak Grove Park** – playground and open space
- **Saddlewood Park** – playground and open space
- **Orchard Hills Park** – Playground, gazebo, and open space
- **Waterstone Park** – playground and open space
- **Fieldbrook Park** – playground, soccer field, (2) baseball fields
- **Fishhook Park** – playground and open space
- **Sedgebrook Park** – playground, gazebo, (2) tennis courts, basketball court, open space

2. Facilities

- **Community Center** – The Wauconda Park District’s main hub for recreation. The Community Center includes five (5) multi-purpose rooms, a fitness center, and gymnasium. The Community Center houses the District’s Administrative Offices.
- **As We Grow Preschool** – Home to the District’s 3- and 4-year-old preschool programs.
- **Beach Park Marina** – Amenities include: Boat slip and launch
- **Bangs Lake Marina - Amenities** include: Boat slip, launch, bait shop, gasoline kayak and stand-up paddleboard, pontoon boat and row boat, rental.
- **Phil’s Beach** – Amenities include: splash pad, beach, picnic area, lake swimming, Wibit play features, accessible boardwalks, concessions, bathhouse, Baggo court, game tables, and gazebo.

3. Programs and Memberships

There was a total of 858 total program sessions offered with a total participation of 14,087. The Park District offered programs in the following areas in 2023:

Special Events
Active Seniors
Trips
CLUB (Before and after School Program)
Cultural Arts
Music Lessons
Days Off School
Group Fitness
Gymnastics/Tumbling
Dance
Teen Activities
Youth Activities
Arts and Crafts
Youth and Adult Leagues
Youth Instructional Sports

In 2023, the Wauconda Park District sold 1702 memberships for various facilities.

Memberships include:

Boat Launch Passes at Beach Park and Bangs Lake Marinas
Boat Slips at Beach Park and Bangs Lake Marinas
Fitness First Membership (1-month, 3-month, and annual options)
Phils Beach (individual and family membership)
Open Gym (monthly)

4. Additional Services

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

- 1-Mile walking Path at Cook Park
- 9 Baseball and softball fields for affiliate group usage
- 2 soccer fields for affiliate group usage
- 1 football field for affiliate group usage
- Arthur Farley Handicap accessible fishing pier
- Handicap accessible pontoon boat in cooperation with NISRA
- Canoe/Kayak Launch (free to all users at Cook Park)
- 2 Bocce Ball courts
- 2 Horseshoe pits
- 1 Gag Ball Pit
- Fishing bait and tackle sold at the Bangs Lake Marina Bait Shop
- Boardwalk with interpretive signage at Cook Park
- Rain Garden which helps filter runoff water before it gets to Bangs Lake
- Fishing pole lending program
- Wauconda Fest (annual community festival)
- Wauconda Triathlons (kids and adult races)

5. Other Benefits

While the Wauconda 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 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.

Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. By way of example, below are amounts that other units of local government charge the Park District even though the Park District's taxpayers are also taxpayers of these other units of local government. Such fees and charges, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the park district's ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

- We currently pay additional fees for services rendered by Wauconda Fire District, Wauconda Police Department, and the Village of Wauconda for special events the District plans throughout the year, primarily Wauconda Fest and Wauconda Triathlons. Perhaps there is a way that these services could be traded or bartered for another service that the District can provide that will benefit these governments and show cooperation.

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases, the unit of government assessing the fee ultimately benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax or other revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are necessary, general-purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the park district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Park District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees on the Park District not only leads to inefficiency, but it is also shortsighted.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited from charging more than their out-of-pocket costs associated with the activities covered by a fee that is assessed to another unit of local government with the same taxpayers. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. Eliminating local permit fees is a way to reduce administrative costs without impacting overall public revenue. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. Some communities recognize this and do not charge fees to other units. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

2. Inefficiency of Other Governments

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

- In September 2021, the Wauconda Park District submitted a Land Water and Conservation Fund Grant for the purpose of purchasing Wauconda Boat. This full-service marina would provide additional revenue for the district and help

improve the efficiency of our capital improvement plans, by providing additional non-tax dollars. We received notification in November of 2023 that we were awarded the grant of \$750,000. In December of 2023 we were notified that we would not be eligible for the grant because we had purchased the property prior to the award of the grant. To complicate matters the District applied for a letter of Retroactivity to move forward with the purchase in October of 2021 and obtained the notification of approval in March 2022, after purchasing the property in February of 2022. This inefficiency has jeopardized the \$750,000 in reimbursed funding that is critical to the long-range plans of the District. This matter is still unresolved.

3. 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 approximately 20 hours in staff time and \$1000 in 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 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 \$2000 on criminal background checks. The Wauconda 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 Wauconda 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.

4. Opportunities for Increased Transparency

As illustrated above, the Wauconda Park District is very transparent in its operations. The following are opportunities for increased transparency:

- Put notes from Wauconda Fest and Triathlon Committee meeting notes on the District's website.
- Continue to add new information to the District's FAQ page.
- Semi-annual coffee with a Commissioner and/or Executive Director.
- Develop an Annual Report outlining accomplishments, registration numbers, park improvements and beneficial facts that show the residents the value of their tax dollars.

5. Opportunities for Other Intergovernmental Agreements

- Opportunity to create an intergovernmental agreement designating safe paths for bike and foot traffic around Bangs Lake. This could also include designating some portions of the road as bike paths to connect to different parts of the community or other Lake County Trail systems.
- Increase opportunities for senior citizen programming with the Wauconda Township.

6. Opportunities for Savings such as Energy Efficiency Projects, Joint Purchasing

- One opportunity for increased energy efficiency would be to replace all the ballfield lights with energy efficient LED lighting. Com Ed offers a rebate program for assistance with this.
- Another opportunity for energy efficiency is to replace old HVAC equipment and hot water heaters with more energy efficient models during replacement time.
- Utilize Bangs Lake for watering plants and trees on shoreline properties.
- Investigate options for increased use of solar power.

I. OTHER

The Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency feels the Wauconda Park District does its best to work with a minimal amount of resources provided to it through the collection of property tax. The District seeks out grants and other forms of charitable contributions to minimize the burden on the taxpayer. In an effort to increase transparency, the District will continue to post meeting minutes and other valuable public communications on it's website. In addition, the Board and staff will continue to seek out new and creative ways of gathering community input in order to better meet the parks and recreation needs of the community.

The Wauconda Park District Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency has approved this report dated November 12, 2024.

Signed: _____



Committee Chair/Board President

Signed: _____



Executive Director/Board Secretary