

EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR  
CRETE PARK DISTRICT

APPROVED BY THE PARK DISTRICT'S  
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY  
ON APRIL 17, 2024





## I. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Park District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Park District in 1957. All Illinois park districts, including the 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 many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Park District is governed by a board of (5) five commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the 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.
- **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 contrasts with general purpose governments where elected representatives are responsible for oversight on many 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 park 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 with larger, multi-purpose governments with many departments.
- **Protection of revenues.** Because the 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 park district is held in trust for the residents of the 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 board.

- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The 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 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 Park District share is less than 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 Park District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

- [Crete Park District Employee Manual](#)
- [Annual Financial Review](#)
- [Special Event Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [Crete Park District – The Board Charter](#)
- [Park Ordinances \(Approval Pending\)](#)
- [Strategic Plan Proposal](#)
- [Annual Report](#)

## II. List of Shared Services and Partnerships

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

### 1. Membership in SRA

The Park District is part of the Lincolnway Special Recreation Association ("SRA"). Special recreation associations are a form of intergovernmental cooperation among local government units 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.

By partnering together, local communities can effectively deliver more successful program opportunities to community members with special needs. Furthermore, by participating in the SRA, the Park District networks with seven other local governments to provide many more program opportunities for our community members who have special needs and offers a choice between participating in the SRA's programs or in programs that are provided by the Park District.

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

- *Willard Wood Park Center*

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

In 2023, Crete Park District made a formal request to join the Lincolnway Special Recreation Association. The SRA has already been a great asset by supporting two members of our summer camp with inclusion services in programs that were provided by the Park District.

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

Crete Park District is a member agency of LWSRA

## 2. Partnerships

- Crete Park District and Will County Forest Preserve collaborate on recreational programming to better serve the residents of Crete.
- Community Survey – Crete Park District, Village of Crete, Crete Public Library, Crete Township worked collaboratively to commission the University of Illinois to obtain input from Crete residents on satisfaction with the public services, community interest on capital projects, interest on services desired that are not currently offered.

## 3. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government

- Taxing Body collaboration on Toast to Crete, which is hosted by Crete Township, Crete Public Library, Village of Crete, Crete Monee School District 201U and Crete Park District, which is an evening of public officials networking and sharing ideas for the betterment of the Crete area.
- Crete Park District and Crete Public library have an intergovernmental agreement offering the community the Moutvic Family Story walk located in Peter Halligan Park.
  - Resolution No 2324 4.1

Other partner programs between the Crete Public library and Crete Park District include story time at the park district preschool classes, Stories and Snacks in the

park and pop-up events. Activity booths at Park-a-Palooza, Unplugged and Acorn Fest along with creation of the community wide survey.

- The Village of Crete and Crete Park District have had several partnerships for years and are currently creating intergovernmental agreements for transparency and more formal documentation for future management.
    - Cyber Security Agreement
    - Fuel use agreement.
    - Facility and space agreement
    - Cell Tower Agreement
    - Land use for Iron Removal facility in Swiss Valley Park
    - Memorial Day Parade collaborative efforts with Park District, Village of Crete, Mason, FMen and American Legion
  - Crete Monee School District 201U and Crete Park District have working relationships.
    - Walking Club
    - Adult health and wellness activities to assist with employee wellness programs.
    - Juneteenth
    - Mentoring Program
    - Facility use for youth activities.
  - Crete Township
    - Senior Luncheon held in the summer at Crete Park Pavilion
    - Acorn Fest, the Crete Township sponsors a kids activity area during the community event.
4. Partnerships or agreements with athletic or similar affiliate organizations that operate sports or other leagues utilize park district fields for practice and/or games.
- Crete Bulldogs
  - Illinois Lutheran
  - Governors State
5. Partnerships or other interrelationships with non-profits
- Crete Park Pals
  - Crete Runners Association
  - Crete Lions Club
  - Crete Area Chamber of Commerce
  - Crete Area Youth Baseball Softball Association
6. Informal cooperation with other units of local government which save taxpayer dollars by eliminating redundancy include shared use of:
- Equipment
  - Labor
  - Services
  -

### III. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

**Use of volunteers.** One way the Park District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through volunteers. Last year, 15 individuals volunteered 65 hours of service to the Park District. Crete Park District hosts an Earth Day event to bring volunteers into the parks to assist with cleanup, weeding, mulching, power washing and overall spring readiness of the parks for public use.

**Youth employment.** The Park District is a major employer of youth in the community. Last year, the Park District employed 20 youth. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workforce.

**Crete Park Pals Foundation.** Last two year, the Foundation raised \$22,000 in private donations, which help alleviate the burden on taxpayers. The Foundation also supported the Park District by:

- Creating awareness for Park District programs and need for support to continually improve the parks.
- Aid with recreational activities and services at our community events.

**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 Revenue.** Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Park District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Park District is an economic engine for the community and generates much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, 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 (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Park District had limited funding sources and no loss revenue funding. Our 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 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 program registrations, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

## IV. Transparency to the Community

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

- Document Location(s) Available at our Administrative Office, 737 W Exchange, Crete IL or our website: [cretepark.com](http://cretepark.com)
- Annual tax levy Administrative Office
- Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance Administrative Office
- Agenda and minutes Administrative Office/Web
- Comptroller's Annual Finance Report (AFR) Administrative Office

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

- The board of commissioners meets once each month. 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 Park District board. Also, 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 before.
- 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 before adopting this annual tax levy. The 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 708-672-6969 or email at [rchavez@cretepark.com](mailto:rchavez@cretepark.com)
- Crete Park District participated in 2023 Community Survey
- The primary goal of this project was to gather input from residents regarding their use of and satisfaction with facilities, programs, services, and events in the Crete area. Another goal of this community survey was to assess residents' needs and preferences regarding community development, parks, recreation, enrichment, and educational programs and services offered by the Village of Crete, Crete Township, Crete Park District, and the Crete Public Library District.
  - These municipal agencies collaborated with the University of Illinois Office of Recreation and Park Resources (ORPR) to develop the survey. Valid and reliable survey questions commonly used in community surveys were tailored to Crete. Each agency had input into questions included on the survey and a stratified random sample of 5,000 households from within the Village of Crete and/or Crete Township were sent a postcard explaining the survey that included a QR code and link to the survey. A follow-up postcard was mailed 10 days after the initial postcard and the municipal agencies promoted the survey via social media, signs, email, and the Memorial Day Parade.
  - A total of 497 surveys were completed, which yielded an 11% response rate. Thirty percent of respondents came from the email list, 30% from the random sample, and



the rest were from social media, flyer distribution, and signs. The random sample and convenience sample were analyzed based on age, gender and length of residency and results indicated the groups were not significantly different, which justified combining the two samples into one sample for further analysis.

- Crete Park District held two public meetings to gather residents' input for Lincolnshire Park Renovation which were held on June 29 and July 15, 2023.

## V. District Membership and Education

- The six full time and two part-time annual team members all have a bachelor's degree, and three team members have advanced degrees and hold IPRA memberships.
- One CPRP team member
- 2023 Commissions participated in IAPD Board Self Evaluation conducted by IAPD board president Peter Murphy
- Crete Park District is a member of IAPD
- Crete Park District is a member of Park District Risk Management Association (PDRMA)

## VI. Benefits and Services

The 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. The Park District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

### 1. Facilities

- a. Heritage Park Sports Complex
  - i. Flag Football
  - ii. Softball/Baseball from t-ball preschool age to senior leagues.
  - iii. Tackle Football practice fields
  - iv. Micro Soccer
  - v. College Soccer practice fields
  - vi. Special Events
- b. Crete Park on Main
  - i. Ballet with the age range from 3 to 80.
  - ii. Tia Chi
  - iii. Zumba
- c. Willard Wood Park Center
  - i. Early Learning Center of 3–6-year-olds
  - ii. Houses Summer Camp programs 3 – 12-year-olds
  - iii. Rental facility for life celebrations
- d. Administrative Building
  - i. Office space
  - ii. Public meeting space
  - iii. Meeting space for civic organizations

### 2. Programs

The Park District offered the following programs last year. Registration numbers are also provided.

- Adult
  - Pickleball 74
  - Softball 24
  - Line Dancing 22
  - Walking Club 10
  - Horseback Riding 02
  - Medicare Class 04
  - Memorial Lights 30
  - Self Defense 06
  - Tia Chi 32
  - Zumba 13
- Ballet
  - 3-5 age 22 per session 3 sessions per year
  - Beginner 12 per session 3 sessions per year
  - Intermediate 22 per session 3 sessions per year

- Studio 40 per session 3 sessions per year
  - Zoom 02 per session 3 sessions per year.
- Camps
  - Days off School 20
  - Summer Camp 58 average per week for 9 weeks
- Youth
  - Basketball League 15
  - Soccer 100 in each Spring and Fall programs.
  - NFL Flag Football League 26 in Summer and 40 in Fall
- Special Events
  - Acorn Fest a 2-day event
  - Trick or Treat Trail
  - Daddy Daughter Date Night
  - Egg Hunt
  - Flashlight Egg Hunt
  - Park A Palooza

### 3. Additional Services

The Park District collaborated with other taxing bodies or civic groups to provide services to the community.

- Crete Country Christmas
- Memorial Day Parade
- Juneteenth Event

### 4. Other Benefits

While the Park District is a special purpose district, its impact on 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. Day off school and summer programs offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare 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.

Crete Park District offers a great opportunity to learn on the job. For most of our seasonal part time employees are new to the workforce. The district offers incredible training and skill development opportunities for these employees.

## VII. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

### 1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

Crete is very efficient in waiving or limiting the intergovernmental fees and charges. Local taxing agencies work to keep the fees to a minimal amount to cover the out-of-pocket expenses. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

### 2. 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** The park district spends staff time and 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 local 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 \$684.50 (fees to NCSI only, no labor cost included) for criminal background checks. The 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 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 the 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.

### 3. Opportunities for Increased Transparency

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



VIII. OTHER

Dated: 4/17/24

Signed: Laura Stuardi

Signed: Brenda Chavez

Signed: Michael Smith

Signed: Smith

Signed: John E

Signed: Berry L. Morgan

Signed: Janet C. Carey

Signed: Caro Diana

Signed: Ande Butfield

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_