



A PLACE TO BELONG

Parks Foundation of Oak Park

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Parks Foundation of Oak Park providing new opportunities for residents to contribute ideas and support for Community Recreation Center

Meetings next week designed to listen to Black residents and youth opinions

With preliminary plans for a new Community Recreation Center (CRC) in development, suggestions and opinions from local residents are critical to help ensure all voices and needs are heard to inform the project. Special community-listening meetings are scheduled on Sept. 23 for a group of Oak Park youth and on Sept. 25 for 50 Black residents interested in providing input on what the Community Recreation Center should offer the village's diversity of residents.

The meetings continue a series of public sessions that began in February and will continue this Fall. They are designed to hear residents' suggestions for the CRC. The Parks Foundation of Oak Park is leading the campaign called "A Place to Belong," to raise private dollars to fund the project. The foundation is a nonprofit, 501(c)3, organization committed to supporting Park District of Oak Park facilities and programs that benefit the community.

Two Oak Park community leaders, Mary Jo Schuler and David A. Ansell, M.D., are volunteering to lead the campaign to raise private funds in order to help build Phase One of the Center (\$18.5M) that will help address community wellness needs for multi-generations of Oak Park residents.

Input collected so far confirms that a Community Recreation Center is important to Oak Park residents, particularly youth who lack a welcoming, affordable place to participate in after-school programs, and for seniors who express a desire for a year-round, indoor walking track and recreation space. Community surveys have consistently validated that Oak Park lacks affordable recreational and fitness opportunities for all residents.

The Center will provide free, after-school programming for middle school and high school students. It will be constructed on privately donated land in the 200 block of Madison Street, the Center will be within 1.1-mile of both middle schools, the high school and high-density

housing. It will provide space for Esports and community rooms; indoor sports including basketball, pickleball, and volleyball; a walking track; and a fitness center. Phase Two will include an Aquatics Center with indoor swimming pools for lap swim, zero-depth play, and warm water therapy.

In February, more than 75 people attended the Parks Foundation's first community information reception where they heard about the Center and its benefits to the community. Several other small group gatherings are being planned to give residents the opportunity to learn more about the project and about how they can help. An underlying point in all discussions is that all families, including under-resourced families, need better access to a lifestyle of fitness, recreation and fun.

The Parks Foundation, in conjunction with the Park District, plans to offer additional community meetings to continue sharing details about the Center's development and about the campaign's progress. Even with the effects of the COVID pandemic, the Foundation is receiving positive responses to requests for funding commitments - from private and corporate donors, to foundation and state grants - all to aid in creating a center for all, built by the community, without raising tax dollars.

The Parks Foundation promotes giving opportunities around Oak Park parks and to support extraordinary projects within the Park District of Oak Park. Its mission is to collaborate with Oak Park residents, community groups and partner organizations to support exceptional and extraordinary projects that enhance our parks and community life. Founded in 2012, the Foundation is chartered with the State of Illinois as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. While a separate and independent entity, the Foundation coordinates closely with the Park District of Oak Park to help address community health, recreation and wellness needs for all. For more information, visit the Parks Foundation website at: <https://parksfoundationop.org>.