



A PLACE TO BELONG

Parks Foundation of Oak Park

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Campaign co-chairs share Community Recreation Center progress with Village Board; trustees approve energy funds for Net Zero, energy-efficient building

Leaders of the campaign to build Oak Park's Community Recreation Center provided Village of Oak Park trustees an update on the volunteer-driven campaign during Monday's Board meeting. Following the presentation, trustees voted to commit \$400,000 in Sustainability Funds to help make the new center energy efficient.

Oak Park residents Mary Jo Schuler, Ph.D., and David Ansell, M.D., co-chair the campaign for the Parks Foundation of Oak Park, shared progress on the campaign that will fund construction of a recreation center and create "A Place to Belong" for all Oak Park residents.

Making the center Net Zero and energy sustainable adds \$2 million to construction costs, which 80 percent can be covered by a sustainability grant. The \$400,000 committed by the Village Board from the Sustainability Funds, will close the cost gap and create a model building. The funds are earmarked to support clean energy programs in Oak Park. The project would reduce annual electric cost by approximately \$78,000 per year and also be good for the environment and community.

"Energy efficiency and equity are two key values of our community," said Schuler, whose family donated the property for the new center on Madison Avenue. "The Village's partnership with the Park District represents our community's commitment to clean energy and to the health and wellbeing of all residents. We are confident that this civic asset will make everybody feel welcome."

The extra costs for a Net-Zero building include features such as energy efficient mechanicals, solar panels, triple pane windows, increased roof and wall insulation. Currently the Park District has a Passive House Institute facility in the Carroll Center, a LEED Gold Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex and a LEED Platinum Austin Gardens Environmental Education Center.

“Despite the impact of the pandemic this last year, we are seeing continued and growing support for the campaign to build this important center for our community,” Ansell said. “This center offers so many community benefits, including catalyzing development on the east side of Oak Park when most new development is on the west side.”

The co-chairs reported that community engagement around the center is strong including the virtual community meetings open to the public; meetings with religious leaders, social workers; and focus groups with youth and adults from diverse communities.

“We are receiving great feedback as well as pledges and donations during the quiet phase of the campaign,” Ansell said. “There is a lot of excitement and need for this center, which will fill a long-time void in our community. It will be a center of gravity for youth, families and seniors to gather, particularly for those who have financial barriers to accessing other fitness facilities.”

He added that program fees and memberships will make the recreation center self-sustaining.

The campaign is raising private dollars through individual, foundation, grants and gifts that will help ensure the multi-use center will be built with no new taxes.

Established in 2012, the Parks Foundation has raised private support for several projects that enhance the public park facilities and green space throughout Oak Park. This will be the Foundation’s most ambitious project yet with a goal to help raise the \$22 million for Phase 1 of the new center. The Community Recreation Center will provide space for indoor sports, including basketball, pickleball, volleyball; a walking track; a fitness center; and after-school programs serving middle school and high school students. Phase 2 would include an Aquatics Center with indoor swimming pools for lap swim, zero-depth play, and warm water therapy if those fundraising goals are achieved.

Numerous community surveys have validated that Oak Park lacks affordable recreational and fitness opportunities for all families in the community.

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>

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