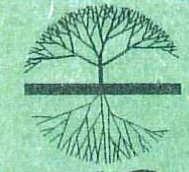


The

Examiner of STREAMWOOD

Volume 11
Number 45

IF I WERE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A GOVERNMENT WITHOUT A NEWSPAPER OR A NEWSPAPER WITHOUT A GOVERNMENT, I WOULD NOT HESITATE TO CHOOSE THE LATTER." THOMAS JEFFERSON



50 cents
April 2, 2008

Park District approves new strategic plan

By Rich Trzupek

A little more than a year after the Park District decided to revise its long-term goals, staff unveiled a new strategic plan designed to make sweeping improvements in a variety of areas. Presenting the plan to commissioners during the board's March 25 meeting, team leaders were clearly excited about the future.

"In the past year, I have witnessed how being surrounded by positive, innovative, energetic people can change your life," said Barb Lund, who led a team in defining a plan for better customer service. "Once drained and exhausted by the negativity of others, I now feel energized, looking forward to what we can accomplish today by working together."

"I want to help change other people's lives for the better. I want to create memorable moments for our residents and our staff. I believe this is possible. And I believe this plan and the Core Values that guided us to it will help make it happen."

The district's new slogan "SPD CARES" summarizes its new statement of core values: safety, preservation, diversity, collaboration, accountability, responsibility, ethics and service. A new mission statement was also adopted: "We provide diverse and responsive recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of the community through our parks, facilities, services, employees and volunteers."

Executive Service Corps guided the board and staff through the strategic planning process in a remarkably short period of time. The Park District hired the consultants late last year.

"The work group leaders deserve a huge amount of credit for getting us where we are," said Executive Director Dennis Stein. "ESC commented that we accomplished in six months what most people take a year to finish."

The strategic plan covers the next five years of operation and identifies 12 specific goals, along with milestones along the way to each goal.

Among those goals are further improvements in customer service, developing and implementing a comprehensive capital improvements plan, improving the Park District's Web site, and partnering with local

groups and agencies for the good of the community.

Stein acknowledged there would be adjustments along the way to accomplishing each goal, but the plan is flexible enough to accommodate adjustments. The important thing, he indicated, was to keep up the momentum.

"Other districts I have worked with have had plans that have been very successful in gathering dust. I didn't want a plan that provides excuses," he said. "I want a plan that identifies successes that staff can get excited about."

And what changes can residents expect to see as the plan is implemented? Stein provided a number of examples:

- More outreach to solicit feedback from residents
 - Upgraded quality in parks and facilities
 - Better and more responsive customer service
 - Improved relations with neighbors of parks and recreational facilities
- "The staff that worked on this really took the bull by the horns," Stein said. "What's really exciting is that this is something they are willing to be held accountable for."

Each of the five board members served on one of the strategic planning committees as well, another part of the process that ESC's consultants found unique. A long-time veteran of the Park District, Finance Assistant Sherri Harry found the process invigorating and said she is looking forward to the future.

"After 20 years, we finally have a direction to go in," she said, echoing a sentiment with which most everyone involved would agree.

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Editorial Good job, Park District

Over the years, we have had cause to criticize the Park District on a number of occasions. It's a pleasure, therefore, to now be able to congratulate the district on a job well done.

As the Park District moves forward with a new, far-sighted strategic plan, Village residents should be proud of all the changes that have occurred over the last couple of years.

There's a new attitude in the district. Patrons no longer deal with sullen staff, or, worse, find themselves ignored. Instead, going into a Park District facility today, residents are inevitably greeted by a cheery face and an offer of help. It's refreshing and it's professional.

Indeed, "professional" is the watchword for the Park District these days. Using Executive Service Corps, a group of retired businessmen and women from the private sector, to develop a strategic plan was an inspired choice. It enabled the district to develop a quality long-term plan with definable goals and milestones.

For the first time, the Park District will develop a long-term capital improvements plan. That's good news for taxpayers, who can expect board and staff to live within its means and prioritize the improvements that matter most.

The district will also continue to address customer service, along with tackling the ambitious goal of serving more segments of an increasingly diverse community. It's a great plan and we hope everyone involved will be as committed to its execution as they were to its preparation.

Both the board and staff deserve a round of applause for this remarkable turnaround. The board has led the way for change, stayed involved in the process the entire way through and provided a professional staff with the support it needed. Most importantly, having suffered through the regime of perhaps the worst director in Park District history, the board rebounded to hire the best: Dennis Stein.

Stein culled out the deadwood, simply by demanding more than those employees were willing to give. He replaced the individual kingdoms that some employees had carved out with a unified Park District and a new sense of purpose. He kept the best of the old management team, like Deb Karner, Sherri Harry and Barb Lund, and brought in new, hard-working talent like Dawn Banks and Jeff Nack.

Stein and his team have delivered time and time again. After years of fumbling and cost overruns under the past regimes, Stein and company opened Sunny Hill. They reformed the budget process and found new ways to save taxpayer dollars. They closed a dilapidated Aquarius Pool and stopped the bleeding. They've reached out to new users, like cricket players, who have never utilized Park District resources before.

With a new strategic plan in place, we look forward to more of the same. And, on behalf of village residents, we offer thanks and "a job well done" to commissioners, to Director Stein and to his staff.