

SERVING ON A PARK DISTRICT BOARD

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?



SO YOU WANT TO SERVE ON THE PARK DISTRICT BOARD... WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

By Peter Murphy, President and CEO
Illinois Association of Park Districts

If you are appointed or elected to the park board, you will become a leader who has accepted a major civic responsibility. You should be willing to make a commitment to give freely of your time and talents to help strengthen and further the park, recreation and conservation mission of your community.

As a board member, you will take on the responsibility for helping to set goals, formulate policies and establish services that will meet the present and future needs of the citizens of your district. The success of your agency depends to a great degree on how well you understand your role and how effectively you address your responsibilities as a board member.

More than 2,100 citizens serve on Illinois park district, forest preserve and recreation boards. Effective board members are respected citizens, well known and active in community affairs and interested in the total recreational needs of their communities.

Serving without compensation, locally elected commissioners represent their fellow citizens and interpret their views. They have the primary responsibility of spending tax monies, fees and donations designated for park and recreation services. They spend, and spend wisely, millions of dollars every year.



BOARD OBLIGATIONS

As a board member, it is important that you commit to the “big picture” and the long-term effects of the decisions you make. You should use sound judgment by weighing the pros and cons of each issue, be open to new ideas, and make ethical decisions. In addition, it helps to have the capacity to “take the heat” when unpopular, but necessary, decisions are made.

Board Members:

- Adopt policies that allow the organization run efficiently, effectively, legally and ethically.
- Request, receive, evaluate and make decisions based on well researched guidance from the executive.
- Interpret the agency’s mission, values and vision to the public.
- Monitor operational and capital finances.
- Hire, fire, supervise, evaluate and support the executive.
- Establish policies after consideration of pros and cons of each issue.
- Help set a strategic direction that adopts goals relating to the vision and mission of the agency.
- Act as a resource, a sounding board and as the eyes and ears of the citizens of the community, making sure that the agency is meeting their needs.
- Develop, maintain and update long-range plans.
- Adopt and adhere to a code of ethics.



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The Illinois Association of Park Districts publishes books, provides training and assists board members in their desire to serve the public.

Effective Board Members:

- Have an attitude of cooperation, open-mindedness and objectivity.
- Are motivated only by a desire to serve the citizens and the agency.
- Work with the executive, not over or around him or her.
- Inspire the community’s confidence, respect and support.
- Spend time in board meetings on strategic planning, policies and procedures, not on operational details that are the executive’s responsibility.
- Make no disparaging remarks about the agency, other board members or their opinions.
- Keep high ethical standards.
- Display a talent for working well with others.
- Do not promise voting outcomes prior to learning the facts of any issue.
- Do not make decisions until all sides of an issue have been presented.
- Support board decisions even when a decision conflicts with personal views.

THE ELECTION PROCESS

Park district boards in Illinois are comprised of five or seven members called commissioners or trustees. To be eligible to serve as an elected commissioner or trustee, you must live in the district for at least one year prior to election day. Terms are for six years, but the board or the community can elect to change terms to four years. In general, two seats are up for election in the spring of each odd-numbered year.

Briefly, the steps to being elected are:

1. In the fall of an even-numbered year, pick up a statement of economic interest and candidate petitions at your park district office.
2. Gather signatures of eligible voters so that your name may be placed on the ballot. You must obtain 25 valid signatures or 2 percent of the number of ballots cast for commissioner or trustee in the last election, whichever number is greater.
3. File the nominating petitions and a statement of candidacy with the park district secretary between 113 and 106 days prior to election day (usually in late December of an even-numbered year).
4. File a statement of economic interests with your county clerk (and a receipt with the park district secretary) on or before the final day for filing petitions.
5. Choose whether to file with the appropriate official clerk an optional loyalty oath and a voluntary statement of compliance with the Fair Campaign Practices Act.
6. File campaign finance disclosure forms with the State Board of Elections, if you raise or spend a prescribed amount on your campaign.

For specific details, contact your park district's executive director, board secretary or county clerk. Or, check the State Board of Elections' website at elections.il.gov.

Visit the IAPD online at
ILparks.org

TRAINING & RESOURCES FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE BOARD MEMBERS

The Illinois Association of Park Districts has a number of resources that are available to you as a candidate and as an elected board member.

These resources include such important publications as The Park District Code, the Illinois Park District Law Handbook, and the Guide to the Open Meetings Act and FOIA.

In addition, the IAPD helps board members understand the financial procedures of Illinois park districts with such publications as the Illinois Park District Financial Procedures and the Guide to Public Sector Employment Laws.

We encourage you to visit our website at ILparks.org and take advantage of the plethora of member resources that area available to you as you build your understanding of the park district system in Illinois.

As a newly elected board member, you will be receiving the Illinois Parks and Recreation magazine which contains timely information on trends and governance issues.

The IAPD also has robust educational offerings for new and seasoned board members alike and you are encouraged to participate in these throughout the year, such as:

- The opportunity to track your board service and education by applying for IAPD Board Development Program.
- The IAPD offers the Board Self-Evaluation that allows a board to take a look at themselves to determine their level of effectiveness and efficiency of operation. This specialized training will be of great benefit to new board members as well as seasoned board members. It defines roles and responsibilities, describes duties for oversight and governance and assists in defining leadership within the agency.

To find out more about IAPD's online resources or other IAPD educational services, contact:

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