



Wheaton Park District

Wheaton Park District Board of Commissioners Special Meeting Minutes Wednesday September 3, 2025 5:00 p.m. DuPage County Historical Museum 102 E. Wesley Street Wheaton, Illinois

CALL TO ORDER – President Vires called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Barrett, Kelly Mee, Pecharich, Welker were present.

Commissioner Frey was absent

COMMUNITY INPUT

None

PRESENTATIONS

aQuity Research & Insight, Inc. - Jeff Andreassen

Jeff Andreassen of aQuity Research presented survey results of the community survey conducted in July and August of this year.

- Survey results are based on n=405 respondents from randomly selected WPD households. Recruiting done by email and USPS mailing.
- Dates of data collection: July 10th to August 25th
- All online responses. Only close-ended responses are being reported as open-ended are still being coded and will be included in final report.
- Respondent sample weighted to reflect current US Census data for Wheaton for adult population by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, presence of children under 18 in household, and homeowner vs. renter status.
- General findings
 - Very high esteem ratings for WPD (90%+ giving favorable scores on a 0-10 scale), with only 3% offering negative opinions.
 - Many have a good sense of the WPDs share of their property taxes, with 43% estimating that it is 5% to 10% (close to the actual 8.5% share)
 - Nearly 9 in 10 feel their household/interests are represented and included within WPDs offerings. Those disagreeing give varied responses (to be included in final report).

- Most frequent parks visited: Memorial, Northside, Seven Gables, Lincoln Marsh/Prairie Patch, Central Athletic Complex, Graf Park. However, some responses may reflect confusion (e.g., high responses for Prairie Path Park and Herrick Park may refer to non-WPD trails/properties).
- Most frequent facilities visited: Community Center (especially Parks Plus Fitness, meeting rooms, indoor track); Arrowhead Golf Club (especially the pro shop and restaurant)
- Very strong satisfaction scores from WPD users/visitors on all attributes, especially safety.
- Gap analysis for indoor facilities and amenities shows that about a third are interested in an indoor warm water pool, indoor lap pool, and gym space. Of these, demand for gym space is currently being met, while the indoor water facilities represent gaps (not seen as readily available either from the WPD or other agencies/providers in the area).
- For outdoor amenities, providing features along walking paths (benches, garbage cans, drinking fountains) garners the most interest and these are seen as readily available. Similarly, demand for some popular facilities (playgrounds, outdoor pool) is being met, while others represent gaps (especially year-round outdoor bathrooms, followed by splash pads/spray grounds). Fewer than 10% express a need for outdoor turf fields.
- From a list of potential improvements, residents are most willing to pay for year-round bathrooms at larger parks with walking paths, and an indoor pool with lap lanes and a warm water pool feature. They are more divided on a new field house with multi-sport turf fields and gym courts.
- Regarding repairs and/or replacing Rice Pool and Water Park, a majority (56%) support making only necessary repairs for now and waiting 10-15 years to replace the aging facility (at a higher overall cost in the long term), vs. replacing the full facility now (44%).
- 69% report someone in their household participating in a WPD program/event in the past year. The biggest reasons for non-participation are not having children at home (suggesting that non-users perceive the District as focusing mostly on youth and younger families), and lack of familiarity with District offerings.
- The needs assessment on programming shows that youth programs across all age groups are readily available, as are community events for all ages. The biggest gaps are adult programming, especially for ages 18-59.

- Residents rely primarily on the main WPD website when seeking information about District activities, events, programs, updates, etc.

The full analysis for the final report is underway, which will have much more detailed information and responses from open-ended questions. This is expected within the next two weeks or so.

Commissioner Pecharich inquired about the timing of the last community survey, noting that with many improvements made since then, it would be valuable to compare past and current data, especially given the number of longtime residents in the community who may recognize changes over time.

Executive Director Benard confirmed that the last survey was conducted nine years ago and stated he would provide the results for Andreassen for comparison.

Andreassen noted that if the previous survey questions align closely enough with the current ones, even with some differences in wording comparison could potentially be included in the final report.

Executive Director Benard explained that several proposed studies had been deferred until the results of the recent community survey were available. Now that the survey data has been collected, staff will compare the community's feedback to the original list of deferred items.

One key example he provided was the possibility of year-round restroom facilities at the district's most heavily used regional parks. Because this was a top priority identified in the survey, staff will now recommend conducting an engineering study to assess the scope and cost of such a project. This would help the board make informed decisions about whether to pursue the project in full or phase it over time. Benard clarified that he is not recommending immediate implementation but rather a small investment to understand the financial and logistical requirements of the project. He emphasized the importance of providing the board with the necessary data to guide long-term capital planning.

He also referenced another deferred item—a master plan for a potential new aquatic facility. Now that the survey results include public input on this issue, the board can decide whether to explore it further.

Lastly, Benard mentioned that any future recommendations would include the status of current temporary solutions to provide a complete picture of existing conditions and potential improvements.

Strategic Plan Presentation Summary – Nikki Ginger

Nikki Ginger provided an update on the Wheaton Park District's Strategic Planning process. Since the last board meeting, two major workshops have been held:

1. Mission, Vision, and Values Workshop – Conducted with leadership and a diverse team of 20 staff members from across departments. Staff engagement was high, and feedback from the Board was incorporated. Drafts of the mission, vision, and values have been created and shared internally for input.
2. Strategic Development Workshop – Focused on identifying key goals for the next three years. Staff collaborated to shape priorities and begin outlining initiatives.

The team is now entering the action planning phase, working closely with Executive Director Mike Benard and his team to finalize initiatives.

The completed Strategic Plan will be presented to the Board for review and approval at the November 5th meeting.

Questions presented from Commissioner Pecharich:

Was summer the best time to conduct the strategic planning survey, or would another time of year have been more effective, given various challenges during that season?

Response from Executive Director Benard:

The timing was largely based on how the development and approval of the survey instrument unfolded. Delaying it further would have pushed back the entire strategic planning timeline.

Presentation Toohey Park – Upland Design

Maria Blood, the planning landscape architect with Upland Design, presented concept plans for Toohey Park Improvements that are proposed for the OSLAD grant application due at the end of September. The proposed plan includes renovations of existing facilities such as the 2-5 playground, improvements to the pond, and potential future parking upgrades (parking is not part of the grant). New additions include a 5-12 age playground, picnic shelter, game area, loop trail with a connection to adjacent Orchard Park, and a practice soccer field. The full project cost is estimated at approximately \$1.24 million, with the OSLAD grant covering half (up to \$600,000). Pond dredging is also needed but not included in the grant. The team will present the concepts at the public meeting next week, gather additional feedback, finalize the master plan, and submit the grant application by the end of the month.

Finance and Administration
Discussion Items

1. **General Obligation Limited Tax Park Bonds Series 2025** – Review of planning packet.

Summary of Wheaton Park District – 2025 Finance Subcommittee Debt Update Presentation by Anthony Meceli, Speer Financial, Inc.

The Wheaton Park District's 2025 Finance Subcommittee Debt Update Presentation, prepared by Anthony Miceli of Speer Financial.

The district has three outstanding bond issues. The General Obligation Limited Tax Park Bonds, Series 2015C and Series 2024 totaling \$3.347 million, and General Obligation Alternate Revenue Source Bonds, Series 2019A totaling \$3.48 million. Debt repayments are scheduled annually from 2025 to 2029, with total debt service for 2025 estimated at approximately \$3.47 million.

The district's Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) for 2024 is \$3.09 billion, resulting in a statutory debt limit of \$88.94 million and a non-referendum debt limit of \$17.79 million. This leaves a legal debt margin of \$85.59 million and \$14.44 million for non-referendum debt.

The Debt Service Extension Base (DSEB), which grows annually based on CPI (assumed at 1.5%), is projected to be \$2.92 million in 2025, with a margin of \$2.296 million in 2026 after debt service.

The 2024 total tax rate is 0.5474, translating to an estimated tax of \$868.54 on a \$500,000 home, with EAV growth of approximately 21% from 2020 to 2024.

Two hypothetical referendum options are presented: a General Obligation Bond Referendum, which allows unlimited tax until bonds are repaid and must be used for capital projects, and a Limiting Tax Rate Referendum, which increases the tax extension base without expiration and allows unrestricted use of funds. Bond issuance scenarios include \$30 million, \$50 million, and \$70 million bonds, resulting in estimated annual taxes of \$123, \$206, and \$288 respectively on a \$500,000 home. Key dates for potential referendums include the primary election on March 17, 2026, with a resolution deadline of December 15, 2025, and the general election on November 3, 2026, with a resolution deadline of August 3, 2026.

The 2025 financing plan includes issuing Series 2025 Bonds totaling \$2.228 million to fund capital projects and pay debt on Series 2019A, with a net new capital of \$1.65 million expected through competitive bank placement.

2. **Capital Asset Replacement Schedule** – Review and discussion.

Capital dollars that match our needs could shift earlier or later. Maintain **Executive Director Benard** provided a high-level overview of the district's long-term capital asset replacement schedule in conjunction with the annual debt review. The purpose is to ensure that capital needs are planned and funded in a balanced way, avoiding unsustainable spikes in spending.

Key points included:

- **Forecasting Infrastructure Needs:** The capital replacement plan maps out the lifecycle of major asset buildings, equipment, and amenities—based on industry standards and past performance. Some items may shift earlier or later depending on actual wear or usage.
- **Spending Projections:** Annual capital needs will fluctuate year by year. Notably, a spike is projected in 2026 due to major projects like Phase III of the Community Center and HVAC improvements. This mirrors past investment peaks, such as Memorial Park renovations.
- **Arrowhead Golf Club:** Future capital plans include bunker renovation and irrigation upgrades. These are funded through Arrowhead's operating revenues and planned over a six-year period.
- **Strategic Asset Management:** The district remains committed to preventive maintenance, minimizing deferred costs and extending asset life cycles.
- **Long-Term Flexibility:** While some capital projections in outlying years appear low (e.g., sub-\$1M), those figures may increase as projects shift or are redefined. The Board will revisit the long term plan annually.
- **Next Steps:**
 - October & November workshops will focus on the operating budget, capital budget, and levy proposal.
 - The levy estimate must be approved at the October 15th meeting.
 - Staff have completed initial budget work, which will be reviewed and distributed shortly.

The presentation emphasized the importance of intentional planning to maintain existing assets while accommodating future growth responsibly.

3. **2026 Budget Development** – Review of activity October through December

4. **Board General Practices and Policies Manual** – Periodic review.

- a. Added prospective candidate packet
- b. Public will no longer be able to add an agenda item.
- c. Comments down to three minutes

General Discussion: regarding limits to three minutes per speaker, with a maximum of one hour total allocated for public comment at each meeting. Some board members expressed concerns about limiting speaking time, particularly in meetings with few speakers. Others supported the change, noting that the board president still has discretion to extend time if appropriate. While there was some debate about whether the hour-long cap was necessary, it was noted that similar limits are common among other public bodies.

Overall, the board agreed to proceed with the updated policy while relying on the board president's discretion to manage public input flexibly when needed.

5. Cream of Wheaton 2025

The Executive Director noted and reviewed the increase in City charges for 2025 for the Cream of Wheaton over 2024.

Additional Comments

Play For All Foundation Board Appointment

1. Executive Director Benard stated that Liz Hunka was added to the Play for All Foundation and invited the board to review her bio.

2. IT Contract Expiring at End of the Year

At an upcoming board meeting, the Executive Director plans to present a renegotiated multi-year contract with the District's current IT managed services provider, whose agreement expires at the end of the year. Rather than issuing a competitive RFP, the recommendation is to retain the current firm due to nearly a decade of strong performance and a positive working relationship. To ensure accountability and inform negotiations, a third-party audit of the District's IT infrastructure and the provider's services is being conducted. This audit will support the contract renewal process.

Buildings and Grounds

Action Items

1. Triangle Park Basketball Court Renovation Project

Commissioner Mee moved to approve a contract with Chicagoland Paving for \$65,000 plus a 10% contingency. Seconded by Commissioner Barrett.

There was some general discussion around the challenges in securing asphalt bids late in the construction season. It was noted that, and contractors are typically booked by fall and asphalt plants close in November making it difficult to schedule work. The suggestion was made to issue bids earlier in the year, such as February, to improve bid volume and competitiveness.

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Mee, Barrett, Welker, Kelly, Pecharich, & President Vires

Nays: none

Abstain: none

Absent Frey

2. Community Center, Rice Pool, Atten Park and Seven Gables Park Parking Lot and Drives Sealcoating and Striping Project

Commissioner Barrett moved to approve a contract with SKC Construction for \$140,045.36 plus crack fill at a cost of \$.83 per linear foot. Seconded by Commissioner Kelly. No discussion.

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Mee, Barrett, Welker, Kelly, Pecharich, & President Vires

Nays: none

Abstain: none

Absent Frey

3. Drainage Irrigation and Turf Engineering Study

Commissioner Barrett moved to approve an additional services proposal from Wight Engineering for \$4,000 for the addition of the Danada South athletic fields to the project scope. Seconded by Commissioner Kelly. No discussion

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Mee, Barrett, Welker, Kelly, Pecharich, & President Vires

Nays: none

Abstain: none

Absent Frey

4. Resolution 2025-03

Commissioner Barrett moved to approve Resolution 2025-03 authorizing staff to complete an application for the 2025 Open Space Land Acquisition and Development grant program for the renovation of Toohey Park and Safety City. Seconded by Commissioner Welker. No discussion.

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Mee, Barrett, Welker, Kelly, Pecharich, & President Vires

Nays: none

Abstain: none

Absent Frey

5. Utility Procurement

Commissioner Barrett moved to authorize the Executive Director to execute an electricity contract for a 12-60 Month Term Starting June 2026 at a Rate Not to Exceed 0.0690/kWh. Seconded by Commissioner Mee.

Board members acknowledged rising utility costs and the lack of anticipated savings for the upcoming contract. The Executive Director noted that recent market increases began in July and are affecting both the district and residents. He confirmed that, in addition to using the district's energy broker, he will continue to seek competitive rates independently to secure the best possible contract. No further Board action will be required once the rate is finalized.

Motion passed by roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Mee, Barrett, Welker, Kelly, Pecharich, & President Vires

Nays: none

Abstain: none

Absent Frey

Discussion Items

1. **Cosley Zoo Staff and Overflow Parking Area Construction Project** – Review of Change Order #7
 - a. Currently recommend 4,200. No discussion
2. **Cosley Zoo Education Pavilion & Duck Enclosure Project** – Review of Change Orders #8 and #9. No discussion
3. **Briar Patch Park Batting Cage Project** – Review of Bid Results Need to reject. No discussion
4. **Arrowhead Golf Club Parking Lot Replacement Project Phase 1** – Review of Bid Results. Work will begin this Fall.

In response to questions from the Board, it was clarified that construction for Phase 1 will begin this fall, with the overall project being strategically phased over four years. This schedule is intended to minimize disruptions to golf operations and business activity by performing the work each fall during the off-peak season. No further discussion.
5. **Northside Park Lagoon Settling Basin Engineering** – Review of proposal from Burke
Executive Director Benard reviewed Burke Engineering's proposal to design a settling basin at the lagoon inlet in Northside Park. This targeted dredging approach will focus only on the basin area to reduce long-term maintenance costs.

Once engineering is complete, Executive Director Benard plans to approach the city to request support for stormwater management, as was done during the lagoon renovation over a decade ago. The estimated cost for dredging is around \$500,000.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:01 p.m., President Vires moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Mee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.