

**CHAMPAIGN PARK DISTRICT  
MINUTES OF THE STUDY SESSION MEETING  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**

**February 25, 2015**

The Champaign Park District Board of Commissioners held a Study Session Meeting on Wednesday, February 25, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. at the Leonhard Recreation Center, 2307 Sangamon Drive, Champaign, Illinois, pursuant to notice duly given. President Petry presided over the meeting.

Present: President Joseph Petry, Vice President Alvin S. Griggs, Commissioners Barbara J. Kuhl, Jane L. Solon, and Timothy P. McMahon, Treasurer Gary Wackerlin and Attorney Guy Hall.

Staff present: Joseph DeLuce, Executive Director, Cindy Harvey, Assistant to the Executive Director/Board Secretary, Andrea Wallace, Director of Finance, Kevin Crump, Director of Operations and Planning, Megan Kuhlenschmidt, Director of Recreation and Marketing, Jameel Jones, Director of Cultural Arts, and Stacey Cornell, Administrative Specialist.

Other staff was present as well as members of the public and media.

**Call to Order**

President Petry called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to gather facts as the Board explores Champaign Unit #4 School District's renewed request to use Dodds Park as a site for the new Central High School. President Petry explained the procedure for community members to make public comments, and he noted that frequently asked questions would be shared on the Park District's website.

**Presentations**

Champaign Park District

Mr. DeLuce presented the staff report on Dodds Park. The 110 acres of land was purchased in 1969 from the Seeber family. In 1972 the Park Board named the park in honor of D.C. "Pick" Dodds for his 41 years of service on the Board. The park has numerous amenities and features: softball/youth baseball fields, soccer fields, concession stands, restrooms, Tribute to Olympic Athletes, worker's memorial, sculptures, garden plots, disc golf course, trail, and playground. Mr. DeLuce gave an overview of the programs, leagues and events the park hosts and participation numbers for the soccer complex. He reported the development costs to date were \$5.6 million. The park is currently 103 acres. It contains 19 different easements and 58 memorial trees with 43 of them in the soccer complex. Mr. DeLuce reported the costs to replicate the soccer complex as estimated by the JJR/Smith Group Architects was \$4.5 million, excluding land acquisition. Farnsworth Group Architects estimated the cost at \$4.1 million. Mr. DeLuce stated that there were restrictions applicable to the park due to a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant used to construct the Greenbelt Bikeway Trail. He explained the process to lift the restriction could take a year or more to complete. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources indicated a trade for farm land would likely be approved as long as it is of equal or greater value.

Champaign Unit #4 School District (Unit 4)

Dr. Judy Wiegand, Champaign Unit #4 School District (Unit 4) Superintendent, presented a report proposing a new Central High School at Dodds Park. She reported the search for a new Central High School location has been ongoing since 2006. In January 2014, the Interstate Drive site ranked highest using objective criteria and the property was purchased. Dr. Wiegand

stated the lack of an infill location was holding some of the community back from supporting the project. She explained a new Central High School at Dodds Park addressed the desire for an infill site and supported Unit 4's programming vision. It also was among the top three locations in terms of transportation friendliness for minority students. Dr. Wiegand stated the close proximity to Parkland College would allow: teacher collaboration, college and career center collaboration, increased accessibility to dual credit courses, workforce development, college readiness, exposure to new academic areas, and shared facilities. Dr. Wiegand requested on behalf of Unit 4, 40 acres for a new Central High School at Dodds Park. The remaining acreage would remain park land. A land trade of equal value would be made to relocate the displaced soccer fields. She stated improved soccer facilities at a new site, shared fields and the expansion of the existing partnership with Unit 4 were opportunities for the Park District. It is Unit 4's belief that a new Central High School at Dodds Park is the most sensible and innovative solution to a long-standing community issue.

#### Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD)

Karl Gnadt, Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District Managing Director, stated he was in agreement with Dr. Wiegand. It was a great opportunity for collaboration. He stated that in examining transportation only, Dodds Park was the preferred site of the last three locations considered. MTD already has service in the Dodds Park area. Costs would increase with other sites.

#### Parkland College

Dr. Tom Ramage, Parkland College President, stated he was available to answer questions.

#### City of Champaign

Bruce Knight, City of Champaign Planning and Development Director, and Dennis Schmidt, Director of Public Works, were in attendance. Mr. Knight stated the City has a long standing cooperative relationship with all involved. The City has no formal position but would offer support in terms of answering questions and providing support.

### **Questions by Commissioners**

Vice President Griggs asked if MTD buses are using Parkland Way, the road off Mattis Avenue leading into Dodds Park. Mr. Gnadt replied that, no, they were not. Dr. Ramage stated that at one point in the past buses had used that road.

President Petry asked City staff if the high school would use Parkland's entrance on Bradley Avenue. Mr. Knight stated the challenge would be to do a good traffic impact analysis. It would use the existing entrance to see how class start and end times affect traffic, and then a solution would be designed. Dr. Ramage stated traffic at the Bradley entrance on Monday, Wednesday and Friday early mornings and afternoons is heaviest. He commented getting off campus was more difficult than getting on campus due to the timing of the stoplight.

Commissioner Kuhl stated that according to the Unit 4 website, the Country Fair site had 37-38 acres with no room for expansion. She asked how it was eliminated from consideration when it had more land available than Dodds Park. Dr. Wiegand stated that other factors such as site preparation were taken into account. She also commented that at Dodds Park, Unit 4 could use the existing softball field and tennis courts. Dr. Wiegand stated that a site scoring system was developed and Dodds Park was rated as one of the top ones.

Commissioner McMahon stated he supported the building of a new Central High School. He asked if a site analysis had been completed on Dodds Park similar to the one on Spalding Park. Dr. Wiegand replied one had not been completed. Commissioner McMahon asked how costs associated with Dodds Park are anticipated to be less expensive. Dr. Wiegand stated the costs

were reduced because parking, tennis courts and a softball field already exist. A detailed engineering study has not been performed. Dr. Ramage clarified that the only discussions he has had with Unit 4 concerned sharing the tennis courts.

Commissioner McMahon asked if the trade would include the cost of building new soccer fields. Dr. Wiegand replied that would depend on the Board's vote. Commissioner McMahon expressed concern that Unit 4 could need more acreage at Dodds Park in the future. Dr. Wiegand stated Unit 4 has done due diligence with the purchase of land and it is hard to say what will happen in the future.

Commissioner Kuhl asked what land Unit 4 had banked. Dr. Wiegand responded that land adjacent to Barkstall School and at Interstate Drive are the only "banked" acres.

Commissioner Solon asked if Unit 4 would share athletic facilities at other sites. Dr. Wiegand responded they would, if available. She stated there would be transportation costs if the athletic facilities were not on site of the school.

President Petry stated the LWCF restriction poses a time challenge of 1-7 years. He inquired about Unit 4's timeline for a new school. Dr. Wiegand responded that in 2020-2021 both high schools are projected to exceed capacity and would need to utilize portable classrooms. President Petry asked how long it would take to build a high school. Dr. Wiegand stated it would take three years. President Petry asked the latest date a decision would need to be made. Dr. Wiegand estimated up to two years. President Petry stated that the members of the Park Board and School Board will be different in the future. If the decision were made to agree to a land swap, how would the public know that the new Central High School would be at Dodds. Dr. Wiegand stated she would need to consult legal counsel.

Commissioner Solon thought it would be prudent to share the conversation with Parkland College. Dr. Wiegand stated that yes, it would be, once Park Board approval is obtained. Commissioner Solon stated that action could be futile if Parkland's position about of the school in Dodds Park was not known. Dr. Ramage stated it is hard to address when it is unclear what is going to happen. His main concerns with Central High School at Dodds Park were security and traffic. The academic connections already exist. He stated he did have a brief conversation with Unit 4 regarding the tennis courts and their need for resurfacing. Commissioner Solon commented that sharing the auditorium and other facilities would be prudent. Dr. Ramage stated that use of a pool would be great. He also noted that twenty-nine (29) area constituent high schools are within Parkland's district.

## **Public Comments**

Bruce Hannon, 1208 Union, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated Champaign has 8.4 acres of green space per 1,000 people. He noted other area communities that have high ratios. The state average is 11.4 acres. In his opinion, Dodds Park is a treasure. He favors of keeping Central High School centrally located. Mr. Hannon encouraged a "no" vote.

Ed Wachala, 82 East University, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He expressed concerns with having a high school located next to Parkland College and, an example, mixing 14 year olds with 20 year olds. He did not think the logistics of sharing facilities would work either since the softball fields are used extensively. Mr. Wachala was against a new Central High School at Dodds Park.

Craig Hays, 28 Greencroft, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated he had concerns with the legal encumbrance on the land and that it would take 1-3 years to resolve. Mr. Hays thought the taxpayers would be taxed again to pay over \$4 million to build soccer fields at another location and other programs would be sacrificed. He also commented that the park is one of the most used, as a premier park. He stated that the standard for this type of action has not been met and the value of the memorial trees in the park was priceless.

Lawrence Richards, Lynn Street, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He complimented the Park Board on having good parks and saving the Springer and Virginia Theatre buildings. Mr. Richards came to express displeasure with the school board and pending referendum.

Rebecca Patterson, 609 East Bradley, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. Ms. Patterson stated she had concerns with a high school sharing facilities with Parkland College that has students aged 16-86. In particular, she was opposed to swimming pools with high school students being shared with those of any age. She commented that it was different from the University of Illinois Laboratory High School because that is a private school and the students choose to go there. Central High School students would have no choice since it is a public school.

Rochelle Funderburg, 2622 Natalie, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She stated that the information presented was all based upon speculation because no engineering study had been done. She stated that the only thing that changed from the first request for Dodds Park to the second was the referendum was defeated. Issues such as traffic, drainage, and the Copper Slough had not been addressed. Ms. Funderburg stated the Park Board should reject the school board's request for Dodds Park.

Larry Meister, 2605 East Illinois Street, Urbana, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated he had family members that played ball at Dodds Park. In his opinion the area had a high crime rate and not knowing the outcome of eliminating the land restriction were deterrents. He also commented that Unit 4 wants 40 acres now but could ask for more in the future. Mr. Meister thought the relocation of the soccer fields would result in more taxpayer money being spent. He was of the opinion that the Interstate Drive site was the better option because the land had already been purchased; it was easily accessible and had room for expansion. The Interstate Drive location could be more feasible and asked for it to be considered.

Jane Pica, 2521 Pinehurst Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She stated she was opposed to Dodds Park being used for a school. Mrs. Pica had a tree in the park planted in memory of her deceased son who played on the fields. She commented that she was told it would remain a park and it would be disrespectful to do otherwise. In her view the proposal is also not centrally located.

Treasurer Wackerlin left the meeting at 7:00pm.

Kathy Shannon, 2207 O'Donnell Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She stated that she was in favor of using Dodds Park for a school. It is next door to a densely populated area. She commented she would love for the students to have the high school there.

Holly Dodds, 1206 South Prospect, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She commented that the Park Board's mission was to expand and strengthen recreation. In her opinion, there was information and misinformation presented. She did not see giving up 40 park acres to be in the Park District's best interests. Ms. Dodds urged the Park Board to do what they were elected to do - protect, enhance, and preserve parks.

Randall Krause, 108 West Green, #110, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated he was not convinced that Dodds Park was the best site for a new Central High School. It is a valuable public space. He commented that being west of Mattis Avenue was not sensible and urged the Board to assess the feasibility of the location and let Unit 4 explore all options.

Vic McIntosh, 501 Clearwater Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He commented that it cost \$7 million to build the park and it would cost another \$5 million to relocate the soccer fields resulting in a \$12 million charge to the taxpayers.

Cedric Jones, 2516 Pinehurst Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated he is a current Central High School student. He commented that he has a history class with 40 students in it. Mr. Jones stated he was excited about the possible partnership with Parkland College and thought building a new Central High School at Dodds Park would be amazing.

Jerry Pica, 2521 Pinehurst Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. Mr. Pica favored keeping the park as a park and keeping Central High School centrally located. He urged not rushing to pass a referendum.

Kathy Richards, 3001 Weeping Cherry Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. Ms. Richards guessed that most users drive to Dodds Park and if a deal were done there would be a better park elsewhere. She stated the Park District would not be subtracting park land.

Jim Simmons, 1316 West Ridge Lane, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He commented that in his opinion, Dodds Park was the most feasible option. Mr. Simmons would like to see the school board and the Park District work together to make Dodds Park or any other viable plan work.

Craig Walker, 2114 Plymouth Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. He stated that Central High School is old and waiting would not solve anything. He thought Dodds Park was a great opportunity. He stated the need for young people to be trained in trades and Parkland offered that. Mr. favors the process moving forward.

Laura Sonnichsen, 2104 Galen Drive, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She stated the Park District needs to take care of the Park District. Green space is a big concern of hers and she thought having to replicate the soccer fields elsewhere would be a waste. Ms. Sonnichsen also commented she was concerned that the school district would want more acreage later.

Lynn Stuckey, 806B West Healey Street, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. She stated she is a school board member and wanted to clear up what she thought were misstatements. If the decision were made to share swimming facilities, it would be done so that high school students were the only ones at the pool at appropriate times. She also commented that Lakeland College had classes in high schools when students were not there using that example. Ms. Stuckey questioned Dodds Park being in a high crime area.

Mary Schultz, 914 West Daniel Street, Champaign, addressed the Board regarding Dodds Park. Ms. Schultz stated she appreciated the work of the Park District. In her opinion, the Dodds Park location was too valuable to pass up and afforded a huge advantage being near Parkland College. She presented the Park Board petitions with 243 signatures in favor of the new Central High School being at Dodds Park.

**Comments from Commissioners**

Commissioner Solon thanked everyone for coming out.

President Petry thanked all for taking the time to attend the meeting. He stated the next step was for the Board to process the information. President Petry gave details on how to contact the Park Board.

**Adjourn**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Kuhl made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice President Griggs. The motion passed 5-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Approved:

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Joseph A. Petry, President

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Cindy Harvey, Secretary