



NEWS RELEASE

ROCKFORD PARK DISTRICT MAKING MEMORIES FOR A LIFETIME

From: Rockford Park District

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Rockford Park District Board of Commissioners Approve 2018 Budget; Lower Tax Rate Anticipated Along with Reduction of Recreational Opportunities

ROCKFORD, IL – At tonight’s Rockford Park District Board of Commissioners meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved the 2018 budget. For the fourth year in a row, the Rockford Park District will hold the line on taxes and maintain the 2017 tax levy, meaning the District will not receive any additional tax dollars in its operating funds. “Over the last four years, we have saved taxpayers \$1.7 million. Achieving those savings resulted in some difficult cuts, but we know our tough decisions were the right call for the community. The path to increased property values begins with the collective effort of all local taxing bodies working together to hold the line on taxes,” said Rockford Park District Board of Commissioners President Ian Linnabary. The resulting tax rate is estimated to decrease from last year’s tax rate of \$1.1544 to \$1.1362. After several years of continued decline in the District’s Equalized Assessed Value (EAV), the District is experiencing a slight uptick. Based on preliminary EAV information, the estimated increase is 2.1% as compared to the 2016 Equalized Assessed Value for Winnebago, Boone, and Ogle counties. However, this is subject to change due to tax protests and appeals. EAV, tax levy extension, and tax rates are only estimates, as the actual information will not be available until spring.

This year, the District faced another \$1 million deficit which is reflected in the 2018 operating budget which is \$33,923,236 in 2018, and was \$34,879,152 in 2017. The District’s 2018 capital budget is \$19,791,482 and in 2017 was \$24,563,354. The budget is balanced for the 109th consecutive year, within available resources, and is aligned to achieve the District’s Priority Results. For the past 30 days, the 2018 budget was available for the public to view at the Webbs Norman Center, all area public libraries, and on the Park District website. A public hearing also took place before tonight’s vote.

With a \$1 million deficit this year, and \$8.4 million in past budget reductions, the District can’t continue to sustain all aspects of District operations, and had to make tough yet strategic decisions regarding recreational opportunities for 2018. “A decline in revenue both through fees and a declining tax base, aging infrastructure, along with population and demographic shifts that impact our fee revenue have made it extremely difficult to provide the same level of service as in past years. We are running out of ways to scale back our service without having a significant impact on the youth we

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serve. The District is focused on making a stronger investment in youth, along with a recommitment to our core services and neighborhood parks, which are the backbone of our community,” said Rockford Park District Executive Director Jay Sandine.

2018 Modification of Programs and Services

- Not operating Forest City Queen and Trolley Car 36 for 2018 season
- Closing Sand Park Pool for 2018 season and closing Harkins Aquatic Center two weeks earlier
- Reduction of one week of the free Music in the Park Summer Concert Series (8 weeks vs. 9 weeks)
- Elimination of indoor swimming lessons
- Elimination of one youth day camp called Tween Scene/Summer Blast
- Expanding hours of operation at Washington Park Community Center to invest in area youth
- Increased support for Rockford Park District Police

2018 Revenue Adjustments

- Video gaming at select locations
- Select pricing increases in programs and rental opportunities
- Increased Foundation support

2018 Expense Reductions

- Elimination of four open full-time positions by attrition and restructuring
- Elimination of event parking services for community partner events
- Elimination of support to Community Centers for ground maintenance, reduction in contractual mowing
- Savings from lower utility, gas, and health insurance costs

Master Plan Engagement Sessions Begin in March

As a result of a reduction in services for 2018, the District will launch a master plan to engage the community to determine District priorities and allocation of resources of taxpayer dollars over the next three to five years. A community-involved master plan will provide a series of recommendations that will help guide investment in District assets, along with decisions regarding obsolete, underutilized, or non-trending parks, facilities, and amenities. A master plan will provide an opportunity for the District to engage and inform the community on the true value of parks and recreation, receive critical feedback to determine priorities of park services, and ensure the District’s plan aligns with the vision of other community leaders and organizations. A vibrant park system
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increases property values, decreases juvenile crime, provides health and wellness opportunities, improves the environment, and often employs thousands of area youth, for the very first time. A final master plan is expected to be presented to the community in the summer of 2018.

2018 Budget Q and A

Question: Why close Sand Park Pool versus Alpine Pool or Harkins Aquatics Center for 2018?

Answer: Closing Sand Park Pool for the 2018 season will save the District nearly \$88,000. A variety of repairs to the concrete, fencing, and play features was needed at Penguin Pond, along with repairs to the baby pool adding up to roughly \$40,000. On top of the construction costs, the District spends roughly \$48,000 to operate Sand Park Pool every summer, and attendance for Learn to Swim lessons and general admission have also declined. In 2018, remediation of the former Sand Park landfill will continue with the focus being along the entire eastern portion of the Sand Park pool property, making it harder to navigate and not a very family-friendly environment. Remediation of the former Sand Park landfill will take place over the next two years, and include a new parking lot along with removing the driving range and sledding hill, which will be converted to a nature preserve, as specified in an agreement reached in 2015 between the Rockford Park District (RPD), State of Illinois, City of Loves Park, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), and Browning-Ferris Industries (BFI), Inc. The City of Loves Park has been working with the District regarding this decision, and will continue to work with the Park District to explore recreational needs of the community. Keeping Alpine Pool and Harkins Aquatic Center open is the best geographical balance to provide swimming and lesson opportunities. Closing these amenities for 2018 has helped reduce the District's deficit, but we want to talk to the community first before making decisions that go beyond 2018.

Question: Why dock the Forest City Queen and not run Trolley Car 36 for 2018?

Answer: The Forest City Queen is in need of roughly \$40,000 in repairs to the hull, and Trolley Car 36 needs \$10,000 in repairs. In addition, the District spends \$17,200 in tax subsidy to operate both, so in all we were able to save roughly \$70,000. The Forest City Queen began operating in 1979, and every year, the boat must pass an inspection by the U.S. Coast Guard. These two recreational opportunities also had a limited capacity, and over the years, attendance has declined. Closing these amenities for 2018 has helped reduce the District's deficit, but we want to talk to the community first before making decisions that go beyond 2018.

Question: What are the fundraising priorities for 2018?

Answer: Fundraising priorities for the Rockford Park District Foundation in 2018 are playgrounds, trees, and Help Me Play. The District has 62 playgrounds that are beyond the 15-year life cycle; to help our tree canopy, 2,000 ash trees need to be removed, and each tree costs \$350. The District also wants to make sure to help engage youth by raising money for Help Me Play, the District's financial assistance program.

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Question: Are all construction projects on hold?

Answer: Some projects will continue to progress if they are well supported by the community, areas of interest that meet the growing demands of the community, and are good business decisions that are primarily funded via donors, sponsors, or non-tax revenue support. For example, the Rockford Bank & Trust Pavilion is all possible thanks to generous partners such as: Rockford Bank & Trust, Rick and Lana Engen, Norris & Margaret Aldeen Foundation, and Al and Joe Castrogiovanni, who together contributed \$2.7 million to the project. Rockford Bank & Trust Pavilion will generate an estimated \$150,000 of profit yearly, which will be reinvested into Aldeen Golf Club. Property tax revenue and golf fees will not sustain Aldeen Golf Club at the same service level in the future. The Rockford Park District anticipates that 20+ golf events as well as other non-golf events will utilize Rockford Bank & Trust Pavilion.

Question: Why is the Park District looking to add video gaming at select facilities?

Answer: The Rockford Park District’s mission is to help people enjoy life by providing an exceptional park and recreation system that contributes to the health, wellness, and entertainment of its citizens. With declining revenue both through fees and a declining tax base, along with population and demographic shifts, it is becoming extremely difficult to provide the same level of service without an increase in new revenue or a decrease in our footprint. Park districts across the country as well as other local municipalities have added gaming machines as a non-tax generated revenue stream. At this point, we are exploring a variety of locations for gaming machines such as: Mercyhealth Sportscore Complexes, all District golf courses, UW Health Sports Factory, and ice facilities.

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