

Committee of the Whole Meeting

Darien Park District Board of Commissioners and the City of Darien

January 12, 2026 - 6:00 P.M.

Darien Park District Community Center

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Park District Commissioners present were Cathy Marchese, Frank Noverini, Ray Jablonski, Steve Shanks, and Luanne Spiros. City Council members present were Thomas Belczak, Eric Gustafson, Joseph Kenny, Gerry Leganski, Mary Sullivan, and Ralph Stompanato. Absent: Ted Schauer. Others present were Elizabeth Lahey, Recorder and Vito Abbate, guest.

Joint Meeting with City of Darien Alderpeople and the Darien Park District Commissioners to discuss intergovernmental cooperation, goals, and objectives and 2026 special events.

Commissioner Luanne Spiros discussed the ongoing partnership between the Darien Park District and the City of Darien, emphasizing proactive relationship building, open communication, and the importance of aligning goals for the benefit of residents. She explained that the meeting's purpose was to further develop relationships between the Park District and the City, proactively address pain points, and create opportunities for collaboration and education on operating models and goals.

Alderwoman Mary Sullivan shared positive feedback regarding the partnership, noting that previous miscommunications had been resolved through open dialogue and that both organizations are now working well together, supported by City services and interwoven community interests.

Alderman Leganski and Kenny shared their positive experiences working w Park District staff.

Alderman Ralph Stompanto reported that staff from both organizations have had no significant issues, and daily collaboration between staff members has contributed to smooth operations and effective problem-solving. He highlighted the importance of aligning strategic partnership goals, focusing on how joint actions affect residents, and maintaining separate but overlapping responsibilities to maximize community benefit.

Commissioner Ray Jablonski provided updates on the Westwood Park renovation, including the use of grant funding, construction timelines, event relocations, and future plans for additional amenities, with input from commissioners and staff regarding logistics and community impact. He announced that because of the Westwood Park renovations, some events such as concerts may be relocated to Community Park's South Pavilion, and that the City and the Park District are coordinating to ensure successful event execution at alternative venues. He discussed the three year joint City/Park District IGA Event list.

Commissioner Jablonski described the upgrades including a new entertainment pavilion, adjustments to the asphalt path for food truck access, and the installation of four pickleball courts with lighting, addressing previous concerns about truck maneuverability and community feedback on lighting and sound. He

outlined future plans for Westwood Park, including additional improvements for summer camp and preschool areas, and the installation of a new splash pad, building on the popularity of the existing facility at Garden View Park.

Commissioner Jablonski discussed the Park District's approach to long-term planning, including a 10-year asset replacement plan, strategic budgeting, and considerations for property acquisition and future development, with reference to City practices and community needs.

Commissioner Jablonski discussed the potential for acquiring additional land adjacent to existing parks, citing examples from neighboring communities and identifying open lots near Community Park as potential future purchases if funding allows. He explained that financial constraints from past referendums have shaped the Park District's focus on maintaining a balanced budget, with Sportsplex operations funded primarily through user fees rather than taxpayer dollars. He further explained that staff are preparing for the end of Sportsplex bond payments in 2028-2029, which will free up funds for maintenance upgrades and potential new development, with plans to conduct community surveys closer to the bond payoff date.

Commissioner Jablonski reviewed the Darien Park District Event Criteria for Park District events, the process for accommodating City and Lions Club events, and the importance of formal intergovernmental agreements to address differences in event focus, insurance, and documentation requirements. He explained that Park District events are typically family-oriented with no alcohol, while City and Lions Club events may include adult-oriented activities such as beer tents, requiring exceptions to park rules through intergovernmental agreements. He further emphasized the need for insurance and documentation for certain events.

Alderwoman Sullivan discussed the importance of improving communication with residents through social media, newsletters, and collaborative efforts, aiming to increase awareness of Park District activities and foster greater community involvement. She advocated for increased use of social media platforms such as Instagram to reach younger families, noting that traditional communication methods like printed catalogs are less effective and encouraging the Park District to promote events more actively online.

Alderpeople Leganski, Sullivan, Stompanato, Commissioners Jablonski and Spiros agreed the digital board/marquee at Plainfield/Cass has been a valuable communication tool for free Park District and City events.

Alderman Stompanato explored the possibility of joint projects between the Park District and the City, emphasizing the need for clear criteria and alignment with partnership goals, and considering options such as jazz events or winter festivals. He referenced the City's 2026 Strategic Partnership Goals

There was discussion regarding the feasibility of installing EV charging stations at park locations, contingent on grant funding and alignment with long-term community goals, with consideration for usage patterns and maintenance responsibilities

Public Comment

Mr. Vito Abate stated that both groups work well together and did not understand why the perception is negative. He suggested including Park District updates in the City's weekly newsletter and Direct Connect

system to ensure residents are informed about upcoming events and initiatives, reducing reliance on separate publications.

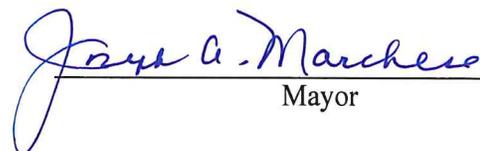
- **Westwood Park Project Communication and GardenView Park:** Request input from staff regarding GardenView parking and Plainfield Rd crossing . Share feedback. Alderman Leganski referenced the success of GardenView Park and asked about the possibility of a crosswalk. Alderwoman Sullivan stated that she would provide her contacts at the County.

Commissioner Spiros summarized the following suggestions from the attendees for consideration:

- **Long-Term Asset Planning for Park District:** Per Commissioner Jablonski, Work with staff in conjunction with the Commissioners, to expand the 10-year asset replacement plan to identify potential acquisition opportunities.
- **Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) Duration:** Per Alderman Belczak, Explore the feasibility of establishing a 3–5-year IGA for event planning at Westwood Park once renovations are complete, to reduce the need for annual renewals.
- **Joint City-Park District Projects:** Per Alderpeople Sullivan, Leganski, and Kenny, Assess interest and develop proposals for potential joint projects or events presented by both the Darien Park District and the City, ensuring alignment with event criteria and addressing any policy or insurance considerations (e.g., alcohol restrictions).
- **EV Charging Station Feasibility:** Per Commissioner Jablonski, Discuss with staff the possibility of installing EV charging stations at Park District locations during upcoming construction, and evaluate financial and operational feasibility, including grant opportunities as part of long term plans.
- **Park District Event Promotion:** Per Commissioner Jablonski, Alderman Leganski, (Park District) **continue to** proactively submit information about events and programs to the City for inclusion in the weekly newsletter, electronic sign, and Direct Connect to improve community awareness and participation.
- **Westwood Park:** Per Alderwoman Sullivan et al., (Park District) **share updates on Westwood Park throughout 2026.**
- **Next Steps:** Approval of the January minutes in early February for both groups and tentatively meet in six months if needed.

Commissioner Jablonski made a motion, seconded by Alderman Kenny that the meeting be adjourned. Upon voice vote the Motion was thereby carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.


City Clerk


Mayor