

History of the Ackerman Park Sports Complex

Initially, park district need for gym space was met through an intergovernmental agreement in which the park district paid School District 41 more than \$700,000 for the expansion of gym space at Churchill and Ben Franklin schools in exchange for park district use of the schools after 4 pm on weekdays and all day on weekends. However, District 41 increasingly expressed a greater need for its own gym space, limiting park district access.

Thus, facing school demands for even greater use of its gym space with no indication of park district needs diminishing, the park district sought resolution by including indoor soccer at Ackerman Park on a list of proposed projects it asked residents to rank in a survey mailed to all homes in the fall of 2005. Of 36,000 residents, four percent (1,645) completed and returned the survey. Based on those results, the top four ranked projects were:

1. Land acquisition
2. Renovate boathouse
3. Renovate Main Street Recreation Center
4. Construct washrooms/shelter at Ackerman Park

In an effort to determine whether all residents would support the top four ranked projects, the park district placed a referendum on the March 21, 2006 ballot, asking voters whether the park district should sell \$12.5 million in bonds in order to:

1. Acquire open space
2. Renovate Lake Ellyn Boathouse
3. Raze Main Street Recreation Center and replace it with a new building with a full-size gymnasium
4. Construct washrooms/shelter at Ackerman Park

The proposal to raze the three-story Main Street Recreation Center instead of renovating it came about when the park district learned that it was more cost-effective to build a new, four-story structure that used the original's same footprint and was four inches shorter. A study completed earlier by School District 41 concluded the cost to renovate the three-story building was \$4 million. A subsequent study commissioned by the park district concluded that razing and building a new, four-story structure would cost \$6 million.

It was hoped that an additional floor would provide residents with the needed extra gym space. During several open houses, however, residents strongly opposed both razing and re-building Main Street and renovating Lake Ellyn Boathouse. The March 21, 2006 referendum, in which 9,387 residents voted, 60% of them against it, failed.

Because the need for gym space was still pressing, the park district re-evaluated and revised its proposal and put forth a new referendum on the November 7, 2006 ballot, asking voters whether the park district should sell \$11.9 million in bonds in order to:

1. Acquire open space
2. Renovate Main Street Recreation Center
3. Construct Ackerman Park Sports Complex

This time, 13,000 people (36% of park district residents) voted, with 54% of them in favor of the referendum.

The sports complex proposal was developed to address the gym needs for basketball and a multi-purpose field to address the needs of a multitude of athletic programs. Input from the park district's advisory athletic committees (baseball, softball, house league soccer, travel soccer, cheerleading), comprising volunteer members who represent thousands of athletic participants, was key to the concept of a multi sports complex.

All park district plans were discussed at public park board meetings and village commission meetings. All discussion and plans were included on meeting agendas and in minutes. All received significant news coverage in the print media as well as on Glen Ellyn TV:

Further, in an effort to gain as much public input as possible before the election, the park district conducted four open houses and invited residents via:

- Tri-fold brochure mailed directly to all resident homes
- Park district program brochure delivered
- Advertising in the Glen Ellyn News
- On the park district Website
- In flyers posted at the Glen Ellyn Library, Main Street Recreation Center and Spring Avenue Recreation Center
- In eblasts to residents
- In postcards distributed to program participants
- Glen Ellyn TV

In an effort to make the four open houses convenient for the greatest number of residents, each was held in a different facility, on a different day and at a different time. During each, commissioners and staff were on hand to provide details on each proposed project and its estimated cost. All information provided at the open houses was also available:

- In binders placed at the front desk of MSRC and SARC
- On the park district Website

To date, the progress of referendum projects is:

- Main Street Recreation Center renovation was completed in September 2007
- Open space has been purchased. Five homes on Lenox Avenue contiguous to Ackerman Park have been purchased since 2007. Of those, four have been razed and land graded for green space.
- Ackerman Park Sports Complex construction is underway. Completion is expected to be complete in late 2009.

Once complete, Ackerman Park Sports Complex will be a revenue-based facility. User fees will be charged for the use of the complex as is done with other park district facilities such as Lake Ellyn Boathouse, Main Street Recreation Center, Spring Avenue Recreation Center and Sunset Pool. The park district has been working with other park districts that operate similar facilities to develop an operating budget for the complex.