



THE PACT:

THE PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL TRIBUTE NEWSLETTER

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PACs 101: A HISTORY LESSON & WHERE WE ARE NOW

In 1980, Friends of the Parks (FOTP) initiated the development of local park advisory councils to involve the public in spending of federal dollars under the UPARR (Urban Park and Recreation Recovery) program. A condition of the federal grants was that citizens must have a voice in how the federal dollars were spent, and since the Park District was just sued for discrimination by the Midwest Community Council and (then by the Department of Justice, where the District ultimately entered into a consent decree in 1983 that ended in 1989), the City approved to filter the grant dollars to Friends of the Parks. FOTP helped form 30 park advisory councils (PACs) that first year and another 25 in 1981, and our involvement in organizing and supporting these park advocate groups never stopped.

During these past decades, we find that park advisory councils have evolved into many forms, acting as independent community groups whose purpose varies between groups. In recent years, the District is claiming and portraying ownership of PACs, and FOTP is contacted regularly by PACs regarding concerns over the recent changes and the alleged rules placed on PACs. The following is an environmental scan of what PACs look like today, what they do, how they and park district work (or don't work) together, and what changes have recently occurred.

WHAT DO PACS LOOK LIKE AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

Some have many members, some have a few, some have an active core group and some have 1 or 2 active leaders • Many have bylaws and some do not • Some are incorporated entities with the State of Illinois, some are registered as non-profit organizations with the State of Illinois, some are recognized 501(c)(3) organizations recognized by the IRS, some are none of the above or a combination of the above • Some members are on one group and some are on more than one • Some have elections every year and some have two-year terms • Some have a collaborative spirit when working with Park District, some have demanding attitude • Some think they are extensions of the Park District and many believe they are independent community groups who partner with Park District • Some have many partnerships with local non-profits, businesses, community groups, who might have representatives as core board members, and others do not have any representation from community groups • Some fundraise, some focus on advocacy only, some put on programming and events, and some do a combination of all three • Some have been around for decades, some are under a year old, and some had a dissolution in the past and are reforming • Most are called DuSable Park Advisory Council and some are called Friends of DuSable Park • Some are fundraising well into the 6 figures, some are struggling to fundraise in the hundreds • Some are inclusive and accessible to all community members and some are not.

HOW DOES THE PARK DISTRICT WORK WITH PACS?

Some Area Managers (AMs) & Park Supervisors (PSs) are symbiotic with PACs, others not involved, some work vehemently against PACs • AMs & PSs have different perceptions of what a PAC can and cannot do • Some Park District departments have a collaborative relationship with PACs, others have a dictatorial attitude, and some are not connected to PACs at all • The District can partner with PACs on events, e.g. staff time for events, movies-in-the-parks, etc. • There is no partnership agreement between PACs and the District to define how the District and PACs agree to work together, e.g. other organizations might have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a business might have a contract, that is aside from the partnership agreements for one-day events.

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WHAT HAS CHANGED RECENTLY?

The District now claims that PAC bylaws cannot contradict the Chicago Park District's bylaws. It appears that the bylaws document they are referring to is the bylaws document that was recently referred to as the bylaws template. • The District now says that PACs must have yearly elections and asked some to change the two-year elections that they have written in their bylaws. • Telling PACs that they cannot have a PAC meeting without a Park District employee present and at times have told them they must reschedule their meeting if an employee cannot attend. • Suspending a PAC president, for allegedly violating the PAC Code of Conduct document, which the District claims as the rules over PACs. This situation revealed the lack of a fair and transparent process for suspending a PAC member, the lack of an appeal process when someone is suspended, and the question regarding the justification and authority of the District in taking such action. •

There is now a District annual reporting document, which recently included asking PACs to identify their bank account balance. • Telling PACs they cannot distribute their own fliers for their own park events and also telling PACs that they must use the District's format. • Dictating how many parks a PAC can advocate for and the number of PACs allowed per park. • Telling PACs that the President and Treasurer have to be fingerprinted by the CPD. • ***Haven't shared your thoughts with us yet about how things are going? Email or call Nicole at machucan@fotp.org or at (312) 857-2757 ext. 7.***

FOTP ARCHIVES: CONFERENCE IN 1987 & NOW IN 2017

In 1987, Friends of the Parks co-sponsored an all day conference with the University of Illinois, Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement. The conference titled "Rethinking the Role of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks: Towards the 21st Century" drew in park activists and park advisory council members, and David Schultz from the Milwaukee County Park System and Chicago Park District Board President Walter Netsch participated.

Friends has offered many iterations of conferences for park advocates over our long history. In 1999, we collaborated with the Chicago Park District to hold the Park Planning Conference, titled "Building Community, One Park at a Time," at the Garfield Park fieldhouse and hosted several more of these Institutes years after. In 2010, we again collaborated with the Chicago Park District and co-sponsored the Park Advocacy Conference, until the Chicago Parks Foundation took on our role and renamed it the Park Advisory Council Conference in 2016.

Now in 2017, we look back on our conference thirty years ago, and believe that now more than ever it is important to talk about our parks as democratic spaces. So, surrounded by park partners at our winter Quarterly PAC Networking Meeting at Friends' office in February, we announced our conference "Rethinking the Role of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks: Parks as Democracy?" In sharing this announcement last month, we were pleased to find out that several PACs are including aspects of community input and discussion that we are also planning to include, such as soapbox speeches reminiscent of Bughouse Square. The conference will also have keynote speakers, expert panels, round table discussions, and small group working sessions. The conference will kick off with our Annual Luncheon. We look forward to having this opportunity to connect with PACs, members, park partners, and Chicago residents, so save the dates June 9 and 10 and consider, *are our parks democratic spaces?*



Top: 2010 Park Advocacy Conference. Center and Bottom: 2014 Park Advocacy Conference

THE
FOTP
TREE
SAYS...



...Reach out to your allies to help you advertise your monthly meetings and events. You can:

- Ask your Alderman to publish meeting dates in their weekly newsletters;
- Send event fliers to Friends of the Parks for us to share on our Facebook page;
- Advertise Earth Day by sending a press release to neighborhood papers;
- Schedule PAC meeting dates for the same day of the week each month and post that schedule in your local library, community boards in coffee shops or community centers, and at your local park field house, of course!