

----- Friends of the Parks -----



PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL
HAND BOOK



Mission of Friends of the Parks

The mission of Friends of the Parks is to preserve, protect, improve and promote the use of Chicago parks, forest preserves and recreational areas for the benefit of all neighborhoods and citizens.

Dear Friends,

For over three decades, Friends of the Parks (FOTP) has been pleased to provide technical assistance and direct support to park advisory councils (PACs) in Chicago's parks. We believe it is a community working with the Chicago Park District that makes a great park or playground.

To provide an update on how to be an effective park advisory council and to encourage expanded partnership opportunities, Friends of the Parks has updated our Park Advisory Council Handbook. The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with information and technical assistance to help you become a more effective advocate and voice for your park. The guide describes how to get involved with your park advisory council and the step-by-step process you can follow to launch a new one.

Working together, we can continue to improve Chicago's parks, playgrounds and public spaces.

Sincerely,

Erma Tranter
President, Friends of the Parks



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What is a Park Advisory Council (PAC)?

A park advisory council serves as an advocate for its neighborhood park or playground. Park advisory councils are made up of people who generally live close-by and use the park for recreation programs, gardening, meeting friends and neighbors, or simply for the quiet and respite that parks provide. The goal of the park advisory council is most often to ensure that the park is the heart and center of the neighborhood and that the park is brimming with people, sports and activities for children and adults all year long.

By working together and regularly providing suggestions and recommendations to the Chicago Park District, a park advisory council improves park conditions and helps create safe, attractive and enjoyable programs and facilities. Park advisory councils are absolutely essential to building a strong park system.

DID YOU KNOW...

Parks, children's playgrounds, bike and pedestrian trails and open spaces help keep children and adults fit and healthy.

4 HOW DO I JOIN AN EXISTING PAC?



How Do I Join an Existing PAC?

Contact your neighborhood Park Supervisor and/or the park advisory council president to find out when the next meeting is scheduled. Attend the meeting and get involved.

You can go to the Chicago Park District's web site at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com to see the list of registered park advisory councils, their council presidents and the contact information.

DID YOU KNOW?:

Studies have found that parks, gardens and natural areas can improve psychological and social health.

More contact information for the Chicago Park District can be found at the back of this handbook. Friends of the Parks (FOTP) contact information is located inside the front cover.

Who can Join a Park Advisory Council?

Any interested citizen, park advocate or park user can join their park advisory council. All park advisory council meetings are open to the public.

What is the Relationship between Park Advisory Councils and the Chicago Park District?

Park advisory councils work and cooperate with the Chicago Park District, but an advisory council is not part of the Chicago Park District.

PACs serve in an advisory capacity. They provide to the staff of the Chicago Park District an independent and knowledgeable voice for the residents of the community about conditions, programs, recreation needs and capital projects for their park.

The relationship between the PAC and the Chicago Park District is collaborative. Each works on the same goal: improving conditions and programs in neighborhood parks.





How Do I Start a New PAC where None Exists?

1

Contact Your Park Supervisor

If no council exists for your park, FOTP will work with you, along with other interested citizens and the Chicago Park District to form a new council. If your park is small, such as a playground, it may be working already under an existing advisory council of a larger park.

The first step in starting a PAC is to contact your Park Supervisor to inform him/her of your intent to start a park advisory council. You can find the phone number of your local park on the Chicago Park District's web site or you can call their main number at (312) 742-PLAY.

You can also call your Chicago Park District Regional Manager if you can not get in touch with the Park Supervisor.

You should also visit the Chicago Park District's web site at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com and review their information about how to form a park advisory council. More information on contacts can be found at the end of this handbook.

2

Identify and Invite Others Who Might Be Interested

A minimum of three (3) members are required to form a park advisory council. We suggest you start with a group of three to six like-minded individuals to form the core of your council. Ask the Park Supervisor and FOTP for leads on others in the community who may have expressed an interest in helping the park.

Schedule a first meeting and invite the broader community to attend. See Step 6 for suggestions on how to promote meeting attendance.

3

What Issues Should the Park Advisory Council Address?

PACs are the eyes and ears of the community on park and recreation needs and they communicate this information to the Chicago Park District. PACs often host events and other activities to ensure that the neighborhood park is an active and beautiful resource for the community throughout the year.

PACs meet with the Park Supervisor to encourage review and discussion of the following topics:

- Review of park programs
- Review of park maintenance
- Planning for park capital improvements
- Recommending staffing levels for the park
- Review the park budget
- Review the proposed or existing concessions
- Review permits for park use
- Create gardens or art projects
- Review opportunities to host events such as holiday parties, open houses, concerts, and fairs
- Promote community activities such as garden clubs, garden walks, senior events, and youth programs



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4

Hold a Park Advisory Council Meeting

Begin to hold regular park advisory council meetings to draw interest in your efforts, to get people involved, and to take action to establish the park advisory council.

To maximize community participation at your meetings, select a regular time to meet, such as the first Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. Be consistent with your meeting time so that people will build trust that the meetings will occur.



5

Choose a Location to Meet

Ideally, meetings should be held at the park. If the park has a field house, the park advisory council should meet there. If not, the council can meet at the closest park field house in the community.



6

Notify Your Community

Park advisory council meetings should be advertised through flyers and/or a poster placed at the park field house, or on community bulletin boards. Many community papers will run meeting notices for free. Email is a fast and appropriate method for getting the word out about your meetings. Announcements should include the meeting time, date and, if possible, agenda.



7

Prepare an Agenda

The chair or president should prepare an agenda based on the issues that need to be addressed.

We recommend you include agenda items that can be covered in an hour. Never forget that, as volunteers, you and the other advisory council members have other personal commitments that are also worthy of your time. Therefore, running effective meetings and adhering to an hour meeting is often a good practice to keep.

The Park Supervisor should attend each advisory council meeting to hear the concerns and issues of the PAC and to present a brief update of park projects and issues. It is also important that the Park Supervisor attends the PAC meeting in order for him/her to take the necessary actions to improve the maintenance and operation of the park.



8

Develop and Adopt By-Laws

After you have held several monthly meetings, each new park advisory council should develop by-laws. By-laws help to establish the park advisory council as a legitimate organization with a long-term commitment to the park.

If you want to follow the formal route, you can develop by-laws to form a structured organization with a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. If you want a less formal option, you can write your by-laws to call for a chair and a co-chair, only.

By-laws should state the length of the terms of the officers of the council and should include a definition of what constitutes a voting member. Voting members should not include first-time attendees. This encourages community members to become involved and stay active in the council rather than appearing only for a specific issue.

By-laws set the procedures that your advisory council will follow. Good by-laws will prevent problems and improve your effectiveness. The Chicago Park District has sample PAC by-laws that you can modify to suit your needs. They can be found on their web site at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com.

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In addition, Friends of the Parks can provide you with sample by-laws that you can tailor to your specific needs. Go to fotp.org to see sample by-laws.

In general, by-laws include the following basic elements:

- The name of the park advisory council
- The stated purpose of the council
- The definition of a voting member
- The length of terms of the officers of the council
- The measures for dealing with officer vacancies
- Meeting regulation rules
- The process for amending the by-laws
- The process for the appointment of committees



Take and Archive Minutes

Elect a park advisory council secretary or designate a person to take minutes at each meeting. The secretary or designated minutes-taker should keep a complete record of meeting minutes in a binder that remains in the park field house. This binder is provided by the Chicago Park District and should be easily accessible to park patrons.



Register Your Park Advisory Council with the Chicago Park District and Friends of the Parks

On an annual basis, fill out the park advisory council registration form. It is a one-page form covering contact information of the PAC, the meeting date, and officers and general members of the park advisory council along with their addresses and emails. The registration form is important to submit to the Park District so that they have updated information on the PAC and can communicate with the council. You can also send a copy to Friends of the Parks, which will provide you access to FOTP updates.



How Do We Get Improvements Made to Our Park?

If there are problems with the park that need to be repaired or changed, we recommend that you prepare simple computer produced stationary and write a letter about the problem or needed repair. Send it to the Regional Manager. Also, send a copy to FOTP, the alderman and to the Park Supervisor. FOTP can provide examples of letters that you can use as a template. When the Chicago Park District does resolve an issue, we suggest you send a thank you letter.

Tips on Communications

Share Your Park Advisory Council's Contact Information

The following organizations and people should be kept current on the proper contact information for your park advisory council. Send it out annually or as council contacts change.

- *The Park Supervisor*
- *The Department of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs of the Chicago Park District is located at 541 North Fairbanks, Chicago, IL 60611. The CPD will provide a link from their site to the PAC web site if you provide the contact information and link.*
- *FOTP provides links on our web site to PAC web sites to facilitate communication and sharing of information.*

Communicate with Your Park Supervisor

Communication between the PAC and the Park Supervisor is vital to ensuring community support for improvements of the park and to create a lasting and effective relationship between the council and the Park Supervisor.

We recommend that the PAC president, secretary, or another designated member be responsible for keeping the Park Supervisor informed about the council's activities and concerns.

Develop a Simple Park Advisory Council Web Site

FOTP suggests that park advisory councils create a web site or web page that outlines the council's goals and objectives to help educate new or prospective members. Post a calendar of events and programs on the web. Post photos of activities and special events. Use the web site to remind people of the next meeting date, and post meeting minutes.



PAC Strategies

Over time, your park advisory council may need to develop strategies for enhancing your effectiveness. Here are some of the most useful tools you can use.

Gain Support from Elected Officials

It's important for park advisory councils to build strong relationships with elected officials. If you can get them to speak on behalf of the parks in your community, you will get the attention of the Chicago Park District. It will also make your council more effective.

Cultivate strong relationships with your alderman. Help him/her to make parks a positive issue that warrants the community's attention. In turn, he/she can and should open doors for your council and take the lead on important issues affecting the park. An alderman can help secure funding for park projects.

Ask your alderman to attend your council meetings or to participate at the meetings through a staff representative. Be sure to invite him/ her to all events, and keep your alderman well informed about the issues your council is addressing.

Aldermanic offices are a great place to inform other ward constituents about park activities and events by posting meeting notices and flyers. Many also send out regular email newsletters to their constituents, which might be another place to promote your announcement.

In addition to your alderman, it is important to work with your elected state representative and state senator. They can help fund improvements in parks, identify opportunities for new parks, and coordinate with the Chicago Park District and other city departments to ensure that your community gets the park resources it deserves.

Contact your U.S. congressman/woman and U.S. Senators by meeting with their staffs and sending letters to inform them of your park's needs. There are federal funds available for a variety of projects such as cleaning brownfields, creating new bike and pedestrian paths, and for restoring natural areas.

Use “People in the Parks” to Address Policy Issues

Occasionally park advisory councils or other interested park advocates may want to take their requests, comments or suggestions to the Chicago Park District's Board of Commissioners. The Board, under the Chicago Park District Act, establishes all rules and regulations for the government and protection of dedicated park land.

The Mayor of Chicago appoints the seven Commissioners of the Chicago Park District, with the approval of the City Council. The Chicago Park District Commissioners do not receive pay for the work they do while serving on the board.

The Chicago Park District Board and Board Committees meet monthly on the second Wednesday of the month. The Board Committees meet 10:30 a.m., usually in the 8th floor Board Room of the Administration Building located at 541 N. Fairbanks, Chicago, Illinois.

The full Board of Commissioners meets on the same second Wednesday of the month, but at 4 p.m. at the same location. The Board and committee meetings are required by law to meet 4 times a year in a park location, so it is important to double check where the meeting will be held. Eight months a year the meetings are held in the 8th floor Board Room of the Administration Building located at 541 N. Fairbanks, Chicago, Illinois.

14 PAC STRATEGIES

Only at the committee meetings are individuals allowed to testify on an agenda item. If you would like to testify, you need to arrive in person between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. and fill out a card stating your position on the agenda item. You will be given two minutes to speak.

At the 4 p.m. Board of Commissioners meeting there is a segment on the agenda called “People in the Parks.” Park advisory council representatives can address the Board of Commissioners on a park policy matter by arriving between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. and filling out a “People in the Parks” card. “People in the Parks” is usually the first agenda item. You will be given two minutes to speak.



We also recommend that you make 10 copies of your testimony to give to the Board of Commissioners and staff before you speak. Your testimony will then be entered into the official proceedings along with your verbal presentation.

You can see the monthly committee and board meeting agendas by going to <http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com> and searching for Board of Commissioners.

Use the Freedom of Information Act

Sometimes it is necessary to get information and documents from the Chicago Park District that relate to your project, task or mission. These documents could include park planning records, meeting notes or minutes, letters written to the park district, park historical records or another written record.

To get what you need, first ask the Park Supervisor to provide you with the documents and explain who you are, why you need them and when you need them. If this step does not work, contact the Regional Manager in writing.

If necessary, you may write a request pursuant to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. The Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides that all public records be open to public inspection and copying with certain exceptions, such as personnel records and agency records regarding real estate negotiations in progress.

DID YOU KNOW...

Parks build healthy communities by creating stable neighborhoods and strengthening community development.

An advisory council can request information about its park by writing the Freedom of Information Officer at the Chicago Park District, 541 N. Fairbanks, 3rd Floor, Chicago, IL 60611.

You may also contact the Office of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs at (312) 742-5135 to discuss the best way to go about getting a copy of a document from the Park District. A sample FOIA letter is available from Friends of the Parks and you may call us or go to our web site, www.fotp.org, to see a sample FOIA letter.

Use your FOTP Connection

You may call Friends of the Parks whenever you have park-related concerns or problems or your advisory council needs information, support or guidance. We are here to help you become as effective as possible and to get the response and recognition you deserve.

We provide information, research, reports and other materials to park advisory councils. We make our library available to council representatives. Throughout the year we offer workshops, symposia, Creative Living in the City lectures, and events for advisory councils and members.

Please let FOTP know the name of your council contact. We will add him/her to our mailing list for tours, seminars, conferences, citizen action alerts, and other events and notices.

You can find our contact information on the inside front cover of this handbook.



PAC Funding Resources

You can do a lot to improve your park without raising money. However, you will likely find that you want or need to raise funds to help achieve your goals. Here are some resources to help you get started.

Setting Financial Goals

Before you start asking people for money, you must also have strong leadership and a good plan. The entire council must support the fundraising effort.

You should also address advisory council fundraising ideas with your Park Supervisor and make sure what you want to accomplish is understood. You should ask about restrictions on using your funds in the park and whether the Chicago Park District will partially or fully fund the proposed project.

Once you have talked with the Park District about your goals, choose a chair of the fundraising committee.

Your advisory council members may have experience managing money and can set up a program for the council. If not, consult an accountant to address any legal questions regarding non-profit organizations and fundraising. Look for more information on the FOTP web site.

Some park advisory councils have found it effective to incorporate as a 501(c) (3) organization to make it easier to raise money through tax deductible donations. While not necessary, some PACs have found it useful, particularly when ambitious development goals are set.

If you decide that you do not want to become a 501 (c) (3), the PAC formally can request that FOTP serve as your fiscal sponsor for your fundraising plans.

DID YOU KNOW...

Despite the importance of parks, 55 of Chicago's 77 community areas do not have a bare minimum of 2 acres of parks per 1,000 residents.

Setting up FOTP as Your Fiscal Sponsor

There are 5 steps that park advisory councils must undertake to have FOTP serve as their fiscal sponsor.

- (1) *An advisory council representative needs to contact our office to request FOTP to be their fiscal sponsor.*
- (2) *The advisory council then writes a letter requesting that FOTP serve as the fiscal sponsor. The letter should include a brief description of the project, fundraising plan, including project overview, how much money needs to be raised, and timeframe for completion of park project.*
- (3) *The park advisory council is required to become a FOTP member at the Fiscal Sponsor Advisory Council Membership level to help cover direct staff and bookkeeping costs. This must be renewed annually as fundraising continues.*
- (4) *Once the letter and membership fee are received from the advisory council, a confirmation letter is sent out approving the agreement along with a copy of FOTP's tax ID number and letter of 501 (c) (3) status.*
- (5) *By September 30 every year, the advisory council should send a 1 to 2 page description of the status of the project, including: how much money was raised, how much was spent, what was purchased, etc. Photos should be included of completed projects.*

Friends of the Parks Seed Grant Program

Friends of the Parks offers small “Seed Grants” to advisory councils and adopt-a-park groups to help fund events or beautification projects.

Through the Seed Grant Program, Friends of the Parks grants up to \$1,000 to assist the PAC or community group in completing park improvement projects or special programs. Some groups use their funds to create a series of free park concerts, a gymnastics theater presentation, flower planting projects, a family music festival, painting artistic murals on the walls of the field house, or the creation of mosaic panels at the field house.

Seed Grant applications are available in early December of each year. Grants are approved in March and issued each spring. You can learn more by visiting <http://fotp.org>.

Other Grants

Other organizations offer small grants. These include Parkways Foundation, Openlands, Green Corps, and NeighborSpace. See the directory of resources at the end of the handbook for their web sites.

Marketing and Fundraising — More Resources

You can find more marketing and fundraising ideas, tips and resources on the FOTP web site.



Directory of Resources

Chicago Park District Contact Information

Department of Community Relations, Director of External Affairs (312) 742-5366

Board of Commissioners, Liaison to the Board of Commissioners (312) 742-4733

Chief Program Officer (312) 742-4868

Director of Natural Resources (312) 742-4116

Budget Director (312) 742-4761

Regional Office Directors

North Region (312) 742-4641

Central Region (312) 746-5962

South Region (312) 747-7661

Web Sites for Other Resources

Chicago Bold www.chicagobold.org

CSI www.calumetstewardshipinitiative.org

Green Corps www.greencorps.org

National Resources Defense Council www.nrdc.org

NeighborSpace www.neighborspace.org

Mike Nowak Gardening Tips www.mikenowak.net

OpenLands www.openlands.org

Parkways Foundation www.parkways.org

SETF www.setaskforce.org

TreeKeepers www.treekeepers.org

Selected Park Advisory Council Web Sites

Commercial Park www.commercialparkadvisorycouncil.org

Grant Park Conservancy www.grantparkconservancy.com

Horner Park Advisory Council www.hornerpark.org

Indian Boundary www.indianboundary.org

Jackson Park www.hydepark.org/parks/jpac

Lincoln Park Conservancy www.lpacchicago.org

Washington Park www.hydepark.org/parks/washington

Wicker Park www.ourwickerpark.org

Willie White Park www.willyebwhitepark.org

Other U.S. Park Advocacy Group Web Sites

The Central Park Conservancy www.centralparkconservancy.org

The Highline in New York www.thehighline.org

Neighborhood Parks Council in San Francisco www.sfnpc.org

New Yorkers for Parks www.ny4p.org

The Prospect Park Alliance www.prospectpark.org

The Restoration Project of New York www.restorationproject.org

Seattle People for Parks www.cityofseattle.net/parks

Friends of the Parks – Membership Form

Do you want to support your local park?
You can help preserve, protect and
improve Chicago's treasured parks with a
membership contribution of:

- \$1,000 Frederick Law Olmsted Circle
- \$500-\$999 Benefactor
- \$250-\$499 Conserver
- \$100-\$249 Patron
- \$100 Fiscal Sponsor Advisory Council**
- \$50-\$99 Family
- \$50 Advisory Council**
- \$35-\$49 Individual
- \$25-\$34 Student/Senior
- _____ Other

All members receive:

- Our quarterly newsletter
The Advocate
- Free Parks tours —
(usually \$10 for the public)
- \$5 Discount to our
annual events such as our
Annual Meeting and
Awards Luncheon and the
L.A.T.E. Ride
- Event discounts with the
Active Transportation Alliance
- Advanced notice of our free
public lectures
- Notification of
Important Issues

NAME

ADDRESS

APT./SUITE

CITY

STATE

ZIP CODE

EMAIL (*Email addresses will only be used for FOTP informational notices*) TELEPHONE

Please send your contribution to:



Friends of the Parks (FOTP)

17 North State Street, Suite 1450

Chicago, Illinois 60602-3315

Phone (312) 857-2757 Fax (312) 857-0656

<http://fotp.org>