



# THE PACT:

## THE PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL TRIBUTE NEWSLETTER

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## BUILDING CAPACITY, MANAGING CHANGE & WORKING TOGETHER: THE GARFIELD PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL



**Garfield Park, 100 N. Central Park Ave.** By Keith M. Kelley, President/Garfield Park Advisory Council

I joined the Garfield Park Advisory Council (GPAC) in 2009. I was elected President in 2015. The organization had been lead for the past two decades by my charismatic predecessor, Levette Haynes. After only one year in this role, I am in awe of her perseverance! This article is a reflection on how this year has been a “learning process” not only for me, but for our organization.

The Garfield Park Advisory Council is thirty years old;



**Above:** Members and leaders from the Garfield Park Advisory Council.

however our organizational capacity is that of a new organization. My main task has been to develop how we observe, report, and advise the Chicago Park District, as well as raise alternative sources of revenue on behalf of our park. This has involved growing our membership to increase our human capital, restructuring our committees, strategically appointing chairs, and positioning the GPAC to fundraise by entering into a fiscal sponsorship relationship with the Chicago Parks Foundation. Getting our PAC to function like “an organization” was our first step to building our capacity.

The second step was figuring out how to get our members to work together! One of our challenges as an organization has been to respect the heritage and contributions of long-standing community residents, while still remaining welcoming to newcomers. We have been experiencing a lot growth in membership this year. Recent changes in neighborhood demographics (or “gentrification” depending on your perspective) have

“diversified” our membership. Some members have lived most of their lives in this predominantly Black (African-American) community, while others have arrived more recently. Most of our members “work through differences” rather than simply argue to make their point.

Granted, I did say, “most” of our members. We have a few that vocally take issue with something (even when you agree with them)! This type of behavior can often disrupt meetings and disengage some members from the process. After a couple of “passionate discussions”

### **Want your PAC featured in the PAC Highlights section?**

Please give us a little history about your PAC and the great work your PAC has done. Why did you start? Was there a hurdle that you overcame? Is there a great project you’d like to share? Please include 1-2 pictures and no more than 300 words. Send submissions to Nicole at machucan@fotp.org.

## DATES OF IMPORTANCE

**July 2nd:** Chicago Park District and CARA's *Go Run Chicago* event at region parks

**July 19th:** Southeast Chicago Area-Wide Plan Public Workshop—details at <https://southeastchicago2016.wordpress.com>

**July 28th:** Friends of the Parks' Webinar—How to Create a Flyer

**August 13th-14th:** Friends of the Parks' L.A.T.E. Ride fundraiser

**September 11<sup>th</sup>:** National Grandparents Day

**September 24<sup>th</sup>:** National Public Lands Day

**September 27th:** Fall PAC Quarterly Networking Meeting, FOTP office @ 5:30

**October 3rd:** Child Health Day

**October 10th:** Indigenous Peoples Day

**October 27th:** Friends and The Law Project present 501c3 meeting to PACs.

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**CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE:** during meetings I took the advice of a GPAC member, and began to follow Robert's Rules of Order to maintain decorum. We're still working on this, but it's getting better. Our meetings must remain a "safe space" for community members to openly discuss our park.

There are a lot of public safety concerns in our community. The PAC has begun planning for a larger summit on crime and safety in Garfield Park in August. We have begun a conversation with the park district about criminal activity taking place in broad daylight at our new playground. We are also considering the use of

"phone trees" when reporting crimes in the park to 911 as another strategy to address safety in our park.

Lastly, we have had to learn how to make decisions as a council. I recently had a member bring an idea to be for my "approval" of a project. I told them that I liked the idea, but I didn't have the authority to simply "rubber stamp" their idea. It needed to be discussed and voted on by the council. I reiterated this at our next meeting. We still have much to learn, but I am proud of the Garfield Park Advisory Council's growth and development so far.

Contact GPAC at [garfieldpac2015@gmail.com](mailto:garfieldpac2015@gmail.com)

## FOTP ARCHIVES: CPD PLAYGROUND SAFETY STUDY

In 2005, Friends of the Parks entered into a partnership with Children's Memorial Hospital (now Lurie Children's Hospital) to biannually survey all of the City's playgrounds in order to determine their level of safety. Surveying was comprehensive including over 500 playgrounds by trained playground evaluators (including then 2006 intern Nicole Machuca). The majority of these playgrounds were installed between 1988 and 1993, with a life expectancy of 15 to 17 years. Once installation was completed, the park district had not instituted a successor program to inspect, maintain and replace playground equipment.



Friends' 2006 survey found that a number of playgrounds were in disrepair and contained hazards to children. With the data on the condition of playgrounds, the district began to put into place a comprehensive maintenance plan for Chicago's playgrounds that was funded and staffed beginning in 2007.

However, the results of the most recent 2012 Playground Safety Study were alarming: more than 300 of the 500 surveyed playgrounds, or 60% of all playgrounds citywide, failed to meet national safety standards. This serious deficiency, and the slowing of playground replacement due to the high cost per unit, prompted Friends of the Parks to develop a new playground construction plan that was adopted by the Chicago Park District.

Under this new Chicago Plays! initiative, 300 playgrounds would be built over five years—ending in 2018—and include an exhaustive community engagement plan. Mayor Rahm Emanuel officially announced the program in 2013, and this year has hopes that the remaining 80 will be completed.

## THE FOTP TREE SAYS...



**...take a holistic approach to advocating for capital improvements.** This month's reminder comes from participants at our last PAC Quarterly Networking Meeting, held June 28th. As specified in the June PACT Newsletter, there are many ways to advocate for capital improvements to your park. But what we can learn from those park partners who've fought for years, or even decades, to make these projects realities? We learned that in many ways it is about a mishmash of the following elements: community resiliency, community organizing, community perseverance, community leaders — if not a community "champion," access to knowledge of how the system works, partnerships, and in the end "political will." From the stories of Ping Tom's new field house or Kelly's multi-use field, it was a combination of these things made these communities' dreams come true.

