

**REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
OF THE VILLAGE OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS PLAN COMMISSION**

A MEETING HELD ON:

February 28, 2024

Project Title: Salt Creek Park District Recreation Area

Address: 3445, 3145, 3041 W. Salt Creek Lane

Petitioner: Diane Hilgers
Salt Creek Rural Park District

Address: 530 S. Williams Ave.
Palatine, IL 60074

Requested Action:

1. Rezoning from the B-3, General Service, Wholesale and Motor Vehicle District to the P-L, Public Lands District.
2. Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan to reclassify the site as Parks.
3. Special Use Permit allow facility owned and operated by the SCRPD.

Variations Required:

1. Chapter 28, Section 10.4-4, to allow 0 onsite parking stalls where (as yet to be determined number of parking stalls) are required.

Attendees: Diane Hilgers, Salt Creek Park District
Elizabeth Kwandras, Assisting the Salt Creek Park District
Jay Cherwin, Plan Commissioner
John Sigalos, Plan Commissioner
Bruce Green, Plan Commissioner
Lynn Jensen, Plan Commissioner
Sam Hubbard, Planning Department

Project Summary:

The subject property consists of approximately 13.69 acres of vacant land and is comprised of three separate parcels. Two of the three parcels (the eastern and southern parcels) are encumbered by a restrictive covenant that restricts their usage to parkland/open land. A pond is situated between these two parcels and serves as a regional detention basin for many of the properties in the vicinity. The western parcel, which is approximately 2.46 acres in size, is not encumbered by the parkland/open land restriction and currently an open field. All three parcels are owned by the Salt Creek Rural Park District (SCRPD), which began using the land as soccer/playing fields in 2019. There is no onsite parking lot or curb cut that serves this property, however, access could be achieved via a curb cut along Salt Creek Lane.

The Salt Creek Rural Park District is proposing to formalize their use of the site as playing fields, which would consist of three temporary athletic (soccer) fields, four 20' tall portable light towers, and two fishing piers adjacent to the detention basin, which would be used for recreational fishing and fishing derbies in conjunction with the Arlington Heights Lions Club. No parking facilities are proposed for construction at this time and the SCRPD has indicated that parking would occur on-street along Salt Creek Lane at the north of the subject property.

Meeting Discussion:

Ms. Hilgers – introduced Elizabeth Kwandras who has been assisting with the project. This property has been owned by the park district for almost 30 years, and the goal is to serve the community with recreational activities, so tonight we are here to seek approval for rezoning and

for special use for activities on site.

Mr. Hubbard – explained the overall site is just under 14 acres and is made-up of three separate parcels. Two of the three parcels are actually encumbered by a restrictive covenant that restricts their usage to parkland/open land, but the third parcel, which is the smallest in size is about 3 acres does not have this restriction. There is a pond that situated in between the two parcels at the northeast of the property that serves as a regional detention area for the vicinity. The Park District has been informally using the property for playing fields since 2019. There is no onsite parking. The site is open grassland and the Park District has striped some soccer fields, but now they are looking to formalize the use as playing fields, install portable light towers at about 20 feet in height, and two fishing piers that would be adjacent to the detention basin. The property is zoned B-3, which is a General Service, Wholesale and Motor Vehicle district, and this type of use is not permitted in that district, so they would be required to rezone the site to P-L, which is a Public Lands zoning district. The P-L district is the appropriate zoning classification for the proposed use and the use would require a special use permit in the P-L district. They will need to submit a Plan Commission application and include a response to the three criteria necessary for special use permit approval. The site is designated as Mixed-Use on the comprehensive plan and this dates back to 2008.

Historically, the Staff Development Committee has not been supportive of park uses on the site. This area of the Village was originally subdivided in the 1990's and was intended as a light industrial area with employment generating uses, given the proximity to the highway and good site access. Staff thought this site was always appropriate for a higher employment generating use, but over the last several decades that's never been realized. There have been proposals for a commercial recreation use that were explored but never materialized. More recently this area has transitioned away from industrial uses and the mixed-use neighborhood at the Arlington Downs development has been constructed. The trend of development is now primarily residential and as a mixed-use area. Staff can get behind the change in use here to a park facility, which could complement the residential component within Arlington Downs PUD and any other future development in the area.

As part of this project, the Salt Creek Park District will need to provide details on what exactly is proposed and they will need to outline specifics on how they are intending to use the property. They have classified the overall use as "temporary" and staff would like that to be further defined; what is the temporary time frame proposed here and what are the long-term plans for this site. Details will be needed on the different kinds of sporting events, games, and practices. This will help staff to understand what the peak demand will be for use of the site and whether usage of the different components and fields will occur concurrently or separately.

Staff encourages the petitioner to contact the Building & Life Safety Department to determine if the proposal triggers any requirements for ADA compliance or washrooms. Because portable lights have been proposed, a photometric plan will be required. Details on usage of the lights will be required and the long-term usage plans for the portable lights. Staff has some concern that the temporary light solution may not be viable for extended usage.

A to-scale plan that shows the location of the playing fields and portable lights will be required. A parking variation will be required since no on-site parking spaces are proposed. The park use would rely entirely on on-street parking. A variation will be needed to allow zero parking stalls where code requires a number yet-to-be determined. Since the parking requirement is based on overall occupancy limits for the site, staff will need to work with the Building Department to determine how occupancy limits apply to an outdoor playing field. To justify the variation, the petitioner will need to provide a response to the four criteria for variation approval and provide parking data from their existing facilities that have soccer or athletic fields to use as a basis to forecast demand from this site.

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Staff recommends exploring the possibility of shared parking arrangements with some of the nearby property owners. The Fire Department expressed concern about Salt Creek Lane, especially if there would be cars parking on both sides of the street, and how a fire truck will be able to navigate down that street during emergency situations. Traditionally, street parking has been prohibited on the opposite side of the street adjacent to park facilities due to safety concerns about kids crossing the street. If parking is only allowed on one side of the street, does the street have sufficient capacity to accommodate for the expected parking demand? The petitioner should revisit their projections on peak park usage and parking demand. Based on an aerial from September, 2023, it showed at least 80 people and close to 40 cars parking on the street. The petitioner should survey usage at events that occur on the site prior to finalizing their application.

If this moves forward with the positive recommendation, a condition of approval would be added that if there is a parking problem occurring here as a result of the park usage, that the Salt Creek Park District would have to work with the Village to establish staggered usage of the playing fields or restrictions on capacity of events, or work with staff to establish some shared parking with the neighboring sites. The Staff Development Committee was generally supportive of this use.

Commissioner Jensen – inquired as to why the park district has not used this land before now.

Ms. Hilgers – shared that it is a long story and there is history between the Village and Park District, but we are working with Mr. Hubbard to be able to rezone.

Commissioner Jensen – commended the village staff for finally letting the market speak to them, this land should have been able to be developed a long time ago instead of waiting around for some commercial development.

Commissioner Cherwin – asked Ms. Hilgers more about the history of the land.

Ms. Hilgers – did not have the entire history of the land, and although she has been with the Park District for 29 years, she has not always been in her present position. There were issues between the Village and District from the beginning when purchasing the land, there is a covenant on the land, so that limits the park district to only open space use.

Commissioner Jensen – asked about putting in parking spaces; there was plenty of land and onsite parking could avoid street parking. He did not think street parking was ideal.

Ms. Hilgers – my understanding is that the number of spaces needed would take up a substantial amount of land. They needed as much land as possible for the soccer fields. Currently the land is being used primarily for practice only, and they need to periodically rotate usage of the fields to keep the grass healthy.

We discussed typical site usage with the owner of the soccer company; he shared the typical use on practice nights was that the majority of kids get dropped off, but with younger children the parents stay and it is an hour class. He had taken pictures last summer when we first started this process and he had counted 20 parked cars. I did speak with him after I got the Village staff report with the aerial photo, he mentioned that it was probably a time where they had rain outs and they had to reschedule. This is not typical, however, she acknowledged that the District needed a better understanding of the parking demand.

Commissioner Jensen – agreed with Ms. Hilgers. Asked if the Village can assist in finding shared parking arrangements, rather than the on-street parking. Parking is the only issue I see; I think it is a great use for this property.

Mr. Hubbard – stated that the Village could assist if possible.

Commissioner Sigalos – expressed that the land use was a great idea. Do you foresee putting synthetic turf at this location?

Ms. Hilgers – no not at this time. We are just starting to see what we can comfortably do without stepping on anyone's toes or trying to spend a large amount of money. We don't know the long-term plan, especially given the changes in this area that could come with the Bears. They were waiting to see how that would play out, just like everybody else.

Commissioner Sigalos – what do the Bears coming to this location have to do with your plans?

Ms. Hilgers – the Board of Commissioners was not comfortable with a long-term plan at this point until we know what's going to be happening with the Bears development or and whether it would be something completely different.

Ms. Kwandras - development of Arlington Park will have huge impact on everyone in the area; the residents across the street in Rolling Meadows, all the buildings along Salt Creek Lane, and on Rohlwing & Euclid. Depending on how these areas develop, it will have implications on the Salt Creek Park District. If the area around the subject property develops as more commercial in nature or more residential in nature, it may change what the Park District wants to do with the land. It is a waiting period to see which way the Bears are going to go and what happens with Arlington Park because that's going to dictate a lot of what happens in this area.

Commissioner Sigalos – asked about the portable lights and any plans for permanent lighting.

Ms. Hilgers – there is no plan for permanent lights. The soccer company they work with would like to use the fields for fall practices, hence the reason for the portable lights since it gets darker earlier in the fall. They reached out to the Village and the Village advised them that they needed to go through the zoning entitlement process. The lights could be in use for just one year or for a couple of years. They really don't know at this point.

Commissioner Sigalos – asked about toilet facilities and safety concerns with balls going into the pond and having children try to go after it.

Ms. Hilgers – responded that there were portable toilets on the site and that they have not had issues with balls going into the pond.

Commissioner Cherwin – asked about the plans for the southern portion of the lot, and when the property was originally purchased what was the plan.

Ms. Hilgers – there is an incline there, that is why the soccer fields are on the northern portion of the site. We have no plans for the south side of the property. The original plan was to work with a company called Market Facts. They were going to build a three phased recreation center, similar to what the District has at our Twin Lakes facility, and have a daycare. Market Facts ended up backing out and the Park District didn't get a grant that we needed to facilitate the development. Then they were also having issues with the Village and what they wanted to allow on the site. As long as a recreation facility would be built on the portion of land restricted by the covenant, then it was similar to the open space and there wouldn't be issues with the open space covenant.

Commissioner Cherwin – so did the Village ask you to develop commercial?

Mr. Hubbard – yes, before we learned that it had a restrictive covenant on it, that was the long-term vision due to proximity to the highway and so forth. Once the covenant was placed on it in 1995, there were plans for a business incubator and day care that that portion of the land not

encumbered, and recreation center on the restricted part. CoreLands was the previous owner that established the covenant.

Commissioner Cherwin – the Park District is asking to rezone the land to allow a temporary solution/usage. Is the Park Districts goal to ultimately use the land as open space for the public, or to rezone it to get more value out of it by selling.

Ms. Hilgers – we can only sell the third parcel that doesn't have a covenant on it. As she understands it, they cannot lift the covenant on the other two parcels. When she became the Director 14 years ago, she had conversations with Charles Perkins, and this was around the time that the Argent Group/DEVCO came in. There was a discussion of transferring the property to the Village and for about 8 years that was the plan. Then there was interest by the Bears of purchasing the Arlington Race Track site and the Park District received notice that the Village was not interested in purchasing the land, so we continue to try to figure out what to do with the land. Elite Soccer, based in Arlington Heights, is currently who is using the land.

Commissioner Cherwin – is in favor of roadside parking and potentially putting some permeable gravel that could sustain some parking in some of these areas next to the fields. A shared parking agreement with the building to the west seemed like it would make sense. These arrangements should be able to accommodate for the parking demand and he'd be OK with that.

Ms. Hilgers – it has been difficult to get in touch with some of the neighboring property owners. Hopefully the Village could assist.

Ms. Kwandras - the Park District is very committed to working with the Village to accommodate whatever the needs are, whether that be restrictions to one side of the street parking, working together to find other alternative parking arrangements with nearby owners, whatever the case may be.

Commissioner Green – I'm not so concerned about the parking. When you take Salt Creek Lane and with an allowance to park cars on one side, it still would provide a lot of parking spaces. It can be worked out. Do the lights go away every day? In other words, they set them up and then they take them with them at the end of the day. Or what happens to the lights? And what about the floating docks, are they removable?

Ms. Hilgers – the lights would be onsite for about 10 weeks, used for about 2.5 hours per night. The docks would remain in the water, just like at Twin Lakes, just smaller.

Commissioner Green – we will figure the parking thing out and it will be a nice use of the space. Thank you for coming tonight.

Public Comment

No comment.

RECOMMENDATION

The Conceptual Plan Review Committee encouraged the petitioner to proceed forward with their application.

Bruce Green, Chair
CONCEPTUAL PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
Kendra Maher, Recorder