Park District of Oak Park

Recreation Center Historical Stewardship Committee

Final Report

Presented to the Board of Park Commissioners on Thursday, October 5, 2006

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Committee Members:
Tom Philion, Chair and Park Board Commissioner
Beth Burdin
Doug Gilbert
Chris Goode
Nancy Holmes
Maggie Kelly
Roy Phifer
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In January of 2006, the Board of Commissioners of the Park District of Oak Park created a Recreation Center Historical Stewardship Committee to investigate historical and architectural issues pertaining to the three remaining Van Bergen designed recreation centers still existing and used within the Park District: Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers (Stevenson Center having been demolished and reconstructed in the 1960's). These 3 remaining centers were originally built in the 1920's, and represent the initial era of playground and recreational facility development in Oak Park.

Andersen, Carroll and Field Centers—and all of the other recreation centers existing in the Park District in 2006—had undergone substantial review prior to the formation of this committee through the Infrastructure Committee Study (2001), an independent engineering study conducted by the Village of Oak Park (2002), and a programming study encapsulated within the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan (2003). A general finding of these studies was that the recreation centers do not have the types of multiple programming spaces necessary to meet the recreation needs of the community—even if improvements to these facilities occur. In addition, with the completion of the Carroll Center Site Master Plan in 2005, and the Field Center Site Master Plan in early 2006, the Park Board and the Park District determined that relocating and integrating these two recreation centers with adjacent schools would be a viable goal for the future. An assumption embedded in both site master plans is that the existing recreation centers will be demolished upon the erection of new centers integrated with adjacent school facilities.
Responding to the claims of some in the community that the three Van Bergen designed facilities have a significant historical and architectural value to Oak Park—a claim supported by an informal review of the three centers, completed by the Village of Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission in 2004, at the request of the Park District—the Park Board decided to create a Recreation Center Historical Stewardship Committee (RCHSC) to explore questions related to the preservation of these three buildings. These questions were:

- Do Andersen, Carroll and Field Centers have the remaining architectural integrity and significance to consider their preservation and possible restoration? What are the varying levels of historic significance of each of these three buildings? Can these buildings be relocated?
- What would be the potential financial cost to restore these facilities?
- What are the opportunity costs if these facilities are restored and operated as stand alone single space recreational centers?

In pursuit of answers to these questions, the RCHSC invited various experts informed about historic preservation and recreation center development to make presentations and document the various facts and issues pertaining to the preservation of these centers. The RCHSC met monthly from March, 2006 until September, 2006; it toured the identified facilities, and heard an extended presentation on the current and future recreational and financial needs within the park district. The goal of the deliberations was to develop an understanding of the history and significance of the recreation centers, as well as the opportunity costs involved in seeking to preserve them. The park board requested that this understanding be shared in writing with current and future park boards, as well as the broader Oak Park community, so that informed decisions about the development of the three Van Bergen recreation centers might take place in the future.

The members of the RCHSC were: Tom Philion, Chair and Park Board Commissioner; Beth Burdin; Doug Gilbert (OPHPC chair); Chris Goode; Nancy Holmes; Maggie Kelly; and Roy Phifer. Lesley M. Gilmore, of Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc. served as a Technical Advisor to the committee. Members of the committee were selected based upon their interest in the mission of the committee and also their knowledge of architecture, historic preservation, and recreational needs in the community. Every person who applied to participate in the committee was selected as a committee member.
General Findings of the Committee

Over the duration of its tenure, the RCHSC was able to develop consensus around the following four statements. These consensus statements are:

A. The three Van Bergen designed recreation centers are historically significant in that they represent Oak Park’s participation in what was known as the “playground” or “structured play” movements of the early 20th century. These movements—which were strongly supported and financed by Oak Park voters before and after the Great Depression—led eventually to the birth of modern recreation programs in Oak Park, Illinois, and other parts of the United States in the latter half of the 20th century. While the 3 Van Bergen designed recreation centers are not recognized nationally for the role that they played in these movements, they have received considerable local and regional attention, and clearly embody the desire and effort of Oak Park to develop recreational facilities of the highest quality, at the lowest cost to the taxpayer, that enhance community cohesiveness, creativity, communication, health and fitness.

B. The designer of Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers, John Van Bergen, is clearly an architect of local, regional, and national stature and significance. Various buildings that he has designed have been preserved in communities across the United States, and especially in the Chicago area. In 1926, Van Bergen participated in and won a local contest to design shelter houses for outdoor play in Oak Park that would not exceed $6,000 in cost to construct. Van Bergen’s winning designs were built between 1927 and 1928, and are somewhat unique within the breadth of his work in that they are public, recreational facilities open to all citizens. In addition, they were built within a limited budget, and with an eye toward meeting the recreational needs of the community. Consequently, they represent an efficient, creative, and civic-minded application of Prairie School architectural values and principles.

C. The recreational needs and practices of the Oak Park community have changed substantially since the time of the creation of these three recreation centers, and are likely to continue to change and evolve in the future. Originally, the three centers were built as warming shelters and comfort stations for winter activities, and child-size spaces for creative drama and play in the fall, spring, and summer seasons. Within a very short period
of time, the buildings were expanded and modified to allow for more active, teenage, and adult programming. While the buildings remain functional for young children and small group recreational programming, it is clear from the recent comprehensive planning process and the testimony of various park district staff and consultants that they do not work well for the more flexible, active, large group, and multi-space activities that increasingly are in demand in the 21st century in Oak Park and other park districts in the area.

D. The “story” of the three Van Bergen designed recreation centers—especially their role in the development of Oak Park, the emergence of a Prairie School style of architecture, and the creation of community through play-oriented recreation—is one that needs to be more clearly articulated to Oak Park residents. As future boards ponder the redevelopment of these recreation centers to better serve dynamic community recreational interests, they should investigate ways of preserving and/or restoring various artifacts and structures so as to make this story known to future generations. This might entail restoring one or more of the recreation centers as a functioning historical and recreational site; preserving certain features or artifacts from the structures for use in new or modified facilities; and/or creating plaques, photos, exhibitions, and other mechanisms for calling attention to the leadership role that the village and park district of Oak Park played in creating high quality, community-centered recreation services in the state of Illinois.

Specific Recommendations Related to Historic Preservation and Site Development

As the RCHSC came to consensus with regard to the above statements, and especially the importance of telling the story of the role that Oak Park played in the development of high quality, community-based, play-oriented recreation, committee members necessarily discussed different options for historic preservation and site development at Andersen, Field, and Carroll Centers. The options for historic preservation and site development that the committee identified and considered were:

- Exterior restoration—especially removal of the brick veneer and restoration of the original stucco
- Interior renovation—bring back the historic character with contemporary finishes and materials
- Reconfiguration of interior spaces to better serve community needs while maintaining architectural integrity
- Adaptive re-use of the interiors (e.g., comfort stations, storage, etc...)
- Continued maintenance and investment in the buildings
- Construction of additions (e.g., kitchens, preschool rooms and storage, etc...)
- Creation of plaques and/or other displays that educate citizens about the history, significance, and names of the centers
- Creation of exclusive exterior bathroom access
- Building relocation
- Removal of existing structures and construction of new centers that preserve elements of the original Van Bergen designs

In discussing these various options, the RCHSC did not investigate in detail the financial costs entailed in their actual implementation (with the exception of building relocation), nor did it rank order the options by preference. Instead, it evaluated the architectural and structural integrity of each center, and developed site-specific recommendations with regard to the application of one or more of the above options. As the options above and recommendations below for historic preservation are not exhaustive, the committee hopes that future park boards will keep an open mind with regard to any new proposals for preservation and site redevelopment that may emerge as a result of further public discussion and analysis, or perhaps future expansion of existing park properties.

The sections below summarize the center evaluations and site-specific recommendations of the RCHSC. It is the hope of the committee that the park district and future park boards will weigh carefully these recommendations as decisions regarding center use and redevelopment are made. In particular, the RCHSC hopes that a case-by-case approach to the historic preservation of the three Van Bergen designed centers will continue to be utilized, as the three centers have very unique characters and conditions. Because the committee did not examine in detail the financial costs of its recommendations, it suggests that future park boards weigh carefully the financial and opportunity costs to the community of these recommendations, just as the park board in 1926 gave serious consideration to the financial and opportunity costs in choosing the John Van Bergen designs for its recreation centers over those of other architects and competitors.
Andersen Center

Of the three recreation centers, Andersen Center is in the best condition, and retains the most authentic relationship to the streetscape and surrounding neighborhood. As such, it has the best potential for extensive exterior and interior historic preservation and renovation, and the committee strongly endorses this concept. The site seems ideal for continued child care and community meeting use, and could be adapted or modified so as to serve as a resource for information about the history of the park district and perhaps even the larger Oak Park community (through collaboration with the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest). Programs related to cycling and children’s theater that have thematic connections to recreational activities popular in the 1920’s seem ideally suited for this center. Depending on financing, it might be useful to return certain key interior and exterior architectural features back to what they once were.

Field Center

Field Center is the recreation center that appears least suited to meeting the future recreational needs of the community; the center is in poor repair, distanced from its original streetscape, and has suffered from renovations over the years that have not enhanced its functionality, and perhaps even diminished it. Unlike Anderson, it is not directly accessible from the street, and this results in traffic congestion in the one-way alley west of the center, as children are dropped off for programs and camps. The recent site master plan for this facility calls for its eventual removal and the re-location of its functions in a new addition to Mann School—to be built in partnership with District 97, and with the approval of Oak Park Elementary School District 97. This is a concept that the committee accepts. However, the committee discussed the notion of including artifacts from and language about the center in any new school addition, as well as the possibility of restoring the center to its original size and appearance through an adaptive reuse as a comfort station or storage space, if economically viable at the time. The committee recommends that future park boards examine these and other limited options for historic preservation as the site master plan unfolds and gets enacted.

Carroll Center

The RCHSC was not able to achieve consensus with regard to specific preservation recommendations for Carroll Center. Like Field Center,
Carroll Center has had its landscape modified over the years so that it no longer sits immediately adjacent to a through village street. Like all of the centers, it also is inadequate for the active recreational programming now in demand in the park district. However, the center is easier to get to than Field Center because of the Kenilworth Avenue drop-off point that incurs into the park. In addition, it has an active pre-school program, and nearly the same architectural integrity as Andersen Center, albeit with some additional maintenance issues and challenges. While all of the members of the committee accept the long-term goal of offering new and existing recreational programs in a new center to be added on to Lincoln School (with the collaboration and approval of the Lincoln School community and Oak Park Elementary School District 97), a minority of members reject the corresponding site master plan concept of removing the existing center, preferring instead to preserve it as is in its current location because of its unique character and intimate relationship to the school, park grounds, and surrounding neighborhood. Consequently, the committee encourages future park commissioners to continue to monitor community and school responses to the 2005 site master plan, to pay careful attention to future surveys of community recreational needs and priorities, and especially to give full attention to the financial and opportunity costs to the park district of preserving this facility in either an extensive or limited way.

**Minutes from the Monthly Meetings**

Included in the remainder of this report are excerpts from the minutes of various public meetings conducted by the RCHSC that are relevant to the consensus statements and recommendations above.

**Historical Overview of the Centers**
*Presented by Frank Lipo, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest*

A. Lipo hopes the committee will consider using the Historical Society as resource on an ongoing basis.
B. An overview history of the PDOP and Village Recreation Department was presented.
   1. 1916 formation of Village Recreation Board, separate from the 1912 Park District.
   2. The village wanted to provide small parcels as playgrounds for supervised play.
   3. The first three sites purchased were where Field, Andersen, and Carroll playgrounds are now.
4. Erection of small shelters enabled the Recreation Board to provide year-round organized activities.
5. The social force of directed play prevailed, with the goal of developing children into good citizens. There was a strong focus on the arts – music, literature, drama, painting, and dance.
6. 1920s: National contest for design of four shelter houses was won by local architect John S. Van Bergen, who had worked in Frank Lloyd Wright’s office. Each shelter was to cost $6,000 or less.
   a) Field was the first one constructed, in 1927.
   b) The shelters shared common features: Central room, fireplace or central feature, stucco exteriors, overhanging eaves, casement windows, etc.
   c) Van Bergen had a successful architectural practice in Oak Park and the north shore. He continued designing in the Prairie Style longer than his contemporaries.
   d) Barrie Center was built in 1931, as designed by local architect Arthur Maiwurm.
7. 1930s: First phase of modifications included additions. The Historical Society and the Oak Park Public Library have some of the drawings for these modifications.
   a) Arthur Maiwurm, John Van Bergen, and Charles Kristen designed the improvements.
   b) Field Center was doubled in size.
   c) The drive to improve these centers and retain the programs was buttressed by the desire to prevent the economic depression from causing a cultural and recreational depression.
   d) An addition to Andersen was designed in 1939
8. 1940s-1950s
   a) In 1946 an addition was added to Carroll Center
9. 1965-66: Referendum passed, resulting in increase in the centers:
   a) New centers: Stevenson (replacement for 1920s building), Longfellow, and Fox.
   b) Modifications to Field, Carroll, Andersen, and Barrie: sizable additions, and exterior brick cladding as the most evident changes.

Discussion about the Centers
A. The following questions were raised as being worthwhile to follow up on:
   1. Are the centers of national importance?
2. Did the creation of the centers influence other park districts? Was Oak Park influenced by other park districts?
3. What is the context within which these centers were created?
4. Why didn’t the playground movement last?
5. What thought process generated the changes made in the 1960s?
6. Has the “structured play” concept run its course?

B. How does the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission (OPHPC) weigh in on significance?
   1. Doug Gilbert, OPHPC chair, stated that preservationists look at two primary issues:
      a) Historical significance – locally and nationally. This can include architectural significance and/or social/historical significance.
      b) Physical integrity – has the building been altered beyond recognition?
   2. Typically buildings aren’t examined in this way unless they are at least 50 years old, when people are able to step back and appreciate them.

C. Does location of the building matter? i.e. will the building retain its significance if it is relocated?
   1. Building location is usually an integral component of the original design.
   2. Building relocation is usually used as a last resort to saving a structure.

D. Does the fact that the centers were inexpensive utilitarian buildings matter? The cost of the original construction is not relevant, except in that it demonstrates the inventiveness of the original design and how well it fits its program.

E. How do the buildings fit today’s need?
   1. If designed/renovated for current needs, would they retain their current significance?
   2. Which aspects are representative of the center’s significance need to be identified – whether it’s the interior spaces, the exterior expression, or both.

Aspects to Explore
A. WPA murals? Where are they?

**Integrity of the Buildings**
Presentation by Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc. summarizing the physical assessment of Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers
A. Excerpts of the *Facility Assessment Report* that related to Andersen, Carroll, & Field Centers were provided to each attendee.

B. The three buildings are generally in good shape, with necessary repairs and replacements indicative of those required for materials that have reached the end of their useful lives. This is coincident with renovation campaigns that occur every 25-30 years.

C. The commonalities of the condition of these buildings – and the few singular conditions – were summarized. This summary is attached.

D. The prioritized work on the centers would bring them into good condition and make code compliant and accessibility improvements.

E. Exterior restrooms - Accessibility to the exterior entries of the restrooms would require:
   1. Ramps and landings at Andersen and Carroll to accommodate rises of 18” to 25”.
   2. Changes in grade at Field Center to accommodate rises from 7½” to 10”.
   3. The restroom exterior entry doors will require clear swing hinges in order to provide the required 32” clear opening.

F. Estimated costs associated with the recommended improvements:
   1. The estimated costs are based upon those provided by AME, who performed an assessment of the centers for the Village of Oak Park in 2002. GFAI utilized only those figures that related to work similar to that recommended by GFAI. The figures provided have not been escalated in cost; they are in 2002 dollars.
   2. Andersen Center improvements:
      a) $230,000 (excluding kitchen work which has been completed and roof work which will be completed this summer).
      b) Accessibility to exterior entries of restrooms: $15,000-$20,000.
   3. Carroll Center improvements:
      a) $230,000 (including kitchen work, as well as roof work which will be completed this summer).
      b) Accessibility to exterior entries of restrooms: $15,000-$20,000.
   4. Field Center improvements:
      a) $300,000 (including kitchen work, as well as roof work which will be completed this summer).
      b) Accessibility to exterior entries of restrooms: $5,000.

*General Discussion*

A. Restrooms:
1. Per PDOP, the toilet fixture counts complied with code in 1995.
2. Current exterior access to restrooms is provided when outdoor activity leader has a key.
3. Discussion ensued about providing more extensive exterior access to the restrooms.

B. Condition of centers:
1. The renovations would last 25-30 years.
2. The buildings are probably taking less abuse than in prior years.
3. PDOP stated that the plaster behind the wood paneling is in poor condition, and that the paneling has required painting to conceal abrasions.
4. Concern was expressed about spending money (long-term investments) on the centers prior to determination of the centers’ ultimate fate. It was agreed that reroofing and protecting the buildings was important and that it was important not to let the buildings deteriorate beyond repair. This also allows continuance of the current programming.
5. PDOP state that the Capital Improvement Plan includes about $200,000 expenditure in improvements at each of these centers. Some of this might help fund site master plans.

C. What it might take to restore the centers to their original appearance:
1. Brick removal might reveal stucco in good condition; the stucco soffits are generally in good condition. Brick removal would more strikingly distinguish the additions from the original buildings, and might require major modifications at some of the window openings.
2. The possibility of reducing one of the centers to its original size and converting it to a comfort station was posed.

D. Programmed use:
1. PDOP stated that the centers are well-suited for early childhood programs.
2. If the centers were larger, they could be used for dance as well.
3. The future of the centers will be partly dependent upon programming and the recommendations of this committee.

E. Historical Significance
1. It was agreed that the centers’ significance and integrity – as individual buildings and as a group – should be discussed further.
2. Integrity of location – current and potential relocation – should be explored.
3. The committee asked for a list of what original materials and spaces remain at the centers.
4. Future meetings will continue the discussion of programming and historical significance.

Typical Maintenance/Improvement Issues
A. Roofs
1. Gutters and downspouts have encouraged climbing onto the roofs in the past; PDOP prefers to avoid this.
2. All seven centers were reroofed around 1985.

B. Exterior Walls
1. Wood trim and wall paneling have benefited from cyclical maintenance, with fairly consistent replacement and repainting. Few repairs are required here.
2. The exterior brick at the west wall of Field Center has substantial cracking, which might not be related to the condition of the stucco walls. (It might be attributed to the condition of its own foundation.)

C. Flooring
1. Quarry tile in the 1966 additions is a durable material and has held up very well.
2. Vinyl tile in the original and early addition sections is victim to build-up of multiple layers of subfloors, underlayment, and resilient flooring. This causes telegraphing of lower layers and cracking and unevenness in top layers.

D. Interior Finishes
1. Tectum ceiling as heavy grade sports-type acoustic ceiling provides the only insulation at ceiling/roofing.
2. Wood paneling at walls was installed directly over the studs, not over plaster. Original finish was transparent.

E. Restrooms
1. Restrooms were made handicap accessible about 10 years ago.
2. At Fox, Longfellow, and Barrie the layout resulted in exterior door within HC stall.

F. Mechanical Systems
1. Air conditioning and furnace replaced recently at Carroll.
2. All three centers have sump pumps to deal with water penetration in basements.
3. The centers have large water service lines (as needed for now-abandoned skate rinks).
4. The electrical systems are generally in good condition.
5. All the centers have central air conditioning.

G. Basements for Storage
1. PDOP-wide storage space in general is inefficient and inadequate; it is decentralized.
2. At Carroll, with shortened drive and nearby school, loading access is difficult, so it’s used for long-term storage.

**Original stucco wall surfaces**
A. The exterior walls of all three centers were clad with brick during the 1966 expansions, covering the stucco on the original portion and early additions of the buildings. Where cladding the original building, the brick was set on a concrete foundation poured against the outside wall of the original foundation.
B. At Field Center, an opening by a basement window on the west wall reveals the original rough-textured stucco behind the brick. Dimension between the brick and stucco range from approximately 1/4” to 4”.

**Original centers**
A. The centers’ parks originally had full-time maintenance staff.
B. The three centers seen today were added onto in the 1930’s and 1966. New windows, roofs, and other improvements were made in 1985.

**Architectural Significance**
*Presentation by Marty Hackl, illustrated by Power Point*

A. History of Van Bergen and how he came to be an architect of the “Prairie School.”
B. Examples of Van Bergen’s residential and school designs throughout Oak Park, the Chicago suburbs, and Illinois.
C. Discussion about Oak Park’s 1926 competition for the playground shelter designs.
D. Proposition of Andersen, Carroll, and Field Centers as the only true Prairie School buildings owned by the citizens of Oak Park.
E. Illustrations of Andersen, Carroll, Field, and Stevenson Centers as they appeared prior to 1966 renovations.
F. The question of integrity: Marty posited that the 1966 alterations are reversible, and that if removed, the buildings would be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
G. Example of Ravinia School complex – with mix of original building and additions –being on the National Register of Historic Places, as an understanding of the value of the evolution of a building over time.
Presentation by Jack Barclay, architect of numerous Oak Park (and beyond) buildings since 1958:

A. Jack designed the renovations of Andersen, Carroll, Field Centers, as well as the new centers Fox, Longfellow, and Stevenson in 1966.
B. Jack spoke of his experience as a youth with architects Charlie Kristen, Rudy Maiwurm, and Sam Bird. Kristen and Maiwurm designed modifications to the recreation centers.
C. Jack's recollection is that a $550,000 referendum funded the 1966 renovations at Andersen, Barrie, Carroll, and Field Centers and new construction of Fox, Longfellow, and Stevenson Centers. He did not know why the original Stevenson Center was demolished at this time.
D. He presented a timeline for various projects on the recreation centers:
   1. 1966 renovations and new construction (see above).
   2. 1977: Installed air conditioning at Fox and Longfellow centers (and possibly Andersen and Carroll).
   3. 1981: Structural repairs at Carroll Center (two columns in main room).
   5. 1982: Re-roofing (original and additions) of Andersen, Barrie, Carroll, and Field.
   6. 1985: ADA improvements at Andersen and Field.
E. Examination of why the center work was done.
   1. Recreation Areas: Their Design and Equipment by the National Recreation Association (1958) stated ideal distance from home to playground as no more than ½ mile (to allow it to be walked), and that the best place for a playground was near an elementary school. Heavy-traffic streets should be avoided.
   2. The Oak Park Rec Dept was really a leader in this area.
   3. 1960's building expansions were necessitated by expansion in the programming for kids and adults.
      a) The minimal toilets – designed for kids – were updated for adults and children.
      b) The modifications added support services and increased control by adding offices and reducing the number of exterior doors.
      c) The three new centers each had two large spaces.
4. The trend seemed to be leading towards the "Ridgeland Common approach" with a larger building, with a pool, staffed year-round.

F. 1965 condition of the centers:
1. Jack didn’t recall that any one of the centers were in particularly great shape.
2. Exterior trim was starting to rot.
3. The built-in gutters were in bad shape.
4. The windows were in bad shape.
5. The stucco was not in real bad shape; it (and the decorative tile) was retained behind the brick installation.
   a) Masonry ties penetrated the stucco to hold the brick.
   b) In some areas, there was enough concrete foundation wall to support the brick. In other areas, a steel shelf angle was used to support the brick.
   c) There should be at least a 1” gap between the brick and the stucco.
7. General design approach: Jack stated that he wasn’t trying to be sensitive to the Van Bergen style, as appreciation for the Prairie School hadn’t really surfaced yet. He did think there were a lot of neat aspects to the original designs, which he tried to respect.
8. The cul-de-sac in front of Carroll had been created c.1957.

G. Current condition of the centers:
1. Jack opined that the centers are in better shape now than before the 1966 renovations.
2. Jack hasn’t been asked to design centers like this for 20-30 years - even these had a couple of large rooms.

**General Discussion**
A. The centers are primarily just for kids, with a few exceptions.
B. Programming:
1. PDOP stated that the neighborhood recreation center model has struggled for a number of years. The programs were subsidized until PDOP required a minimum number of participants.
2. Fox is centrally located, has two large spaces, and a lift, which makes it more efficient.
3. Carroll has West Suburban Special Recreation program in the summer.
4. Field is heavily programmed, primarily with pre-school.
5. PDOP will have staff present more information on center programming, at a later session.
C. Question was raised as to which date any/all center(s) should/could be restored to.
D. Question was raised as to what original fabric remains at the centers.
E. It was agreed that the paramount question is how to balance the significance of the architectural and social history of the centers with the programming needs of the community.

Recreational Considerations
Presentation of Recreation Programming at Andersen, Carroll & Field Centers and the Recreation Department Reorganization by Matt Ellmann, Superintendent of Recreation; Kent Newton, Superintendent of Business Operations and Bret Fahnstrom, Manager of Events and Programs

A. Presently (2005) - Comprehensive Program Participation Report
   1. Recreation Department in 2005 had 18 full time employees (6 involved with Centers)
   2. Budget $3,912,380 just under 50% of the total annual budget. (Centers $1,235,111)
   3. Provides a host of services (sports, skating, gymnastics, camps, fitness, arts, etc.)
   4. Dependent on affiliates (fills role for specialized training and competition in athletics)
   5. 4 Programming Divisions
   6. Programs Offered 2,816 (25% filled vs. 18% cancelled)
   7. Compare to 2004, 2,993 (23% filled vs. 20% cancelled)
   8. Compare to 2000, 1,036 (41% cancelled) – Centers & Teens only
   9. Program Approach more target driven
   10. Contact Hours (Camps 1st, Youth Athletics 2nd, Gymnastics 3rd, Fitness 4th)

B. Community Center based programming mainly falls into seven categories
   1. *Youth Leagues & Sports Instruction (Soccer, Flag Football, T-Ball, Basketball, etc)
   2. Youth and Adult Visual Arts (Painting, Crafts, etc.)
   3. Preschools/Playschools/Early Childhood (Preschool, Parent & Tots Classes)
   4. *Youth Trips & Outings (Youth Holiday Trips)
   5. General/Special Interest (Dog Obedience, Magic, etc.)
6. *Special Events (small scale, holiday family activities, penny carnivals)
7. Camps (Action, Basic)
   *Not necessarily dependent on Buildings/Facilities

C. Additional Uses
1. User Groups (Senior Bridge, WSSRA, Coin Club)
2. Comfort Stations (Restrooms)
3. Resident Rentals (Birthday Parties, Baby Showers, Church Groups)
4. Meetings (Affiliates, Park District, Neighborhood)
5. Polling Places

D. Future Programming
1. Programming needs and desires have changed in today’s society
2. The present community center model of service delivery isn’t working as it once was.
3. People are reluctant to send their children to the centers without supervision
4. Youth recreational programming is becoming much more skill based as opposed to pure recreation as the focus
5. Our society is looking for specialty programming (look at all the martial arts)
6. Competition is in (look at travel sports clubs)

E. Agency looks to be trend setters and ahead of the curve
1. This can be accomplished through involvement, education and innovation
2. Also possible physical renovations to the interior to target special functions (i.e., arts, after school)
3. Baby Boomers are 42% of the population
4. Known to work hard, play hard, spend hard
5. Place high value on exercise and fitness
6. Less interested in civic engagements (volunteering)
7. Increased demand for outdoor/adventure programming
8. Continued interest in arts and entertainment
9. Park District planning on After school based programs (day care)

F. Recreation Department Reorganization
1. In Progress (Plan assembled 2005, being implemented 2006, fully in place 2007)
2. Reason for reorganization
   a) Systems (stressed, outdated and lacking focus & direction)
b) Personnel (over independent, need mentoring, more accountability, work balance, margin)
c) Programming (duplicated, stagnant, not trend setting)
3. Benefits of Reorganization
   a) Creating Balance (employee workloads)
   b) Maximizing resources (positions developed to compliment staff skills & talents)
   c) Provide new opportunities (system encourages ownership, accountability and teamwork)
   d) Happy Customers (Customer Service Team to improve coordination, reduce wait lists)
   e) More and new Programs (eliminate duplication so staff can be creative and innovative)
   f) Meeting the communities needs (more responsive Park District)
4. Center and all programming will be Market Driven
5. The fall 2006 Brochure reflects the Program Reorganization, its initiatives (new topic orientation format suggested all the way back in 1998).

G. Summary- Programming and utilization of the centers will challenge the Park District in the future
   1. Balancing indoor and outdoor users
   2. Staffing and training affordable work force
   3. Facilities do have expanded potential with physical and managerial care
   4. Maintain neighborhood feel
   5. Limited by their size (too small for active and physical activities)
   6. Physical characteristics (ceiling heights, flooring, configuration, site lines, windows, etc.)
   7. Lend themselves to Early Childhood and After School
   8. Programming (Day Time), Visual Arts, Family Programming, Meetings (evenings & Saturdays), Rentals (Sundays, non use times)

Mr. Newton reviewed:
• Fund Accounting
• Cost Recovery Policy for Recreation Programs
• Capital Improvement Plan
• Recreation Fund detail related to the costs of operating the recreation centers.

Review of Site Master Plans at Andersen, Carroll & Field Parks
Mr. Gary Balling described the existing layout of Anderson Park; how the park functions and also described the new plan and the work that is to be carried out. Mr. Balling introduced John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc. and requested that John speak about the master plans Altamanu Inc. has been involved with (Carroll and Field).

Mr. Mac Manus stated that Altamanu Inc. when beginning the planning processes was not invested in the decision to restore or not restore, keep or not keep the centers. The history, present condition and potential future use of the Centers were discussed in detail at the Community meetings. Mr. Mac Manus stated that there did not seem to be a large upwelling of public support for the Centers at Carroll and Field Parks. Some spoke with fondness of their own personal experiences of the Centers, others spoke about the present conditions and uses but there was more interest in the potential programs that could be provided than the buildings themselves.

Mr. Mac Manus addressed the location of the buildings on aerials of the parks and stated that the relative relationship of these buildings was not as was originally intended. Both Carroll and Field Parks were expanded by the removal of the road between the Center and the adjacent school. This created a new spatial relationship between the building and the park and to the access roads, making it difficult in particular at Field to access the building. There, the main auto access to the building is by using the alley which creates traffic and a safety hazard.

The relationship between the building and the park remains as intended at Andersen, with easy access for the main road to the building and a very pleasant and practical relationship between the building and the park. The resulting master plans of Carroll and Field look different. In the Carroll Master Plan the building is removed, in the Field Master Plan the building is still shown. However, the intent is to phase out the buildings in both parks when new centers are constructed attached to the schools which will need approval from the schools.

Mr. Goode stated that he was not able to attend the public meetings but that he had made his feelings on the subject of the Centers well known to Mr. Mac Manus and Mr. Grandy by phone. He did not agree that the Centers are not well sited in the parks nor did he think that access was particularly difficult at Carroll Park as there is a turn around close to the building. He believed that the Centers continue to divide the park into intimate spaces and still have wonderful views of
the park. Mr. Goode stated that he believed that there was more support for the keeping of the Field Center as the controversy over Carroll Center had been publicized in the papers. Mr. Mac Manus stated that the papers did cover the controversy but that there was no great support for keeping the buildings. Even after the articles appeared the number of supporters for restoring the Centers remained static.

It was questioned whether Altamanu had looked at removing the addition to the Carroll Center and if it would help. Mr. Mac Manus stated that Altamanu Inc had looked at expanding the existing Center to try to meet the need for additional space but had not looked at reducing the size of the center.

Mr. Gilbert stated that it was unfortunate that the center that was to be kept was Field and not Carroll as the Carroll Center was a much finer building and was in better condition and had wonderful views to the park.

Mr. Philion stated for clarification that the Center at Field was not intended to stay but that it would be phased over time. It remained on the drawings because the community could not decide where to place the new center, whether it should be attached to the school at the north or at the southern end.

Mr. Balling spoke about the need for spaces that supported new recreational activities and that the buildings were not very flexible and could not accommodate more than one activity at a time.

Mr. Ellmann spoke of the need for flexibility in the Centers and the need for the spaces and conditions that were appropriate for the programs the Park District wished to provide.

**Logistics of Moving a Building**

Tim Kelly of Kelly Construction presented a PowerPoint presentation on the logistics of moving a building. He covered the advantages and problems encountered when moving a building. Mr. Kelly reviewed the selection of a site, pouring the new foundation and the order of events required to move a building. Mr. Kelly provided a very general cost estimate in the range of $400,000 to move a recreation center within the existing lot.
An Assessment of the Original Architectural Items Remaining by
Lesley M. Gilmore, Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc

Park District of Oak Park
Historic Stewardship Committee
August 16, 2006

Recreation Centers – Original items that remain:
The items listed are those that are deemed to have been part of the original construction, as well as part of
the early additions/modifications (c.1931 in the case of Field Center and c.1946 in the case of Carroll).

Andersen Center:
1. Volume of the main activity space, kitchen, and janitor’s closet, with basement beneath for
   warming (during ice skating season). **Except for:**
   a. Revised west end configuration where triangular prow replaced squared entry, c. 1966.
      (Note, the entry was relocated to the north as part of the 1966 addition and renovation.)
   b. Windows (they were originally wood casements) and doors.
   c. Tectum acoustical panels at ceiling.
   d. Reinforcing and support of center truss.
   e. Closets installed at east end by prow.
2. Roof shape over main activity space, kitchen, and janitor’s closet.
3. Stucco-clad chimney.
4. North exterior stairs down to the basement below the activity space.
5. Trusses and rafters in main activity space.
6. Fireplace and bas relief sculpture.
7. Murals underneath the paneling at the south prow? (The murals are evident in the pre-
   construction photos taken c.1966.)
8. Benches at south prow.
9. The following modifications have been made to the building (see also exceptions listed in item 1
   above):
   a. A c.1966 L-shaped addition wrapped the northeast corner of the building, providing a new
      entry lobby, office, restrooms, and a storage room.
   b. The stage (in prow) at the north end of the activity room was removed c.1966 in order to
      access the spaces in the addition to the north.
   c. A brick veneer was added to the original building, in order to blend with the brick veneer of
      the addition.
   d. The original built-in gutters were removed.
   e. Much of the stucco soffit has been replaced or parged over.
   f. Wood paneling has been applied to the interior plaster walls of the main activity space.
   g. The flooring (tile) has been replaced or covered over with several layers of underlayment and
      subsequent layers of flooring.

Carroll Center:
1. Volume of the main activity space (dates to 1946 with the addition east of the columns, which
   reflect the original east wall location), kitchen, and janitor’s closet (was restroom originally), with
   basement beneath for warming (during ice skating season). **Except for:**
   a. The entries were relocated from the chamfered corners at far northeast and southeast during
      the 1966 addition / renovation to the inside L at the southeast intersection of the building and
      the addition.
   b. Windows (they were originally wood casements) and doors.
   c. Tectum acoustical panels at ceiling.
2. Roof shape over main activity space (as expanded in 1946), kitchen, and janitor’s closet.
3. Stucco-clad chimney.
4. North exterior stairs down to the basement below the activity space (these were probably added with the 1946 east addition to the activity room).
5. Trusses and rafters in main activity space.
6. Fireplace and bas relief.
7. Murals underneath the paneling at the north curved bay? (The murals are evident in the pre-construction photos taken c.1966.)
8. The following modifications have been made to the building (see also exceptions listed in item 1 above):
   a. A c.1966 L-shaped addition wrapped the southwest corner of the building, providing a new entry lobby, office, restrooms, and a storage room.
   b. The stage (in curved bay) at the south end of the activity room was removed c.1966 in order to access the spaces in the addition to the south.
   c. A brick veneer was added to the original building, in order to blend with the brick veneer of the addition.
   d. The original built-in gutters were removed.
   e. The stucco soffits were replaced with wood.
   f. Wood paneling has been applied to the interior plaster walls of the main activity space.
   g. The flooring (tile) has been replaced or covered over with several layers of underlayment and subsequent layers of flooring.

Field Center (first center to be dedicated, in 1927):
1. Volume of the main activity space, kitchen, and janitor’s closet (was restroom originally), including Maiwurm-designed additions to the north and south in 1931. **Except for:**
   a. Windows (they were originally wood casements) and doors. **(NOTE: the window placement in the walls does appear to match the original – they are set deep in the walls and could remain in place if the brick veneer were removed.)**
   b. Tectum acoustical panels at ceiling.
2. Roof shape over main activity space, kitchen, and janitor’s closet.
3. Stucco-clad chimney.
4. The southwest and northwest enclosed stairways to the basements (this were part of the 1931 additions).
5. Rafters in main activity space.
6. Fireplace and bas relief sculpture.
7. Stucco soffits.
8. Raised stage area in south prow (1931 addition).
9. The following modifications have been made to the building (see also exceptions listed in item 1 above):
   a. A c.1966 addition was built at the front (east elevation) of the building, providing a new entry lobby, office, restrooms, and a storage room. The entry was relocated from the center of the east elevation to the inside L at the southeast intersection of the building and the addition.
   b. A brick veneer was added to the original building, in order to blend with the brick veneer of the addition.
   c. The original built-in gutters were removed.
   d. Wood paneling has been applied to the interior plaster walls of the main activity space.
   e. The flooring (tile) has been replaced or covered over with several layers of underlayment and subsequent layers of flooring.

Gilmore Franzen Architects, Inc.
P.O. Box 266 Gallatin Gateway, MT 59730 (406) 763-9069 Fax: (708)386-4630