

Reasons why I, Mike Stroz am running for Park Board Commissioner

You may remember the Park Ave Beach issue, where 2 ½ years ago the City wanted to close the beach because of security concerns and the Park District didn't fight back, but the public did. I led that effort and by working with the City to improve the infrastructure and having police present to resolve the safety issues of more traffic in front of the water treatment plant, the Park District was able to agree to continuing boat launching at Park Ave Beach.

And that's why I'm running. A group of voters after seeing what I had gotten done at Park Ave Beach asked me to run and do the same for other issues that are facing the Park District. Whether the issue is what will happen to the HP Country Club golf course when the Sunset Valley course renovation is completed, the priorities of renovating or adding onto Centennial Ice Rink, or the need to restart the Lakeshore Committee, I'll listen to all the users about what they want and how the Park District can work for them and take those views to my fellow Commissioners and the staff.

Skills, Talent and Experience I bring to the position

I bring a different set of skills to the Park District Board. I was a successful project manager on Wall Street and I have run and managed multimillion dollar projects. I know how to stay on track and when tweaks are needed while getting the most for your taxes or user fees in the Park District.

We can't just expect people to come to Board meetings to express their thoughts. Park District Commissioners should practice "management by wandering around" – being out at Park District events and facilities, both participating and talking to people. With my background in sales and marketing I know how to draw people into these conversations, and get back to them after researching their issue or concern. In order to do this, you need to go to the users, therefore I will commit to attending or visiting a minimum of two events or facilities per week excluding my typical visits to the Rec Center and Park Avenue Beach to gain feedback.

Five years ago, when we moved here from Connecticut, my wife Stephany and I chose Highland Park largely because of the Lake, Ravinia Festival, the Botanic Gardens, a vibrant downtown and the terrific park system. Having lived in a number of other cities, I bring a new perspective to the board and at the same time I appreciate that an independent Park District is a great asset.

Job Description and Time Commitment

A Park Board Commissioner needs to be a careful listener, a critical thinker and a good negotiator. Decisions are made as a group, not by one person. I could have the best ideas in the world, but I need to persuade at least two other Board member for something to happen. My skill set of project management and sales and marketing

means, that I can and have, achieved consensus from groups of stakeholders with dramatically different viewpoints. And since financial oversight is a vital part of the Commission's work, it's not just reading a budget or setting prices or allocating costs. It's asking if it makes sense and if it reflects the community's priorities. In theory, Commissioners deal with policy and they avoid being involved in day to day operations on things like maintenance. But it's not always clear cut. Case in point. Park district staff doesn't keep the boardwalk at Rosewood Beach shoveled in the winter. But if it's not shoveled it's not easy for people to walk. Is this a maintenance issue or an access issue?

Between keeping up with the information Park District Staff gives board members, meetings and being out in the community, attending events and talking to residents, I expect to spend at least 20 hours a week on Park District Board activities. At the beginning I won't be surprised if the time required is even greater because as a new Board member I know I'll have a lot of learning to do, but because I'm retired, that won't be a problem.

What are the important issues and how I'd address them – There is so much to do!!

- The Park District is about to embark on a major building program. Bringing those projects in on time and on budget is a huge task. I think my project management experience will be extremely helpful here.
- There are numerous examples of deferred maintenance in the existing facilities. We should get all the facilities inspected and develop a maintenance schedule, especially at Park Ave Beach.
- The Park District does a superb job providing facilities and programs for families and children, but we need to do more to meet the needs of seniors, empty nesters and those with modest incomes. In general, facilities and programs need to be made more affordable since our citizens are bearing a high financial burden to reside in this great community. The solutions will include not only new programs but also things like bike paths that connect to the City's bicycle routes.
- The Park District has done a magnificent job improving Rosewood Beach, but the other three beaches, Ravine, Park Avenue and Moraine have been neglected. I want to see the City and the Park District collaborate on a long range plan for Park Avenue Beach. But I also want to see improved access and more people enjoying all four beaches.
- The recently completed long range plan, Greenprint 2024 is a solid start, but we can do even better. Long range plans require regular updates and tweaking. And some decisions concerning the prioritization of Track 1 and Track 2 projects such as the Centennial Ice Rink lobby renovation versus an expansion of the ice rink require, in my opinion, a reconsideration.

- Given the ongoing debates about District 112 schools, the question of land swapping is not yet clear and I will consider any reasonable request through proper channels, especially when the majority of Highland Park is behind the proposal.
- I believe there ought to be room for more latitude when it comes to limiting the park's users' activities. For example, when Rosewood Beach re-opened, dog walking was no longer an approved activity, not even in the months when there are no bathers. I think the Park District could have worked harder to see if we could find a win-win to this issue and I will work to make this limitation less restrictive to users with dogs.
- I think the way the Park Board makes its decisions is in itself an issue. Consensus is terrific; I would hope some votes would be unanimous but it appears that the culture of the present Park Board makes unanimity a requirement. Consider that in the last three years out of 78 substantive votes the Board voted unanimously in 77 of them. I believe that on some issues, a final vote that reflects respectful disagreement is healthy and I believe that those users and taxpayers on the other side, deserve an advocate on the Board.

How to reach out and engage all members of the community

I believe that Park District Commissioners should be doing a lot of outreach, not sitting back and waiting for people to come to their meetings. For example, last year the Board seriously considered changing the name of Jens Jensen Park because they mistakenly thought he was a Nazi sympathizer. If they had checked with the Ravinia neighbors, they would have found they were pleased with the name. If they'd checked with the historians or Jensen experts, they would have found they had been misinformed. The good news is that the proposal was quietly dropped after the public outcry but it made the Park District look like they hadn't done their homework. There are a number of ways to improve community involvement.

- There should be suggestion boxes at all Park District facilities and Board members should get a monthly summary of what suggestions were made.
- Under the present rules, if you want to make a short statement to the Park Board you have to wait until the end of the meeting, so you may be sitting there 3 hours to speak for two minutes. That's a real deterrent. The Park District should follow the City Council's model and let people make short speeches at the beginning of the meeting.
- The Park Board should take a page from District 113's playbook and create a Citizens' Advisory Committee to help oversee construction projects. For District 113, this resulted in both more transparency and substantial cost savings.
- Publicity and public awareness also improve community involvement. The Park District does so many exciting and innovative things, there should be more publicity for things like how they are handling the loss of virtually all their ash

trees because of the emerald ash borer and their work on the Skokie River Woods restoration. I would like to see articles about Park District activities in the City's publication, The Highlander and I think we should make more of an effort to have the press cover Park District programs, not just Commission meetings.

- There are some structural changes the Park District Board should consider to improve citizen participation. The President of the Board of Commissioners should rotate to different members as it was on past, not continue with the same leadership, year after year as it is now. Different Board Presidents will have slightly different priorities which will draw new groups into discussions with the board. I also want to explore making Commissioner's terms 4 years as opposed to the current 6 years, so we need to get your votes more frequently to approve of our leadership. Voting is the most basic citizen participation.

I hope you will consider supporting me, the candidate with a fresh perspective and skill set who gets things done, to the Park District Board. **For more info, go to MikeForOurParks. Org and vote for me, Mike Stroz for Commissioner.** Thank you.