

# Downers Grove Park District **WALNUT PARK**

QUESTION AND ANSWER  
**UPDATED NOV. 2021**



# WALNUT PARK PROPERTY Q&A

## 1. How has the Park District received community input about the Walnut Park property and desired amenities in the past?

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community input is a vital component in developing new recreation amenities to meet the current and future needs and desires of residents living in Downers Grove. The Park District invites the community to preview the plans and give feedback as we continue the long-term master planning process for the Walnut Park property at [dgparks.org](http://dgparks.org).

Prior to the purchase of the additional 14.8 acres in 2015, the Park District hosted focus group discussions in 2013. This input indicated a high demand for an indoor sports facility featuring artificial turf and other recreation amenities.

### SURVEYS

In 2017, the District conducted a community needs assessment, which included a statistically valid survey, a public open house and stakeholder interviews. The community needs assessment indicated that the top needs or priorities of the community included: Walking & Biking Trails, Adult Fitness & Wellness and Adult and Youth Sports Programs. Top needs and priorities may be incorporated at Walnut Park or other parks and facilities throughout the District over the years to come.

In December 2020, the District conducted a community-wide online survey. This survey indicated a high desire for the following amenities: Walking & Biking Trails, Multi-purpose Space, Sports Training & Performance Space, 100x60 Yard Synthetic Turf, Tennis Courts, a Playground and Dog Park. In addition, the community has expressed the need for enhanced natural areas and education in the areas adjacent to the Belmont Prairie and buffer. [Click to view the 2020 survey summary.](#)

### PRESENTATION

On Sept. 16, 2021, District staff presented a draft preview for the long-term master plan with conceptual drawings to the community and the Board of Commissioners at a public Board Workshop. The presentation was live streamed through Zoom and is now available online for viewing. [View the Board Presentation.](#)

### OPEN HOUSES

The District hosted three open houses in 2021 (Sept. 28, Oct. 6 and Oct. 9) for residents to preview the long-term master plan ideas and conceptual drawings proposed for Walnut Park. District staff were available for questions, welcomed feedback and gathered additional ideas from the community. Staff also provided a site walkthrough for those interested. Feedback forms were available for visitors to complete following the presentation. [View the feedback.](#)

### ONLINE PORTAL

The draft master plan concepts, this Q&A, the board presentation, feedback forms and additional information is available on the District's website at [www.dgparks.org/walnut-park-master-plan](http://www.dgparks.org/walnut-park-master-plan). This site will be updated throughout the master planning process. The community is encouraged to complete the feedback form along the way.

## 2. What are the next steps for the long-term master planning of the Walnut Park property?

- Utilize community feedback to make revisions to draft plans developed by Wight & Company.
- Feasibility study conducted and presented to Board of Commissioners.
- Long-term master plan finalized.
- Additional community engagement opportunities and updates along the way!

# WALNUT PARK PROPERTY Q&A

## 3. What is a Park Master Plan?

A master plan is a dynamic long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development. It is based on public input, surveys, planning initiatives, existing development, physical characteristics, and social and economic conditions.

The previous draft concepts for Walnut Park were developed to help the community envision possible amenities that the site could offer. These rough concepts were a starting point for conversation. The input gathered at the Open Houses and through the online feedback forms is helping to guide the master planning process. Additional community feedback is welcomed!

The District anticipates the long-term master plan for the Walnut Park property to be implemented over numerous years and a series of phases.

### POSSIBLE PHASES

- Indoor Recreation Phase: Athletic Dome & Sports Complex
- Outdoor Recreation Phase
- Nature & Prairie Phase

### WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF A MASTER PLAN?

- Provides an organized framework for the future development of a site.
- Utilizes community feedback to envision a long-term plan.
- Suggests potential amenities and facilities that could meet the needs indicated by residents.
- Identifies potential funding sources.
- Includes a feasibility study outlining opportunities, threats, estimated revenue and operating costs.

## 4. How will the possible development of the Walnut Park property impact the existing Belmont Prairie Nature Preserve, connected prairie buffer, neighbors and roadways?

### BELMONT PRAIRIE

Natural area preservation is at the heart of the District's mission. The Park District will continue to preserve and protect the Belmont Prairie and prairie buffer. Any possible development of the Walnut Park property would carefully avoid any potential hydrological, ecological or other adverse impacts on the prairie and buffer. Protecting the buffer zone is required and any development on it must be approved by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

The development of the Walnut Park property could help the District to improve the health and accessibility of the buffer and prairie, assist with raising awareness and provide ways to educate visitors about this treasured natural area in our community. In the conceptual plans, an indoor/outdoor nature pavilion with flexible multipurpose space has been proposed. In addition, new and improved paved and limestone walking trails would feature interpretive signage about the historical significance of the prairie and its ecosystem.

### NEIGHBORS

To create a sound barrier and provide privacy for nearby residents, a berm and buffer zone would be planted on the east side of the property. This buffer zone will feature native landscaping and trees that will complement the Belmont Prairie. Natural landscaping will be incorporated throughout the site including on the west side of the property.

### ROADWAYS

To address possible concerns about traffic flow/patterns and the impact of the development on the nearby roadways, the District will work with the Village of Downers Grove to complete a traffic study and determine future needs. An additional sidewalk along Walnut Avenue will also be explored.



# WALNUT PARK PROPERTY Q&A

## 5. *Why is a dog park not included in the conceptual plans?*

Over the last several years, community feedback has indicated a strong desire for a dog park within the Downers Grove Park District. Therefore, the development of a dog park has been indicated as a high priority in the District's Master Plan.

The District is carefully considering whether or not Walnut Park is the best location for a dog park. In accordance with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, dogs and other pets are prohibited in prairies and buffers to protect the delicate ecosystems that thrive there. With the nearby Belmont Prairie and buffer, it is important to adhere to this ordinance at the Walnut property to ensure the health of the native plants and wildlife.

We continue to explore ideal locations for a dog park and welcome feedback regarding this opportunity at Walnut Park. The community can provide feedback via email and the online feedback form.

## 6. *Why is a pool not included in the conceptual plans?*

Over the last two decades, community feedback regarding the possible development of a pool by the Park District has been extremely mixed. Following the opinion of the majority, the District allocated available resources towards other endeavors over the last 15 years. This includes the construction of Veterans Memorial Pavilion at Fishel Park; development of Washington Park; improvements at Lyman Woods, Patriots Park, Lincoln Center, Doerhoefer Park, O'Brien Park, Downers Grove Golf Club, Recreation Center and more.

Maintaining fiscal responsibility, the District is careful not to duplicate services already established by other organizations in the community. Currently, Downers Grove offers pools at locations such as Indian Boundary YMCA, Downers Grove Swim & Racquet Club, Good Samaritan Health and Wellness Center, Downers Grove North High School and Downers Grove South High School.

Downers Grove Park District has established a Pool Pass Exchange Program to offer resident rates at nearby pools and aquatic centers. Downers Grove residents receive resident rates on season passes at Butterfield Park District Recreation & Aquatic Center and discounted season pass rates at Paradise Bay Water Park both located in Lombard. More information is available at [dgparks.org](http://dgparks.org).

The Park District is planning to develop aquatic-based amenities at McCollum Park and Walnut Park and continues to explore opportunities for additional aquatic partnerships. At Walnut Park, a small splashpad is being proposed at the outdoor playground, which would serve residents at the north end of Downers Grove. At the south end of the community, the District is developing plans for a large sprayground facility at McCollum Park. The timeline for the McCollum Park playground will be available soon and is anticipated to occur over the next two years.

## 7. *Why is the Park District considering developing Walnut Park instead of a site located closer to the center of Downers Grove?*

The Walnut Park property was acquired through two past land purchases—4.8 acres in 2008 and 14.8 acres in 2015. The property currently features one soccer field and a small picnic pavilion with a gravel parking lot. The site is mostly undeveloped land featuring a mowed path, which connects to the Belmont Prairie Nature Preserve and prairie buffer.

Downers Grove Park District continually seeks opportunities to acquire land that is well suited for future parks or facilities. Typically, undeveloped land is economically more viable for the Park District compared to land sites that have already been developed. Although centrally located land sites would be ideal for future parks and facilities, there are rarely opportunities to purchase land in the center of Downers Grove at a rate that is financially feasible for the District.

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The District is extremely conscious of providing amenities in accessible and equitable locations throughout Downers Grove. This is a priority and consideration in all future planning. When choosing land to acquire, there are a number of factors considered including, but not limited to, purchase price, cost of development and whether or not the site could feasibly help to fill a need or desire indicated by the community.

## 8. How will the Walnut Park property differ from existing sites or facilities located in the Park District?

The Walnut Park property presents a unique balance of active and passive recreation opportunities. Approximately 50% of the site would be dedicated to an indoor sports complex and outdoor athletic fields on the north end of the site. The additional 50% on the south end of the property would focus on accessible natural areas for visitors to explore. The preservation of open space and the addition of new recreation amenities would support tourism in DuPage County and positively impact home values for Downers Grove residents.

Easily accessible by Ogden Avenue, I-355 and I-88 on the north end of Downers Grove, the Walnut Park property would serve as a sports destination to accommodate local and regional tournaments, large-scale community events, expos and more. The sports complex and athletic fields would complement amenities offered at McCollum Park and provide the opportunity for sports activities to be offered year round. In addition, the District could expand recreation programs that have outgrown the space available at the Downers Grove Recreation Center.

Currently, Belmont Prairie and the buffer serve as passive recreation space. Development of a nature education pavilion and enhanced trails with interpretive signage would encourage visitors to explore and learn more about the natural world and the importance and significance of Belmont Prairie. With a dramatic increase in demand for nature programs, the District is quickly reaching capacity at Lyman Woods Interpretive Center. The nature pavilion at Walnut Park would provide the opportunity to offer additional nature-based programs for all ages.

## 9. How will the Park District pay for this facility and operations?

Downers Grove Park District will begin work with a consultant to develop a financial feasibility study over the next year. This study will provide an analysis of the economic viability including construction costs, operating costs and return on investment.

For the funding of this project, the District is exploring a public/private partnership, grants and utilizing capital funds. The District anticipates the long-term master plan for the Walnut Park property to be completed over numerous years and a series of phases.

### POSSIBLE PHASES

- Indoor Recreation Phase: Athletic Dome & Sports Complex
- Outdoor Recreation Phase
- Nature & Prairie Phase