

WALNUT PARK PROPERTY Q&A

1. 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.

Over the last decade, the Downers Grove Park District has gathered input from the community regarding the development of this site and overall recreation needs. Community feedback was collected through a needs assessment (2017), public open house (2017), stakeholder interviews (2017) and focus group discussions (2013). This past input indicated a high demand for an indoor sports facility featuring artificial turf and other recreation amenities.

The 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.

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, purchasing price, cost of development, whether or not the site could feasibly help to fill a need or desire indicated by the community.

If developed into a sports complex, the Walnut Park property would serve as a sports destination easily accessible by Ogden Avenue, I-355 and I-88 on the north end of Downers Grove. It would complement the sports-based amenities offered at McCollum Park located on the south end of Downers Grove. If an indoor sports facility was built at the Walnut Park property, sports activities could be offered year round and the District could expand recreation programs that have outgrown the space available at the Downers Grove Recreation Center.

2. How has the Park District received community input about this property and desired amenities in the past?

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.

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 6 needs and priorities of the community included: Walking & Biking Trails, Adult Fitness & Wellness and Adult and Youth Sports Programs.

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3. How can residents provide feedback in the future?

The intent of the survey conducted in December 2020 was to kick off the long-term master planning of the Walnut Park property. The opportunity for community feedback is always available to residents and the District will continue to seek input during the planning process. If you have additional thoughts to share about the planning of the Walnut Park property, here are a few ways to reach out to us:

- Send us an email at www.dgparks.org/contact-us.
- Attend an upcoming board meeting. View the schedule at www.dgparks.org/meetings.

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

The Board of Commissioners will review the results of the recent community survey and will continue discussions to develop a vision for the Walnut Park property. Once a long-term master plan has been established for the site, it will be shared with residents. Community engagement is a vital component in any park or facility project. Typically, the District will share any proposed park or facility concepts and renderings with the community through the District's website, social media and email communication as well as through public open houses. These channels of engagement provide residents with the opportunity to share their thoughts and suggestions throughout the planning process.

5. How will the possible development of the Walnut Park property impact the existing Belmont Prairie Nature Preserve and connected prairie buffer?

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.

6. Why was a pool or splashpad not included in the recent Walnut Park community survey?

The Downers Grove Park District Board of Commissioners understands the need for an aquatic facility in the community. The District continues to explore potential long-term and fiscally viable opportunities and locations that could provide this amenity.

Due to the pandemic and its impact on the District's finances, most capital projects were temporarily postponed in 2020 and 2021. This includes the McCollum Park Improvement Project, which was to feature an all-new sprayground (splashpad) and plaza. The District hopes to revisit this aquatic-based project in the future.

In the meantime, the Downers Grove Park District has partnered with other local park districts to offer Downers Grove residents discounted rates on pool passes and aquatic memberships. To learn more, visit dgparks.org.