

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?

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

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.](#)

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

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 attend an upcoming Plan Your Park Open House to preview the plans and give feedback as we continue the long-term master planning process for the Walnut Park property.

Board Presentation

Thursday, Sept. 16, at 7pm

Downers Grove Recreation Center, 4500 Belmont Rd., Downers Grove

District staff will present a preview of the long-term master plan and conceptual drawings to the community and the Board of Commissioners at the Board Workshop scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 16, at 7pm at the Downers Grove Recreation Center. The presentation will be live streamed through Zoom and will be available online for viewing following the meeting. In addition, feedback forms will be provided at the meeting and available online. In addition, feedback forms will be provided at the meeting and available online.

Plan Your Park Open Houses

Walnut Park Pavilion on Walnut Ave.

- Tuesday, Sept. 28: 4-6pm (Site walkthrough at 5pm)
- Wednesday, Oct. 6: 12-2pm (Site walkthrough at 1pm)
- Saturday, Oct. 9: 10am-12pm (Site walkthrough at 11am)

Preview the long-term master plan and conceptual drawings proposed for Walnut Park. District staff will be available for questions and will welcome feedback from the community. Staff will also provide a site walkthrough for those interested. Refreshments will be served. In the case of inclement weather, the open house will be moved to the Downers Grove Recreation Center multipurpose room located on the lower level.

Can't make our Plan Your Park Open Houses? View our presentation and provide feedback through our survey available online!

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What's Next

- Oct. 21: Community feedback shared with Board of Commissioners at Regular Board Meeting
- Winter 2021: Revisions to plans developed by Wight & Company
- Beginning of 2022: Feasibility study conducted and presented to Board of Commissioners
- Spring of 2022: Long-term master plan finalized

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

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.

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.

4. Why was 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 at the upcoming Plan Your Park Open Houses, through email and the online survey.

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5. *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.

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

6. *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.

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

Following the Plan Your Park Open Houses, the Downers Grove Park District will work with a consultant to develop a financial feasibility study. 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.

Indoor Recreation Phase: Athletic Dome & Sports Complex

- 155,000 square foot athletic dome
- 100 x 65 yard synthetic turf that can be configured for:
 - Soccer
 - Football
 - Lacrosse
 - Rugby
 - Little league practice
- 30,000 square foot convertible conference zone that can be configured to accommodate:
 - 4 Full basketball courts
 - 8 Practice basketball courts
 - 8 Volleyball court
 - 8 Pickleball courts
 - Dividable space for meetings, events and expos
- Walking/running track
- Gymnastics studio
- Sports medicine suite
- Training/sports performance space
- Locker room and restrooms
- Café/snack bar
- Administrative office
- Parking
- Landscaping (residential buffer, bioswales and rain gardens)

Outdoor Recreation Phase

- Synthetic turf with two fields with flexible configuration to accommodate:
 - Football
 - Soccer
 - Rugby
 - Lacrosse
 - Field hockey
 - Softball
- ADA accessible playground and splashpad
- Walking/running path connecting to Belmont Prairie and buffer
- Outdoor restrooms

Nature & Prairie Phase

- Improve and expand trails throughout the prairie buffer
- Interpretive signage along paths
- Nature pavilion
 - 5,000 square feet
 - Indoor/outdoor flexible multipurpose space
 - Restrooms
 - Office
 - Parking