

**The Chicago Park District:  
A Progress Report on Decentralization**

**Prepared by**

**The Civic Federation  
and  
Friends of the Parks**

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## FORWARD

The effort to "re-invent" government is not a fad or passing fancy. It's here to stay. It's a part of history. It's happening everywhere. All over the country, at all levels of government, public officials are expressing grave concern about high taxes and big government. They are responding to acute pressure from the public, as demands escalate for greater efficiency and less waste in government spending. Just as the two-decade-old process of re-thinking of mission, re-formation of structures, and re-engineering of systems, with the downsizing, rightsizing and privatizing they entail, has been at work in the business community, so in the public sector, a similar process is unfolding. It is characterized by spending caps, hiring freezes, layoffs, more competitive bidding, outsourcing, utilization of Total Quality Management circles, and a more market-driven, customer-oriented approach to governance.

Some resist change. They feel threatened by it and prefer business as usual. They feel disinclined to give up anything they have gained, by way of turf or pay and benefits, and react negatively to efforts to move outmoded systems of governance out of the nineteenth and into the twenty first century. Nonetheless, command-and-obey systems of authority and top-heavy highly-centralized organizational structures are crumbling before the forces of the 1990s, as efforts are made to make government leaner, more productive and more effective.

In past years, the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks each prepared separate appraisals of the Chicago Park District (CPD). This year in the interest of efficiency and to eliminate overlap, the two organizations worked together to study, among other parts of the system, the CPD's organizational structure, personnel system, the process by which management decisions are made, and how the CPD's activities are implemented in parks throughout the city.

We have also made recommendations about how positive change can be implemented and are pleased to submit now for public review our analysis of the effectiveness of the restructuring of the CPD.

We commend Chairman John Rogers, Jr. and his Board, Superintendent Forrest Claypool, and the employees of the CPD. The Civic Federation also commends the unions (especially Local 46 Union and its President Jarvis William) for their willingness to explore these issues with us, with the aim of working together to bring reform and progress. We congratulate them on their efforts.

A word of thanks to the Chicago Park District for its cooperation in this study and to the staff members of our organizations: Myer Blank, Greg Wass, and Johanna Giebelhaus of the Civic Federation, and Jackie McKay and Laura Ronneberg from Friends of the Parks.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During the past two years, the CPD has embarked on a major restructuring initiative. The primary objective in this continuing initiative is to decentralize the decision making process regarding local service delivery and capital expenditures within the CPD's management structure. According to the *1995 CPD Appropriations* book, the focus of the restructuring initiative has been to shift a majority of management activities from the Central Administration to the newly created six regional offices. The purpose of this shift is to develop these regional offices as the focal points from which the CPD manages local park programming and expenditures.

In order to measure the effectiveness of this restructuring, the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks conducted an evaluation to discern the types of changes that have taken place in the CPD's organizational structure and the impact of those changes on local service delivery:

- 1) The **Civic Federation** examined the management systems and structural aspects of the organization, focusing on the administrative changes that have taken place.
- 2) **Friends of the Parks** researched the impact that these systems are having on service delivery in neighborhood parks and public participation in CPD decision making.

In the report, conclusions that are based solely on the research and analysis of one organization are identified as such; otherwise, the evaluation represents the joint findings of the Civic Federation and the Friends of the Parks.

The recommendations contained within this report are made with the understanding that the current restructuring initiative is still in process. In many cases, we support the current process being used by the CPD to meet the objectives of decentralization and urge its continuation. In others, we note the need for further action.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted over a three-month period in Spring 1995. For its part of the overall report, the Civic Federation held a series of interviews with Central Administration department heads. These individuals have the responsibility for developing and implementing key management systems. Each of these administration officials was asked to describe the management structure and process being used to carry out the function assigned to that area. The Civic Federation then compared the new or modified systems to those discussed in its 1993 findings.

The Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks together interviewed two additional groups. The first interview was comprised of a group of geographically selected Park Supervisors and the second interview was with a sample of Chicago aldermen. The Civic Federation also interviewed several CPD Commissioners. A phone interview and a mail survey of park and recreation departments of other major cities throughout the country was conducted by the Civic Federation as a supplement to

the CPD interviews. Much of the writing of the report was collaborative because of the need to relate management changes to changes in the field.

Friends of the Parks interviewed Regional Managers, Area Managers, and local Park Supervisors. In addition, Friends of the Parks interviewed those department heads supervising areas that impact park use and programming: Marketing and Program Support, Citywide Recreation, External Affairs, Communications, and Research and Planning. The purpose of those interviews was to evaluate the impact of the changes on the ability of local parks to provide recreational and cultural activities to park patrons.

To determine public perception of park changes, Friends of the Parks conducted a survey of park advisory councils. The two-page informal survey asked if things were better, the same or worse in five basic categories: (1) management and administration, (2) park recreation/cultural programs, (3) maintenance of park field houses,(4) park security, and (5) community outreach. (See Appendix A for the survey questionnaire). Two hundred surveys were mailed out. Fifty two groups responded, providing a limited 25% response rate. Surveys returned represented a range of different sized parks (regional to school-parks) and equally represented all six regions.

Friends of the Parks also interviewed the six Collaborative Groups funded by the Chicago Community Trust's Children, Youth and Family Initiative (see Appendix B). These groups represent a wider community view of parks services. At least one of the Collaboratives operates in each of the six regions. Each is working with their neighborhood parks to develop primary programs to support children and family life in their neighborhoods.

Each chapter of this report is divided into the following sections containing the results of the above evaluations:

<b>Conclusions:</b>	Summary of changes in the system.
<b>Past:</b>	Discussion of the issues documented in previous Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks reports.
<b>Present:</b>	Analysis of current systems and processes and their impact in the field.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	Suggestions for improving the operations and service delivery of the CPD.

## II. OVERVIEW

### CONCLUSIONS:

**CPD's new management has accomplished a tremendous amount in a short period of time through the creation of a management structure to replace the “dysfunctional” one that existed. Financial controls have now been instituted. Capital improvements and facilities maintenance are now efficiently tracked and closely monitored. Park security and safety are now a top priority. Decision making authority has been shifted from the Central Administration to the newly created local regional offices. As the current decentralization process continues, some management systems still require modifications. Like any new system, these problems will need to be corrected over time.**

**Given the pace of decentralization and the restructuring, some staff are overwhelmed by their newly assigned responsibilities. Staff morale remains a problem. The communications mechanisms and operating processes between the regional offices and their local parks need to be improved to maximize service delivery at the local level. Public participation is crucial to long-term support of the CPD's initiatives, and needs to be improved.**

### PAST:

The Civic Federation released *The Chicago Park District: An Independent Appraisal of its Form and Function* in July 1993. This evaluation included an analysis of the CPD's personnel system, organizational structure, and the process by which management decisions were made regarding local parks. The Civic Federation report found the system to be a very centralized decision making structure with few processes for managing the activities of the local parks and few procedures for holding local supervisors and staff accountable for service delivery objectives.

In its 1993 evaluation of the CPD, the Civic Federation found a system with little organizational structure and a poor work culture. Although the Federation did see a significant number of organization-wide problems, the Federation found some very strong staff and excellent programs. It appeared that many of the better programs existed more in spite of the system than because of it. In general, CPD staff throughout the system acknowledged that a major change in the system had to occur and were willing to work toward it.

When the Civic Federation looked at the CPD as a whole, the Civic Federation found that the CPD's problems were systemic and not specific to one geographic area or one particular type of programming. To provide some understanding of where the CPD system was at that time, the following summarizes findings from the 1993 report:

- The Federation found that although the parks were officially decentralized in 1988, decentralization was not embraced by the organization.
- There was a very unresponsive bureaucratic culture at the CPD, a lack of methodical monitoring of programs and staff performance, and few real built-in controls in the system.
- There was a lack of communication and productive interaction between individuals, departments and programs throughout the entire agency.
- Decision making in this system was top down, often lacking the needed input from those who have to carry out these decisions or those who are most affected by them.
- Staff morale appeared to be at an extremely low point. This had a direct impact on park service delivery.
- The system was not set up to serve customers or potential park patrons. It was inflexible, with little ability to adapt to changes in the desires or needs of Chicago residents.

Based on the above observations, the Civic Federation offered a series of recommendations. The primary suggestion was that the CPD complete the decentralization of the park system. Decision making regarding hiring and firing of personnel, programming, and improvements to park facilities should be made at the local level. To accomplish this, personnel at all levels must receive adequate training, be included in decisions, and be held accountable for performing their assigned duties.

In July 1991, Friends of the Parks issued a Report Card on the CPD. Entitled *The State of the Parks: A Status Report on the Chicago Park District*, the grade was a "D". The study found a lack of significant change in the management systems necessary to provide services to the citizens of Chicago. The 1991 report stated, "While the new administration publicly espouses the need for change and repeatedly states their support for new initiatives in planning and management, the practical day to day operations, as well as the actual process of public participation, do not give evidence to the implementation of a plan for change in operations."

In July 1993, Friends of the Parks issued a second report card that gave the CPD a "D+". A summary of the 1993 report card found the CPD doing poorly in six categories including the Board of Commissioners, Management and Administration, Staff Development, Politics in the CPD, Recreational Programming, and Landscaping. A passing grade was given in Maintenance. The CPD earned an above average score in Capital Improvement and Environmental Issues.

The 1991 and 1993 reports by Friends of the Parks found systemic problems in five general areas:

- 1) The Board of Commissioners fostered a meeting schedule and atmosphere that curtailed and/or eliminated healthy dialogue and debate of important policy issues. The Board meetings were scheduled at rush hour at a location that was difficult to access without an automobile.
- 2) The personnel system was antiquated and politicized. It took months to hire new staff and the hiring time lag killed programs in parks. In addition, it was nearly impossible to fire incompetent and unresponsive staff. Political clout protected many unqualified staff at all levels.

- 3) Recreation programming maintained the status quo. The park field houses offered the same programs that had been designed in the late 1940s. There were few new program initiatives, unequal programming for girls/women, and limited cultural initiatives. As a result, many classes at park field houses went without customers.
- 4) The CPD was decentralized in rhetoric only. The system remained one of central control with little local decision making.
- 5) The parks were mismanaged due to the waste in the Central Administration. There were no management systems in place for evaluation, training and accountability. Various departments including purchasing, recreation, and personnel were identified as wasteful by blue ribbon committees or by various consultants hired to evaluate them.

**PRESENT:***Overall, CPD staff deserve credit for creating a well-constructed organizational framework where before there was none.* The most obvious and important aspect of the current restructuring initiative is the decentralization of decision making authority from the Central Administration to the newly created regions. For example, decisions such as park-level hiring that were once handled in the Central Administration's Department of Employment are now being made by Human Resource Managers in the newly created regional offices. These six offices are responsible for 28 geographic areas, which represent 252 field houses and 564 parks. In terms of accomplishments, the current administration of the CPD has taken a dysfunctional system and created a sound organizational structure. The following are examples of some of the new administration's achievements:

- **Computerization and professionalization of personnel system;**
- **Increased emphasis on park security and safety;**
- **Creation of internal work plan;**
- **Development of a five-year capital plan;**
- **Creation of capital and facilities maintenance standard operating procedures;**
- **Substantial elimination of fraud and waste;**
- **Reorganization of local parks into regions;**
- **Decentralization of decision making to regional level;**
- **A 25% decrease in personnel;**



- **A record number of tree plantings;**
- **Reductions in administrative spending;**
- **Increase in spending for parks' core mission;**
- **Development of new revenue sources; and**
- **Holding the line on property taxes.**

In its *1995 Appropriations* book, the CPD gives an overview of its primary decentralization strategy. Taken as a whole, the most recent budget shows a shift in resources from the Central Administration to the local parks. These budgetary shifts are most evident when one compares the 1995 CPD organizational chart with the 1993 CPD organizational chart (See Appendix C). In its new structure, the CPD's park regions are now the focus of the annual budget. The central administrative functions are presented as support to these regions. In addition to the focus on decentralization, a second priority is evident: the elimination of waste. CPD's new management has delivered a strong signal that fraud and corruption are no longer acceptable in the CPD. This message is quite clearly delivered in the *1995 Appropriations* book with the creation of the Department of Field Investigations/Internal Audit that reports directly to the General Superintendent. Other places where this message is being sent can be found in the areas of Finance and Personnel. The process through which each of these areas has increased accountability for expenditures and resources will be explained in each of the respective chapters later in this report.

In general, the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks found that decentralization was nearly complete, resulting in decision making at the regional level and not at the Central Administration. However, some local funds are still handled "downtown." For example, the Department of Citywide Recreation remains centralized. The Division of Beaches and Pools is under that department and therefore presents problems in accountability on a local level. In addition, hiring appears to have been speeded up in some areas, but Friends of the Parks found that a status quo still exists in the types and number of recreation positions and that local supervisors are unable to attract quality recreation staff are still problems.

From the interviews with the Central Department Heads, Regional Managers, Park Supervisors, park organizations, the Collaborative Groups, and park patrons using the park facilities, Friends of the Parks found four basic areas of concern in the implementation of the decentralization of parks:

- 1) Local staff input was generally limited to reaction to directives to local level changes. This has resulted in low participation in the change process by local park staff.
- 2) It is still difficult to remove non-performing staff from the system. An impasse between the CPD and the unions in the application of performance standards to the evaluation process has limited the progress of reform.

- 3) The types and numbers of positions at the local park level remain relatively the same. The allocation for positions defines park programming and limits the supervisor's ability to respond to community input regarding changes in programming.
- 4) Although surveys and public meetings have been held to increase public input into the recreation process, the ongoing involvement of community residents in programs is still lacking in many parks. Neighborhoods First is developing processes that will improve this interaction. Public involvement in local capital improvements has occurred late in the planning process.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

As an overview, the following are the recommendations contained in each of the report's sections:

##### **Governance**

- Develop a public vision statement and philosophy to convey the Board of Commissioners' long-term plans for the CPD to the public.
- Make Board meetings more accessible to the public and allow for more general policy discussions.
- Make public notice of Board meeting agenda available at regional parks two weeks prior to meetings.
- Appoint professionals to the Board of Commissioners with backgrounds in management and policy issues that are relevant to the CPD.
- Establish quarterly town meetings to maximize public input into CPD policies.
- Implement a proactive process for "People in the Parks" to introduce policy issues and address unresolved park problems.
- Restructure Board budget to provide for research staff.
- Pursue a change in state law to broaden the property tax base for museums in the park.

##### **Management and Administration**

- Increase the emphasis on long-term planning.
- Enable staff to meet expanded job roles of Supervisors and Area Managers by providing adequate support services; e.g., increased technological support and more cost-effective reception and messenger functions.
- Give Park Supervisors more authority to plan staffing and programming (i.e., budget) at their parks.
- Hire Regional and Area Managers with degrees in parks and recreation.
- Develop an Ombudsperson System to create a regular mechanism for direct field-level input into management decisions.

##### **Personnel and Staff Development**

- Continue to work with unions to establish mutually acceptable performance evaluation standards.

- Develop “Stakeholder Forums” to discuss long-range issues facing CPD personnel.
- Adopt recreation/programming background as a priority hiring requirement and develop a recruitment plan for recreational professionals through local colleges and universities.
- Determine cost-effectiveness of current recreation positions. Measure the cost of staffing programs versus the number of people served.
- Adopt an employee training schedule that provides long-range notice to the local parks so that recreation programs are minimally disrupted.

### **Capital Improvements, Facilities Maintenance & Landscaping**

- Improve information systems between supervisors and trades people in local parks.
- Conduct internal audit of 1994-95 capital improvement projects that have been outsourced to evaluate comparative cost-effectiveness and timeliness of completion.
- Conduct internal performance audit of Job Order Contract (JOC).
- Improve community involvement in future regional capital improvement budgets.
- Budget for long-term park land acquisition in yearly capital improvement program.
- Shift landscape maintenance staff to report directly to Regional Managers. Develop regional landscape maintenance plans.

### **Finances**

- Include program-based budgeting in annual budget presentation.
- Include performance indicators in annual budget presentation.
- Continue to revisit fee structure to determine if it can be used as a revenue source without having a detrimental effect on use of CPD programs.
- Work with other park districts in the region to design a strategy for addressing the revenue restrictions brought about by property tax caps.
- Continue new administration’s policy of holding property tax level for 1996 by continuing efforts to reallocate present resources.
- Consolidate three discretionary funds (Flex, Renegade and Contract) at regional level to provide local programming dollars.
- Expand pilot credit card purchasing system to all regions.

### **Recreation**

- Combine Citywide Recreation and Marketing and Program Support, encompassing sports, cultural, and other programs, to provide program support services for the regions.
- Communicate more clearly to the local parks that the Central Administration departments are there to support local park programming, not drive it.
- Structure local program offerings in response to community needs.
- Communicate and facilitate the use of contracts for recreational programming.

### **Public Participation and Community Outreach**

- Continue to expand park advisory councils to reflect a broader representation of the community.
- Increase staff sensitivity to the need to listen, attend meetings, and respond to issues raised by park patrons.
- View community groups as equal partners in providing programming at parks, with access to buildings and staff and joint scheduling.
- Further collaborate with citywide initiatives and governmental agency programs to provide additional programs in local parks.
- Take leadership role in neighborhood initiatives, especially those that reflect park goals (safety, youth alternatives, open space, etc.).

### III. GOVERNANCE

#### CONCLUSIONS:

**As public servants, the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners provides leadership to promote the recreational and open space needs of the citizens of Chicago. The Board should convey to the public its vision and philosophy. Friends of the Parks finds that the methods for the public to introduce and participate in subjects on the Board agenda can be improved.**

#### PAST:

Since 1987, the CPD has been governed by a seven-person Board of Commissioners. The Board is not elected by Chicago voters, unlike some park districts in Illinois. The commissioners are nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. They serve five-year terms.

The role of the Board of Commissioners is to set policy for the CPD. Additionally, the Board's function is to hire and supervise the General Superintendent, monitor the expenditure of dollars, set tax levies and fee levels, perform the legislative functions for the district, and control the business and property of the Park District. The Commissioners conduct hearings on specific agenda items at Board Committee meetings which are open to the public.

In the past, business of the Board was placed on the agenda at the Board meeting and referred to the appropriate committee. The listing on the Board agenda allowed the public two weeks' notice of park business to be discussed at the next committee hearing. The Board expanded public participation in 1986 with the addition of a regular agenda item called "People in the Parks." Individuals and groups could introduce park issues that were not on the Board agenda and commissioners could refer action to the appropriate staff or make recommendations.

The Civic Federation's 1993 study found that the Board of Commissioners was too involved in the day-to-day activities of the CPD. The Board was involved in small items such as the purchase of paper, approving payments to contractors, setting salaries for specific job classifications, and other day-to-day management tasks. The Federation recommended that the Board's functions include overseeing and establishing the larger policy directions of the CPD, hiring and supervising the General Superintendent, ensuring that the budget reflect overall policy directives, setting tax and fee levels, and performing legislative functions.

One of the recommendations in the Federation's 1993 study was that the Board send a clear signal that the General Superintendent is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the CPD. The Board would be responsible for setting general policy for the CPD but not be directly involved in day-to-day management. The Board should hold the General Superintendent accountable for implementing the Board's policies.

PRESENT:

Although some Board members have changed since the Federation's 1993 study, the process by which the Board functions has not. The Board continues to address many issues beyond broad public policy, and lacks a structure for useful public input. At the present time, the Board's involvement ranges from the purchasing of sod to the approval of the relocation of Lake Shore Drive. This wide range of issues prevents the Board from concentrating its energies on the most important policy issues. In addition, public input is limited by the timing of Board meetings and the present format. A clear mechanism must be developed that maximizes public input.

In May 1994, the current Board, in an effort to focus on macro policy issues, amended the Code of the Park District to reduce the number of Board meetings from two to one a month. Committee meetings were also reduced from two to one each month. Full Board meetings are usually at 4:45 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month and are held at the CPD Central Administration building adjacent to Soldier Field. Committee hearings usually begin at 4:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month.

The reduction in the number of Board and committee hearings is, in itself, not a problem. Monthly Board and committee hearings could allow the Board to function in its capacity as policy setter as well as to manage and control the business and property of the Park District. However, the new monthly meeting schedule restricts public dialogue on policy issues. There are fewer and less frequent opportunities for public input.

Based on observations by Friends of the Parks, there has been an increase in instances of Board actions taking place on an emergency basis. Items such as privatizing the former Lincoln Park Gun Club or the granting of contracts have become routine emergency items for approval by the full Board rather than issues to be reviewed by the appropriate Board committee. Commissioners suspend the Board rules and sometimes consider contracts as emergencies. This eliminates the process of public discussion and analysis that is provided in the committee setting. In addition, when the rules are suspended for the Board to take immediate action, there is no advance announcement of the agenda item. The change has reduced public participation.

Friends of the Parks found that public participation is limited in a second way. The "People in the Parks" portion of the Board meeting is a token form of public participation. Presenters are given limited time to state their opinions regardless of topic. The limited timing gives the sense that the Board is in a hurry to move on to other issues rather than discuss the issue at hand. In addition, the Board often does not respond specifically to citizens' requests by indicating how the issue will be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Create a Vision Statement**

Awarding of contracts is an important issue, but the Board needs to move beyond its administrative responsibilities to create a strategic focus for the Park District. A way to do this is for the Board to develop its own vision statement. The statement need not be complicated nor lengthy. The purpose of such a document would be to send a clear message to the public that the Board's priority is the recreational activity and open space needs of the people of Chicago. The Park Commissioners Handbook says:

It is essential for park commissioners to have a philosophy for their service on the board. This commissioner philosophy will help shape policy and guide commissioners through tough decisions... A philosophy can also guide an entire park district. The commissioner's personal philosophy, the philosophy of the board and the staff of the district all can be related, and exist harmoniously." (Flickinger, T. B., and Londrigan, A. M. The Park Commissioners Handbook, 1994. The Illinois Association of Park Districts. Pg. 13)

Issues that the Board should be more involved in include the availability of day camps throughout the city, community outreach in underutilized parks, and the condition of undermaintained parks. A vision statement would provide the public with an evaluation tool for holding the Board of Commissioners accountable for meeting their needs. For example, if the Board were to state as a priority the creation of more open space, then each year the public can evaluate how much more open space is created and hold the Board accountable if the objective is not met.

**Restructure Board Support Function**

Currently, the budget for staff support to the Board is \$280,000. This budget primarily covers secretarial support and administrative assistance. In interviews, some Board members expressed a need to conduct occasional research in policy areas being addressed by the Board. In the opinion of Friends of the Parks, with some restructuring, the present budget provides sufficient funds to conduct the necessary studies.

**Change Time of Board Meetings**

Currently, the Board of Commissioners meets in committee once a month and as a Board once a month. These meetings are relatively inaccessible to the public due to their scheduled time at rush hour and location on the South Lakefront. Friends of the Parks suggests the Board change the time of their meetings to a non-rush hour period.

**Provide Two Weeks' Public Notice at Regional Level**

In the opinion of Friends of the Parks, Board meeting agendas should be made available to the public and should include a notice of the issues the Board will discuss. These notices should be posted two weeks in advance of regularly scheduled Board and committee meetings. Committee agendas should be displayed at the regional parks two weeks in advance of the committee hearings. The regional outreach staff should be responsible for notifying local park users of important issues.

### **Reorganize “People in the Parks”**

Friends of the Parks would like to see the “People in the Parks” segment of the monthly Board of Commissioners meeting become the mechanism for citizens, park advisory councils and other organizations to introduce new public policy issues for the Board to consider. Individuals or organizations could submit an issue referral form to request that they be placed on the agenda for “People in the Parks.” The referral form, submitted to the Board one week prior to the meeting, would identify the presenting group and note the issue it will address. The referral form provides background to the Board on the presenting group’s concerns. There should be a reasonable time allowance for the public discussion. The discussion should not include personnel issues. The status of action on policy issues initiated through “People in the Parks” should be reported back to the public at the next Board meeting to assure that appropriate closure occurs.

### **Establish Quarterly Town Meetings**

A way to encourage public interaction between the people of Chicago and the CPD Board of Commissioners is to hold quarterly “town meetings.” Town meetings would rotate among as many different communities as possible throughout the City of Chicago. These meetings would be distinct from the three Board meetings already held annually in local parks. The agenda for the town meetings would consist of discussions of the public's recreational and open space needs. Individuals wishing to present their views would sign up in advance of the meeting. Town meetings would encourage an informal dialogue between the Board of Commissioners and the public and provide Commissioners with independent information on how the CPD is functioning.

### **Appoint Commissioners with Backgrounds Relevant to CPD Management Issues**

As the CPD restructures itself, state of the art systems and management processes are being introduced. The CPD has new purchasing and hiring procedures. New tax laws have created a disincentive for the CPD to reduce its tax levy and retire debt. To address these types of changes, the CPD Board of Commissioners should comprise individuals who not only have a history of public involvement, but have a comprehensive understanding of state of the art management ideas and a strong background in government finance. Appointees to the Board of Commissioners should reflect the range of expertise in architecture, landscape architecture, business, budgeting, and management systems necessary to fill this critical stewardship role. In addition, the CPD should provide new Commissioners with an orientation session that includes training by experts in government finance and organizational development.



### **Expand the Property Tax Base for Museums**

The CPD currently includes debt service payments for museums on CPD property in its tax levy. For many years, the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks have advocated that the levy for the museums be spread over a larger tax base. The nine museums in the park serve a broad geographic area, at least the County and perhaps the region, so their property tax base should not be limited to the City of Chicago. The Board should consider recommending such a change and help the museums pursue the appropriate change in state law. While broadening the taxable base, the museum levy should remain constrained by tax caps.

#### IV. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

##### CONCLUSIONS:

**The CPD's new management has put professional management systems into place in many areas. Staff training was initiated as a priority. Decentralization of significant staff functions to the regional level has occurred. In order for the CPD to complete its current decentralization initiative, it should continue to expand the use of technology at the local park level and increase opportunities for employee input. The impasse with the personnel unions over performance review standards and the lack of field staff input into the change process is slowing the completion of decentralization.**

##### PAST:

An important part of any organization is its management structure and decision making process. In both 1993 studies, the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks found a management structure that contained a top heavy bureaucracy with little accountability as to where decisions were made and who was ultimately responsible for them. The overall problems with the structure were:

- The General Superintendent had too many divisions reporting to him to manage each effectively. This prevented him from effectively monitoring and assigning tasks to each division. A number of divisions were left to carry out whatever tasks they chose with little accountability. A Chief Executive Officer needs to be able to delegate authority and focus on the achievement of the overall mission of an organization.
- Departments with related responsibilities for a given task did not report to the same supervisor. One result of this dispersion of responsibility was that it was difficult to determine who was accountable when problems were not being solved.
- Decision making for all CPD functions was done at the top level at the downtown administrative offices. The consequence of this was that few local park or community needs were adequately addressed.

The 1993 studies by the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks both recommended the following changes to the CPD's organizational structure:

- Streamline the General Superintendent's responsibilities as CEO.
- Group relevant departmental functions more logically.
- Implement decentralization in decision making.

The rationale for the above recommendations was that it had become difficult if not impossible to assign responsibility for the implementation of many CPD functions. Often no one individual or area was assigned the task of handling a given function to completion. There was too much overlap

in responsibilities among management areas for issues to be handled efficiently. For example, labor issues were handled by a multitude of areas not reporting to the same manager. Without one area or individual being held responsible, the result was often a mishandling of the case by the CPD.

The CPD was reorganized on two previous occasions. In 1987 the first steps of decentralization occurred with the establishment of 13 Host Parks (the supervising offices for a group of parks in a given area) and 4 Lakefront areas (totaling 17 Host Park areas). Most hiring, firing, communications, programming, and budgeting, however, came from the Central Administration. Some of the trades, landscape maintenance, and work orders were decentralized to the host park level.

In 1990 the 17 original host park areas were consolidated into 16 Cluster Areas (13 parks and 3 lakefront clusters). The 16 Cluster Managers had more control of work order repairs, landscape maintenance, and trades. Some hiring ability was assigned to the Cluster Manager. Financial and personnel functions remained centralized for the most part.

PRESENT:

### **Number of Departments Directly Supervised by the Superintendent Reduced**

In the *1995 Appropriations* book, the CPD organizational chart emphasizes a decentralized management structure with an emphasis on parks (See Appendix C). As outlined in the 1995 organizational chart, central management includes the General Superintendent, the Chief Operating Officer and the heads of the following departments: Marketing and Programming Support; Citywide Recreation; Human Resources; Finance; Communications; Engineering; Construction and Landscape; External Affairs; and Law. As the link between these Department Heads and the General Superintendent, the Chief Operating Officer plays a key role in facilitating the day-to-day operations of the CPD and the communication between the General Superintendent and the Department Heads.

The CPD management team also includes the Region Managers of the following regions: North; Near North; Central; South; Southwest; and Lakefront. On a weekly basis, the General Superintendent holds meetings with the CPD Chief Operating Officer, Department Heads, and Region Managers. These weekly gatherings have two purposes. First, the meetings provide a forum for all CPD managers to discuss the general operations of the CPD. Second, these meetings offer Region Managers an opportunity to gather and discuss management issues facing each region.

### **Systems Overhauled**

One of the most striking changes that has taken place in the CPD over the past 24 months has been the development of an integrated computerized network. With the assistance of UNISYS, the CPD has developed an integrated network based on the software of Systems Consultants, Inc. Applications have been developed or are currently in process for the following areas:

Purchasing/Inventory Management

Bid Administration  
Inventory  
Purchasing  
Accounts Payable

Human Resources Management

Payroll  
Human Resources

Infrastructure Management

Fixed Assets  
Work Orders

Revenue Management

Grant/Project Reporting  
Accounts Receivable  
Cash Receipts

Budget

Budget Preparation  
Budgetary Accounting (General Ledger)

The CPD has improved greatly over the past two years in terms of its use of technology to manage its basic functions. For example, personnel records used to be maintained on index cards before the new human resource system was put in place. This created a problem for the CPD when it had to do large scale part-time hiring for its summer operations. There were cases where employees who had been fired the previous year were rehired for the next season because there was no accurate way of quickly checking their employment histories. As these systems continue to develop and expand their informational and analytical capabilities, the CPD will be able to more accurately manage its operations, perform evaluations of specific operational functions, and do budget to actual calculations.

**Internal Work Plan Developed**

A major problem faced by the CPD before the current restructuring initiative was the lack of documented goals or time frames for achieving its objectives. To chart the implementation of decentralization, the CPD has developed a system of accountability that tracks the progress of CPD system changes. In the 1995 Strategic Plan, the overall mission of the CPD is presented. Each CPD goal is broken down into concrete objectives and measurable outcomes. For each objective, a target date and list of accountable managers are named. This system not only communicates the overall vision of decentralization to management staff, but also documents the progress of decentralization as a whole. For example, the initiative to fill regional vacancies was explained to us as follows:

CPD Objective: By March 31, 1995, all regional offices will approve the filling of positions, accept applications, and interview/hire applicants for regional jobs so that regions can prioritize and schedule their hiring, can hire from communities and can control recruitment of their most important resources: staff.

Implementation Steps:

- I. Human Resources Council meeting - regional approval of plan.
- II. Identify vacancies.
- III. Human Resources Council will complete seasonal hiring action plan. Post seasonal hiring.
- IV. Identify office needs.
- V. Develop communication strategy (internal for rollout and external to communication).
- VI. Develop new forms (personnel requirements) and procedures.
- VII. Enter vacant positions on-line.
- VIII. Paycheck stuffer.
- IX. Print all forms, personnel requirements, applications.
- X. Train Department Heads on new procedures.
- XI. Human Resources train Area Managers and regional staff.
- XII. Publicize rollout.
- XIII. Region walk through.
- XIV. Re-train regional Human Resources on SCI.
- XV. Begin process.
- XVI. Evaluate impact on regions/central staff and make modifications.
- XVII. Use of 166, change form.
- XVIII. Monitor/adjust/continue to implement local communication.

Each goal of the CPD is defined in terms of concrete implementation steps, staff responsible for achieving that objective, and due dates for completion of the initiative.

As with any organization, communication is an essential component of any good working team. As we conducted this evaluation, we found that the different levels of the CPD were not aware of the work occurring above or below them. One explanation for this problem could be the vastness of the CPD. Another explanation could be the speed with which decentralization took place

Cooperation can only take place when all levels of the organization communicate what types of problems they are addressing and the amount of work necessary to achieve their objectives. One way to begin this process is for the General Superintendent, the Chief Operating Officer, and the Central Administration department heads to write brief descriptions of their job responsibilities and current activities and disseminate the material throughout the system, specifically to the Park Supervisors.

**Authority and Responsibility Decentralized**

Decentralization has empowered each of the six Region Managers with the authority and responsibility to manage the parks and programs in his/her respective region. To aid in this management, each Region is equipped with a staff that includes managers representing the CPD's various management functions: Human Resources Manager; Finance Manager; Trades Manager; Marketing and Communications Manager, Security Coordinator, and a soon-to-be-hired Program Specialist. Although decentralization emphasizes that the regional staff are under the direction of the Region Manager, the staff are also in regular contact with their respective departmental heads. For example, each region's Human Resources Manager has regular contact with the Director of the Human Resources Department. Communication and coordination between these Region "specialists" and central staff are integral elements of successful decentralization. Community outreach coordinators have recently been assigned to the region teams from the Department of External Affairs.

A second component of CPD regional staff is the Area Manager. There are five Area Managers in each region, with exception of six in the North region and two in the Lakefront region. Each area manager is in charge of 8-10 parks in their region. In coordination with Region Managers, Area Managers head up a regional resource team that regularly meets with Park Supervisors. Area Managers conduct random audits of their assigned parks, measuring data such as employee absenteeism, program reliability, and park attendance. As the link between the local park management and region management, each Area Manager is also responsible for providing Park Supervisors with the support and supervision that decentralization demands. Area Managers are expected to meet with Park Supervisors and the Region Manager on a regular basis to communicate directives from management and deliver community feedback to management.

### **Park Supervisor Role Professionalized**

Decentralization is being carried out by focusing accountability on the local Park Supervisor. However, Park Supervisors and Area Managers indicated in interviews that the new practices are not working as planned. Ten out of the 12 Area Managers interviewed during the study stated that they function as information conductors for new policy and procedures. Dealing with issues of payroll, paperwork, central department requests and numerous meetings leaves them little time for managing Park Supervisors in the field. Moreover, some Region and Area Managers lack professional degrees in parks and recreation. Increasing the number of Regional and Area Managers with professional training will assist the supervisors in the creation and implementation of innovative and attractive programming. In the Joliet, Peoria, and Rockford Park Districts--which are the largest in the state, but still smaller than CPD's regions--only qualified recreation professionals are recruited for park management jobs.

Area Managers and Park Supervisors interviewed noted the extreme amount of time they spend performing clerical and messenger duties (transferring required paperwork between the parks and

the region office). The Park Supervisors indicated they spend more time away from their parks than is acceptable.

The role of Park Supervisor has been professionalized by the expansion of duties to include operational planning, budgeting, program development, and evaluation. In addition, the emphasis on the parks as community centers defines a whole new role for a supervisor as a community leader and resource. As such, the Park Supervisors must involve themselves in the planning efforts underway in their neighborhoods. With these challenging new tasks, 13 of the 21 Park Supervisors Friends of the Parks interviewed expressed the need for help with the more administrative aspects of running a facility such as deliveries, reception, etc. Particularly at the larger facilities, they noted that providing support staff for these administrative jobs at peak activity times would increase their ability to concentrate on supervisory responsibilities.

Increased access and training in use of computer and fax systems have been successful at the central level. Over half the supervisors interviewed thought that better communications capability at the field houses (e.g., improved phone systems, faxing ability, and computer access) would be helpful. The CPD has begun to address these issues with a plan for expansion of technical support to 22 parks from the 12 originally available. The concept of “greeters” is also being implemented at some heavily used parks. Drop shipping of supplies has cut down on supervisor pick-up time, and similar time-saving procedures should help Park Supervisors meet the new expectations.

Three-fourths of the supervisors interviewed noted the difficulty presented by the increase in paper work required to set up and report park information. Only a quarter of those interviewed recognized the organizational benefits of the reporting system as a management technique that would be helpful to them as they became more proficient in its use. This indicates the need for better communication by management of the purpose and benefits of the newly introduced systems.

Another problem in the implementation of the new reporting and outreach requirements, noted by the Area Managers we interviewed, is the difficulty for a staff that is learning communication skills as they tackle the new systems. Reports, proposals, correspondence, etc., were seldom expected at the field staff level in previous administrations. Area Managers are aware that attention needs to be given to improving the writing skills and technological capability of field staff whose jobs now require communications skills.

### **Management Tools Introduced**

A set of new management tools has been introduced and is being implemented under the Neighborhoods First program. It focuses on programming as the basis for all park activity. For example, in the staff check list for the condition of field houses, the question asked is, “Is this room program-ready?” In this new initiative, the opinion of supervisors was solicited in the design of the materials, and the materials themselves specifically ask for supervisor feedback as the tools are used. The emphasis is on program readiness of staff and facilities, appropriately shifting the focus from

management to programs. (This initiative is more fully discussed under the “Recreation Programming” section.)

In the Near North region, an interesting management assessment tool has been developed that evaluates Area Managers and the regional support team members. It is based on a customer satisfaction survey where the identified customer is the local Park Supervisor. This clearly places the attention on the critical juncture of service delivery -- the local park. It is the type of feedback that will help supervisors ask for and get what they need to run their parks.

### **Morale Is Low**

Eight of the nine Park Supervisors interviewed as a group for this report expressed the opinion that time-consuming mistakes were made in the current decentralization process because the new system was put into place from the “top down.” Most of the new systems did not involve initial input from the Park Supervisors, according to them. Often the results called for a re-evaluation after the implementation of new procedures, a process that most Supervisors felt wasted staff time and money because staff was trained in procedures that were later redesigned. Supervisors identified the need to hold focus groups before implementation in order to eliminate problems before the program or procedure is introduced at the local level. Many Park Supervisors mentioned park fees for sports and permits as an example of the problems they have when they face public reaction on issues in which they had no input. Lack of participation in the decision making process for change impacts the interest and commitment that Supervisors have for implementing change at the local level.

The issue of morale arose at every interview and focus group discussion. Morale was uniformly noted to be low. Park Supervisors identified two primary reasons for low morale: 1) their exclusion from the planning function, and 2) an “us vs. them” mentality. CPD employees who were with the District prior to the current administration reported feeling alienated early on in the process when criticisms were made regarding their productivity. The immediate focus on accountability was perceived by employees as a threat to their jobs. A divided work force was the result.

### **Standard Operating Procedures Created**

One common problem found in the 1993 studies was that standard operating procedures for handling issues did not exist. If a problem such as a lawsuit occurred, there was no real policy on who had to be contacted, what information had to be collected, and how to proceed with the CPD's response. In general, each problem was handled a different way by more or less a different set of individuals each time.

Continuing with the law example, the lack of standard operating procedures has changed. Currently, the legal department meets as a group at the beginning of each week to review the current case load. Non-litigators attend these meetings in order to make sure that everyone is aware of the current issues. Cases are entered on the computer and tracked. In addition, the law department now tracks



case load by legal area (discrimination, discipline, workers compensation, etc.) to determine general trends.

Before restructuring, CPD managers were not briefed on their legal rights or how an issue should be handled legally before entering into arbitration or other types of hearings. According to staff at the law department, a special effort is now being made to make sure that CPD staff understand that they are "clients" of the law department and that the department is there to represent them. The law department now contacts supervisors where suits have been filed against the CPD in injury cases, for example. Before this change, field supervisors sometimes did not know that the CPD was being sued because of an incident in their parks. Without knowledge of an incident, a supervisor would not know to take preventive measures to make sure the incident did not recur.

### **Privatization Expanded**

The current administration has continued with efforts to privatize those functions which are not directly related to local park programming and recreational service delivery. For example, it has privatized Soldier Field, equipment repair, waste removal, rest room cleaning, and placed consultants in the harbors. In addition, it turned Lincoln Park Zoo over to the Zoological Society. Preliminary estimates indicate that the CPD has realized a savings from its privatization initiatives.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **End Crisis Approach**

When the new management of the CPD began its restructuring work in 1993, there were numerous system-wide problems that it had to address immediately. Management decided to concentrate its efforts on restructuring the entire system at a rapid pace. A tremendous amount of work was done in a very short time period. For this restructuring initiative to work, it is important that management send a signal to the entire CPD that they have achieved a major accomplishment and that the "crisis" mentality of the last 24 months will be minimized.

#### **Create Inclusive Process for Change**

One side effect to the speed with which restructuring was done was that the process was seen by those not involved in the day-to-day decisions as being exclusionary. Rather than being a part of the decision making process as to the important changes that needed to take place to provide recreation services, some employees in the Central Administration building and at the local level feel that they were shut out of the restructuring process and their views were not important.

A partial explanation for why this happened may be that there was not time to include large numbers of people in the process due to the speed with which restructuring was determined to take place. Given that systems are now implemented at the CPD, more employees should participate in the CPD's long range planning process. One lesson that the CPD can use from *The Total Quality*

*Management* process used in private industry is to develop “Stakeholder Forums.” In these forums, employees are asked to construct solutions or recommendations regarding future CPD activities. In order to depressurize these forums, the topics should not be of an immediate nature nor be about mechanisms to evaluate employees. Rather, these forums could be used to discuss better ways of measuring resource needs or joint programming between parks.

### **Emphasize Long-Term Planning**

Friends of the Parks found that the current restructuring has de-emphasized long range planning and the institutional memory of the CPD. In the *1995 Appropriations* book, the three departments that were responsible for long range planning and design were reduced. For example, the Division of Architecture and Engineering was reduced from approximately 78 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees to 33 FTEs. An indirect way of cutting the Department of Research and Planning has been to redirect existing staff from other departments to the Planning Department. The staff transferred in from other departments do not perform planning and research jobs. For instance, one staff person in Planning is assigned to issue permits, which is not a planning function. For these jobs to take up the limited slots in Research and Planning is to derail the progress towards thoughtful planning made in previous administrations.

This reduction is a problem both with the number of people who were reduced in the “planning areas” but also with the positions that were eliminated. There has been a noticeable shift away from the development of an overall long-term strategy to one that concentrates on problems on a case-by-case basis. As Bonnie Noble, Director of Parks and Recreation at the Peoria Park Districts explains:

If I were asked to describe the one most important reason for the district’s success, it would have to be that years ago the Peoria Park District understood the need to have long-term master plans. Although the structure and the vernacular change, it was well understood that we need careful planning (financial and otherwise) to get from here to there. Emergency responses to intolerable conditions will not solve our problems. (Flickinger, T. B., and Londrigan, A. M. The Park Commissioners Handbook, 1994. The Illinois Association of Park Districts. Pg. 19)

From a historical perspective the parks were an integral part of Chicago’s development into a major cosmopolitan city. The genius of the original city planners was to preserve the lakefront and other open spaces for Chicagoans to use. In addition, many of the park structures are architectural landmarks that serve as a vital link to Chicago's past. Friends of the Parks believes that the responsibility of the CPD should be not only to provide for present needs but to document and preserve the lessons of the past. As the CPD continues to restructure itself, care must be given that it does not lose its “institutional memory” and does not end up “reinventing the wheel”.

### **Consider Degrees in Parks and Recreation as a Priority for New Regional Hires**

Friends of the Parks believes that a critical issue with the design of the regional teams is that not all Region and Area Managers have professional/college degrees in parks and recreation. Some Region and Area managers lack recreation program experience and do not have the background to significantly assist the supervisors with their primary responsibility, which is to improve the recreation programs offered in the local parks. The recent addition of Program Specialists in each region will begin to address this need on an immediate basis. However, looking for a recreation background in future managers will strengthen the emphasis on programs as the CPD's essential product and reduce the need for additional programming staff at the regional level.

### **Continue to Improve Technology in Local Parks**

The use of computer and fax systems has been a successful part of the effective change at the Central Administration level. It should be provided on the local park level as warranted. Access to fax machines, computers, and copiers will reduce travel time and absenteeism of supervisors from their parks. Currently, the CPD has installed fax machines, computers, copiers, and phones in 22 parks. We support this effort and encourage its continuation.

### **Develop an Ombudsperson System**

In *Reinventing Government*, co-authors David Osborne and Ted Gaebler discuss the need for public and employee inclusion in governmental decision making processes rather than exclusion. One way to do this is through the empowerment of individuals. Although CPD management has introduced special programs to promote innovation at the local level such as the "Renegade Fund," the general perception among local supervisors remains that there is too much interference with how they operate their parks.

One suggestion is that the CPD develop a management mechanism whose sole purpose is to collect input from the Park Supervisors. Currently, depending on the region, Park Supervisors have only two ways of detailing their individual park needs. They can either discuss their needs with their Area Manager or with the Region Manager. A mechanism should be developed whereby common park level issues can be communicated from the Park Supervisors directly to senior management, specifically the General Superintendent and the Chief Operating Officer.

We recommend that an Ombudsperson System be developed by the CPD in the regional offices. Under this approach, each regional office would identify a park supervisor as the "ombudsperson" whose purpose would be to communicate with the other Park Supervisors. The six ombudspeople would report to one individual in the Central Administration who would be responsible for communicating the recommendations and needs of the Park Supervisors at Senior Staff meetings. As supervisors are union employees, the ombudsperson at each region would also be a union employee in an existing job with the CPD.

This approach is by no means intended to create an "end run" around the current management structure. The current structure whereby Park Supervisors report to Area Managers would remain

intact. The ombudsperson approach is intended as a means for providing direct feedback to CPD management rather than as a parallel chain of command to the current system.

## V. PERSONNEL AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### CONCLUSIONS:

**Significant progress has been made to create standard operating procedures for the CPD's personnel system. Employee records and payroll operations are now computerized. While a stronger sense of accountability is apparent throughout the system, significant problems will remain in terms of the CPD's ability to evaluate its employees and hold them accountable for how they perform their jobs until performance standards can be agreed to with the unions.**

### PAST:

One of the primary functions of the CPD is to deliver recreational services to the public. Given that the majority of these services involve recreational activities led by CPD staff members, personnel policies are central to the CPD's ability to meet its objectives. In its 1993 evaluation, the Civic Federation found the CPD personnel system to be dysfunctional. The main problem was that there was no accountability for how personnel issues were decided and what departments handled them. Systemic change did not occur in the personnel department even with the reorganization in 1986. Despite a history of political patronage and mismanagement of the personnel systems, there were no significant changes in systems or standards for the Personnel Department or for park employees.

In 1993, the Civic Federation identified 10 personnel-related functions that needed to be addressed. The following general recommendations were included in the Civic Federation report based on the suggestions of personnel consultants who participated in the study:

1. **New Human Resources Division:** A Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources would manage the areas of Labor/Employee Relations, Classification and Compensation, Medical Services, Benefits, Personnel (Staffing), and Training.
2. **Classification and Compensation:** Job titles and responsibilities should be clarified. In addition, salaries for career employees should include skill development and career longevity incentives.
3. **Labor/Employee Relations:** There is a need for regular communication between the CPD and labor representatives.
4. **Employment:** Hiring should be done at the local level. Job descriptions need to be redrafted to contain specific duties.
5. **Discipline and Accountability:** Employees should be held accountable for their performance and actions. In addition, managers should also be trained in the application of labor contracts and disciplining of employees.
6. **Performance and Evaluation:** An evaluation system should be designed to create an environment that furthers employee development, enhances service delivery and ensures accountability.

7. Career Development: As one of the keys to employee morale, a clear career development path should be established. Advancement in the system should not be based solely on seniority, but rather on merit and accomplishment.
8. Training: The training program needs to be developed into an integral part of each employee's job responsibilities and be perceived across the CPD as a benefit for ongoing improvement towards greater productivity.
9. Employee Assistance Program: This assistance program was rarely used because it was in a highly visible place that prevented confidentiality.
10. Personnel Component of Management Information Systems: The majority of personnel records were not on computer. For example, there was no way of tracking personnel who had been fired.

In its 1993 Report Card, Friends of the Parks found problems in five personnel and staff development areas:

1. The need to computerize personnel records.
2. The need to develop new work rules/job descriptions for the 1990s.
3. The lack of standards for work and accountability of staff.
4. The length of time to fill vacancies.
5. The inability to fire problem staff.

PRESENT:

### **Personnel Functions Consolidated**

From an organizational perspective, the most noticeable change is that the primary departments having to do with personnel issues now report directly to the Superintendent of Employment. These departments include: Labor Relations, Equal Employment Opportunity Administrator, Training, Payroll, and staff responsible for the entry of personnel data. The benefit of having these departments report to one manager is increased accountability and improved monitoring of personnel cases. It is easier for staff reporting to the same manager to coordinate efforts rather than try to coordinate across departments or divisions.

### **Personnel Records Computerized**

A major accomplishment has been the computerization of personnel information. Before restructuring, personnel information was recorded manually on index cards. To track an individual or position, the department of employment had to manually search for the record. A similar computerization has taken place with payroll. In the past, Park Supervisors used to decide their own accrual of benefits such as vacation time. Under the new system, information is entered at the regional level and verified. The old system prevented the CPD from developing an understanding of trends in areas like workers compensation and benefits. With the computerization of payroll

information, it is possible to do trend analysis on the system as a whole or by region. This makes it easier to detect fraud or mismanagement.

### **New Hiring Process Developed**

In 1993, the CF identified hiring as one of the biggest problems within the CPD. The CPD left positions vacant not for lack of qualified candidates but for lack of a standardized procedure to fill them. The majority of hiring was done downtown and Park Supervisors rarely had any input into who would be hired for their parks. As part of decentralization, the hiring of employees has shifted to each of the six regional offices. The new Region Human Resource Managers in those offices are responsible for working with local supervisors to develop the selection criteria for each vacant position and to insure that the filling of that position is done in a way that is fair to all candidates. The Park Supervisors interviewed in the study reported satisfaction their involvement in the hiring process. They felt that their presence in the interview and selection gives them a basis for their future accountability for that employee.

According to Creating Community Parks: Chicago Park District New Selection and Hiring Process, a document prepared by the Hay Group for the CPD in 1994, the following steps make up the CPD's new hiring procedures:

- Establishment of Hiring Plan
- Notification of Position Vacancy
- Development of Position Criteria
- Development of Posting Sheet
- Collection and Logging of Applications
- Application Screening
- Selection of Interview Candidates
- Candidate Interviews (Practical Test Given)
- Candidate Ranking
- Background Checks
- Employment Offer

It is important to note the change in overall CPD policy that this process reflects. One major change in procedure is that the Area Manager and park supervisor are involved throughout the hiring process. For example, in Step 3, Development of Position Criteria, the Area Manager and his/her park supervisor decide on the types of qualifications that would best meet the needs of the park doing the hiring process.

Even though hiring has improved, vacancy rates, while somewhat improved, still cause problems at parks. The time lapse for filling vacancies appears to have two major causes:

- 1) *Recruitment:* Many of the available recreation positions are hourly and do not provide any benefits. The hourly pay is low compared to the same job as a full-time monthly position. This situation attracts few qualified candidates. Area Managers report that they prefer Park Supervisors leave a position open rather than fill it with a mediocre candidate. Most Area Managers don't have the time or experience to recruit talented staff from the broader community. According to CPD management, under the existing union contract, instructors can only come from the ranks of existing union employees. The CPD is prohibited from going outside.
  
- 2) *Access to Human Resources staff:* Some Park Supervisors we interviewed recommended streamlining the hiring process at the regional level. As the new system becomes more familiar to them, this perception could change. In some regions, the posting of a job requires three or four sign offs by regional staff before it can be initiated. This is a vast improvement from the 10-step hiring process done through the previously centralized personnel system.

A secondary effect of the hiring delay is that supervisors are less inclined to discipline or terminate marginal staff. They fear that firing an employee will create a long vacancy with no staff at the park.

### **Training Programs Expanded**

During the past year, the CPD has conducted extensive training. The purpose of many of these programs was to orient field-level managers and staff to new CPD guidelines. Many staff said training gives them a stronger sense of professionalism. One recurring suggestion, however, was to schedule training sessions to minimize the disruption of park operations. Staff recommended such improvements as advance notice of upcoming dates, regular time slots, and waiting until a new system was fully developed before training field staff. The following is a list of areas and topics in which employees were trained during the last year:



Personnel

Discipline Procedures  
Case for Change  
Performance Management,  
"Train the Trainers"  
Employee Assistance Program

Programming

School-Age Program  
Program Development  
Project Wild (Environmental Programs)  
Special Olympics  
Gymnastics Certification  
Child Development  
Effective Discipline Techniques for Children  
Cultural Awareness (Programming)  
Child Safety  
Day Camp Institute  
Community Collaboration (Mapping)  
Gang Awareness

Supportive

Computer Training

General

New Workers Orientation

Facility

Emergency Guidelines  
Facility Inspection  
Work Orders

Management

Budget. Preparation/Operational Plans  
Time Management  
Strategic Planning  
Crisis Response

Safety

Blood Borne Pathogens  
Personal Safety  
Small Equipment Operation  
CPR/First Aide  
Pesticide Certification

**Discipline Process Changed**

The Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks both reported in 1993 that there was little accountability or responsibility expected of CPD employees. Some staff believed that since there were no real repercussions for one's actions, that there was no need to perform one's duties. The discipline procedure was complicated and vague at best. For example, in the 1991 Disciplinary Procedures book, there was no timeframe for when the steps leading to suspension or discharge should occur. Under the proposed discipline system, it is clear when an employee should be notified, the form of the notification, and what should take place after the notification.

To illustrate this point, the following are examples of the procedures for giving an employee a written reprimand before restructuring and after:

Employee Discipline Procedures as of June 20, 1991

Written Reprimand

Step 1: Any immediate supervisor or superior officer may initiate a written reprimand by completing a Written Reprimand Form. This form will follow the chain of command to the supervisor's department/division head.

Step 2: If the department/division head approves the written reprimand, the three part form will be returned to the immediate supervisor. The immediate supervisor will present the reprimand form to the employee in question and will obtain the employee's signature acknowledging the receipt. If the employee refuses to sign, the immediate supervisor will note such refusal on the form. The pink copy of the form will be given to the employee. The blue copy of the form will be retained by the immediate supervisor. The white copy of the form will be returned to the department/division head. Upon receiving the completed white copy of the form, the department/division head will send photocopies to the law department, the Office of Labor Relations and the Personnel Department.

Step 3: The Office of Labor Relations will forward a copy of the written reprimand to the appropriate union representative. The employee, if covered by a collective bargaining agreement, may appeal the issuance of a written reprimand by filing a grievance within 15 business days after the employee is served with a reprimand. The terms of the applicable collective bargaining agreement governing grievance procedures will apply to bargaining unit members. Non-bargaining unit members may request review by the department/division head.

New Employee Discipline Procedures (Approved by Building and Trades Union)

Written Reprimand

Notification:

- Written reprimand form completed by First Line Supervisor or any secondary supervisor (Form 0001).
- Written reprimand, delivered personally to employee within three (3) business days of infraction or mailed if employee is not at work. If mailed, a copy must be mailed or faxed to employee's union, if applicable.
- A copy of the Written Reprimand shall be forwarded to Regional Human Resources Manager and the Union.
- Written Reprimand will be held in the employee's file for one (1) year.

Appeal:

- Employee may request appeal by delivering written request for review to Human Resources Manager within three (3) business days of Discipline Meeting (or receipt of reprimand, if mailed [Form 0002]).
- Field Hearing Officer schedules appeal meeting within three (3) business days of receipt of request for review.
- Field Hearing Officer issues decision on appeal at conclusion of appeal meeting [Form 0002, (bottom)].

*According to CPD management, Local 46 refuses to accept the new employee discipline process. At the time of publication, the CPD has filed an unfair labor practice on this matter and it is pending.*

### **Grievances Process Streamlined**

The 1993 studies found that the handling of grievances was one of the major personnel problems facing the CPD. At the time of the 1993 study, approximately 400 grievances were pending. That number has been reduced to approximately 200 at the time of this evaluation. Part of the reason for the decrease in number of grievances is better communication between the people handling personnel issues and the field. For example, when a grievance is filed, all individuals who are involved in the issue are notified in writing of the problem: the Regional Manager, Area Manager, Park Supervisor, and the local Human Resource Manager. In addition, all grievances are now logged, tracked, and recorded based on the nature of the grievance. This allows the Human Resource Department to identify regions that may have an inordinate number of grievances. Each week the Superintendent of Employment holds a "Power Grievance Committee" meeting with the six regional Human Resource Managers where pending grievances are discussed. This handling of grievances in an expeditious manner will allow managers to reduce the amount of time they spend on personnel problems and concentrate on providing services to the public.

### **Evaluation Criteria Developed**

The Civic Federation's 1993 study noted that the CPD had no way of evaluating its employees. On the one hand, except for egregious acts, it was difficult to correct an employee's poor job performance. Instead of using some type of corrective measures, poor performing employees were usually transferred from park to park. On the other had, without an evaluation process, there was no real way of documenting the positive achievements of employees and providing them with rewards.

As part of the restructuring of the personnel system, the CPD is now working with the Hay Group to develop a performance management system. In general, the system can be used to evaluate employees based on a series of performance standards and competencies. Performance standards are defined as the areas for which the employee has responsibility, the activities the employee performs in those areas, and expected outcomes of those activities. The following is a draft of one of the recommended performance standards for a staff assistant position:

<u>Key Results Area</u>	<u>Key Activities</u>	<u>Expected Results</u>
Clerk Supervision	Supervises clerks, assigns work, monitors progress and quality, and evaluates	Ensures that projects and assignments to clerks and others in the region office are completed on time and as specified. Ensures that policies and procedures of region office are enforced.  Clerks are meeting or exceeding standards, are improving towards standards, or are disciplined

Even though the performance standards have not been formally adopted, there is a new awareness of performance expectations and accountability among CPD staff.

However, the new performance standards cannot yet be used to terminate poorly functioning staff. According to many Area Managers, new and stricter documentation procedures, while serving to bring some non-performing staff into the disciplinary process, are not yet grounds for termination. Cases still linger indefinitely in the system. Some Area Managers report that diligence in documentation is an effective way to improve employee performance. Many cases of improved performance were reported once the staff realized the Area Manager was serious. Consistency and compliance with required paperwork will eventually result in termination if the employee in question does not improve.

It still takes a long time to remove a non-performing employee and park programs are adversely affected by the continued presence of non-performing staff. This is frustrating for the Area Managers and Park Supervisors, hard on the morale of staff that are meeting standards, and merely confirms to those not complying with performance standards that they can “wait out” this administration as they have others.

A new and effective performance tool is the designation of “Parks of Intervention”. In this process, Area Managers select parks that are not functioning up to par. They work with the park supervisor to set short and long term goals with timelines. The Manager is also expected to provide the support available to help the park staff meet goals. Disciplinary sanctions for non-compliance, however, face the same problems with implementation previously mentioned. Intervention can be used by an Area Manager or Park Supervisor either to terminate poorly functioning staff or to build capability in staff that has not had sufficient background and training to effectively carry out new duties. The effectiveness of intervention as a positive source of support is dependent on managerial skill of the specific Area Manager using it.

### **Payroll System Decentralized**

Before the restructuring in 1994, the payroll system’s problems were symptomatic of the larger system. There were no checks and balances as to the actual time worked by an employee, benefits

earned or used, or collection of data to flag flagrant abuses. Park Supervisors had to leave their parks to deliver timesheets to the Central Administration building each pay period. Under decentralization, the only change is that Park Supervisors must still take time sheets to data entry clerks in the regional office. This delivery requirement continues to remove supervisors from their parks far too frequently.

When the new system came on line, there was a problem with benefits and deductions, partly because the employee records from the old system had to be converted to the new computer system. Most of the initial technical problems have been addressed and a written explanation was sent out to employees with their checks explaining the problem. In addition, the Human Resource Department has a Payroll Hotline to address specific problems that employees may be having.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

##### **Expand and Coordinate Training Opportunities**

The list of topics in which employees have been trained is quite extensive. In addition, the CPD is to be commended for making training a major part of its \$600,000 “Neighborhoods First” initiative. Personnel is the CPD’s largest operating expenditure, which is why training is critical and a worthwhile investment. In our view, training must be accessible to all CPD employees. One current problem that was apparent in our interviews was that some CPD employees are not aware of the training programs that are being offered as a result of their managers not informing them.

One problem often noted by Park Supervisors about training is that it pulls park staff out of their parks at inappropriate times. A regular training schedule that the supervisors can plan around should be implemented. An advance announcement of training will allow supervisors to cover classes of staff being trained.

In its 1993 study, the Civic Federation noted that there was no real career development path at the CPD. Career development should be separate from the process that used to teach employees new systems. It must be distinct from employees’ regular duties and allow them to learn or gain experience at their own pace. Career development programs should be widely announced and clear to employees.

##### **Develop Recruitment Plan for Recreation Specialists**

Friends of the Parks believes the CPD should develop a recruitment plan for recreation professionals.. One way to do this is to work with the local colleges and universities to recruit talented recreation candidates. In addition, consideration of park management experience should be emphasized in hiring for regional and area managers in the future.

##### **Evaluate the Appropriateness of Traditional Job Descriptions**

Currently, the existing union contract places restrictions on changes to local park staffing. In the opinion of Friends of the Parks, the unions and the CPD should discuss ways to phase out those monthly (full-time with benefits) job positions for specialized recreational/cultural jobs that are no longer attracting children and adult participation in parks. Some specialized instructors who offer classes with little or no class participation limit the supervisor's ability to program the park for community needs. The monthly job descriptions that could be eliminated include woodcraft, crafts, and artcraft. These job descriptions were initiated in the 1940s and remain as park job categories in 1995. Further evaluation of monthly instructors for drama and music is necessary to determine the cost-effectiveness of a monthly instructor versus hiring by contract.

### **Increase Hiring Flexibility at Local Parks**

In past statements, Friends of the Parks noted that job descriptions do not allow Park Supervisors to hire the recreation staff that meets local community needs. Part of the reason for this problem is the existing contract. Friends of the Parks recommends that the unions and the CPD discuss a means to give the Park Supervisor the flexibility to hire or contract for dance, judo, or other types of instructors. In the *1995 Appropriations* book, each region now has contract money available for parks to hire instructors on a contract basis. This use of contract employees is in-line with the changes taking place in other park districts. For example, suburban park districts reported few full-time personnel at their community centers. They operate primarily on hiring by contract. This allows for diversity of programs and is less costly than full-time employees.

## VI. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, FACILITIES MAINTENANCE, & LANDSCAPE

### CONCLUSIONS:

**Responsibility for capital projects and maintenance is now in one department. Management information systems are being put in place to track capital projects and work orders. Work orders are being filled more quickly. The CPD's capital improvements program, if adhered to, will result over time in an overall improvement in the quality of the CPD's physical assets without raising taxes.**

### PAST:

The distribution of the CPD's capital spending was a significant problem for many years. After being sued by the federal government in 1981 for discrimination in capital spending, the CPD entered into a consent decree to design an equitable method of distributing resources. From 1983 to 1989 the federal government monitored the CPD's capital spending. In 1989 the CPD administrative code was amended to require an equitable distribution of capital resources.

Another problem historically was the backlog of capital improvements projects. Projects funded in the late 1980s had not been started by 1991. An effort was made at that time to catch up on the backlog by creating a Capital Improvements Division and hiring more tradespeople. In comparison with previous years, more projects were completed, and a database was developed with project timelines, percent completion and costs. However, major facility restoration was still not sufficiently addressed.

In 1993, the Civic Federation noted the generally poor state of maintenance and repair at CPD facilities and parks. One of the biggest problems for local parks was the unresponsiveness of the Central Administration to individual park needs. Some supervisors stated that in order to get a response from the Central Administration they had to intentionally break malfunctioning equipment to create an "emergency." Supervisors also said that to get routine maintenance they had to have a personal contact in the central administration.

Another problem documented by the Civic Federation was that construction and capital-related issues were handled by two separate areas: (1) Central Services/Capital Improvements Division and (2) Engineering and Landscape Management. It was often difficult to determine which CPD staff member was ultimately responsible for a given project.

Friends of the Parks' 1993 Report Card gave the CPD a favorable grade on capital improvements. The CPD had developed a successful WBE/MBE plan, which resulted in a 25% increase in minority

participation in capital improvements. In addition, the CPD had worked to make facilities ADA accessible. An excellent grade was given for the equitable distribution of capital funds throughout the city. There was no longer the issue of more capital dollars going to more politically connected areas, as in the past.

Friends of the Parks gave two very poor grades to the CPD in 1993 for its inability to ensure quality work by both private contractors and the Capital Improvements Division, and for its inability to reduce the number and costly contract change orders because of consistently weak design phases.

PRESENT:

### **Restructuring of Capital and Maintenance Areas**

A review of outstanding capital projects by the new CPD administration in 1993 showed that the CPD had committed \$60 million for capital projects, but had only \$15 million available to fund them. Hundreds of construction projects were halted and the Capital Improvements Division was eliminated. Responsibility for capital improvements and maintenance was combined into a single division--Engineering, Construction and Landscape--reporting to the Chief Operating Officer and replacing the former divisions of Central Services/Capital Improvements and Engineering and Landscape Management. A position of District Supervisor was created in each regional office, responsible for the management of all trades and capital projects work in the region.

Construction priorities are set by Regional Managers with the assistance of the District Supervisors. The criteria for setting construction priorities are: (1) life safety (poor maintenance in the past sometimes resulted in costly accidents) and (2) building integrity, which is further divided into (a) emergency, (b) high priority and (c) routine maintenance. Project Managers are assigned to handle projects from start to finish. The CPD has three major systems to handle facilities maintenance: work orders, job order contract (JOC), and the Capital Improvements Plan.

### **Creation of New Work Orders System**

The CPD implemented a new work order system in August, 1994. Most of the problems associated with the old system (irrelevant orders and long delays) have been eliminated. Approximately 50% of work orders are now filled and closed out within a week, one-third are completed but not closed for lack of cost information, and the remainder await special parts or are deemed low priority.

CPD central staff gets high marks generally from local Park Supervisors we interviewed on timely and effective completion of routine work orders. Work orders are filed by Park Supervisors with the District Supervisor, who oversees the deployment of tradespeople for the region.



### **Job Order Contract**

In 1994, the CPD negotiated with an outside contractor to provide up to \$3 million in annual services to supplement existing CPD staff in completing work orders. This "job order contract" (JOC), based on a similar program in place at the City of Chicago, provides pre-negotiated pricing (averaging 77% of book) for standard contractor jobs. JOC allows the CPD to skip the design and bid process on individual construction jobs. The CPD says that JOC projects take one to two-and-a-half months from start to finish, while Board-approved projects take about three months just to get going.

In 1994, 52 park repairs were completed under JOC. Our review of current North capital projects indicated slippage in completion of JOC projects (see "Project Completion" section below). Project managers interviewed by Friends of the Parks said that they spend a lot of time negotiating project scope. JOC was approved again in 1995 for up to \$3 million.

### **Development of Five Year Capital Improvements Plan**

As recommended in the Civic Federation's 1993 report, the CPD presented as part of its 1995 budget a five-year capital improvements plan (CIP), outlining the CPD's priorities for capital spending for 1995-1999. CPD staff and outside consultants performed a condition rating inventory on all facilities, estimating replacement cost and maintenance needs. The CIP proposes approximately \$40 million in maintenance expenditures for each of the next five years, to be funded mainly by general obligation and revenue bonds. The land acquisitions category was eliminated in the 1994-95 capital project list.

The CIP represents an attempt to move the entire physical plant of the CPD onto a regular maintenance cycle to attain and preserve its full economic life. Historic structures are budgeted for more expensive maintenance costs, but are considered to have a longer economic life. The methodology employed may have resulted in underbudgeting in some categories in which existing resources have not been adequately maintained. For example, the CPD chose to apply a 60-year life expectancy to non-historic buildings rather than the industry standard 50 years. Applying a 50-year life expectancy would raise the required maintenance budget by \$1 million annually; a 40-year life expectancy would raise the budget by \$2.5 million annually.

Landscape improvements are up slightly as a percent of total capital spending by the CPD. In 1992, \$7.1 million was allocated to landscape improvements, playground rehabilitation and land acquisition out of \$40.5 million in total capital spending-- an 18% share. In the 1995 capital budget, \$8.1 million is allocated to park development and site improvements (the closest comparable categories to the 1992 budget) out of \$40.1 million in total capital spending--a 20% share."

From 1988 to 1993, the CPD's capital budget included a line item for land acquisition. Acquisition was eliminated from the last two capital budgets and is a minor item in the CIP. Chicago currently has one of the lowest ratios of park land per capita of any major U.S. city and this situation needs to be addressed. The recent "Public Space for Public Life" survey of the 19 largest cities in the U.S. determined that Chicago had the lowest number of park acres per capita, and the second highest population density after New York. The City of Chicago's "CitySpace" project may result in new land being made available to the CPD.

A positive addition to the CIP is an energy conservation program. Beginning in 1995, the CPD plans to initiate both short-term and long-term energy conservation measures. Existing buildings will be retrofitted with energy conserving bulbs, new thermostats and regulating switches. In addition, old buildings will be insulated to prevent heat loss. In the long term this program can reduce the CPD's expenditures on electricity and natural gas.

Given the CPD's revenue constraints, the CIP represents a rational strategy for preserving and extending the life of fixed assets and reducing operating costs, and the issuance of debt for this purpose is appropriate.

### **Project Completion**

Capital improvement projects that are under construction are tracked in a database that includes a description of each project by park, the project manager's name, contractor name, construction start and finish dates, current status and change orders. Reports reviewed included a cost history by project and a construction schedule by region. Out of 19 projects in the Near North region under construction as of June 28, 1995, our review indicated eight were behind schedule, including all three projects listed as JOC. The CPD says that 87% of projects initiated in 1994 were completed on time. Accurate information was not available for prior years. The capital projects tracking system has not yet been reviewed by the CPD's internal auditor for control weaknesses or effectiveness as a project management tool.

The system generates weekly reports on progress on capital projects by region. These reports are provided to Regional Managers and District Supervisors, but Park Supervisors do not receive this report and thus are not well-informed about project status.

Park Supervisors interviewed were not familiar with the JOC contract, but agreed that repairs in their parks were completed more quickly by the decentralized trades force. Supervisors approved of the work of the regional trade supervisors in scheduling and ensuring completion of work orders. Supervisors did voice the need for better communication with the trades staff onsite at their parks.

The CPD budgets higher design and contingency fees for capital projects than their private sector counterparts. CPD capital improvements include a 15% design fee and contingency allocation of

18-20%, compared to private sector practice in which design fees are under 8% and contingencies are approximately 10%.

### **Landscape Maintenance**

Friends of the Parks found that variations continue to exist in the maintenance of park land from park-to-park. However, some parks that had been poorly maintained in the past are showing vast improvements. For example, the maintenance of the Lakefront parks has continued to improve despite their heavy use. Lakefront parks are now cleaner and lawn areas are regularly maintained according to a landscape maintenance schedule. The South Lakefront is being maintained better than it had been in the past. Abandoned structures in lakefront parks were torn down and two unneeded service yards were removed. The relatively rapid improvement in the landscape maintenance of lakefront parks compared to neighborhood parks may be due to the fact that Lakefront landscape staff report directly to the Lakefront Regional Manager while landscape staff in other regions report to the District Supervisor who specializes in trades.

Since 1993, the CPD has planted nearly 9,000 trees and 10,000 shrubs, removed 6,000 weed trees and trimmed nearly 5,400 trees and 6,700 shrubs using a systematic grid. Significant efforts have been made to improve specific problems such as baseball fields that had been neglected in the past. The condition of baseball fields was the most frequent complaint in 1993 community forums, so the CPD launched a five-year \$10 million ballfield renovation program and hired 75 ball diamond laborers for the past two years. About one-third of the baseball diamonds will be restored or rebuilt by the end of 1995. In addition, approximately \$250,000 was budgeted in 1995 for ecosystem--wetlands, prairies and savannahs--restoration.

The Park Supervisors in our focus group, most of whom were interviewed in the Civic Federation's 1993 study, said that serious problems with the maintenance of the parks' landscaped areas, some ballfields and lagoons remain. There were frequent instances of equipment breakdown and slow turnaround in repairs, which is being addressed by contracting out equipment repairs with a 24-hour turnaround. According to the CPD, in the first week alone under the control of White GMC, the garages repaired 175 trucks and 251 lawn mowers; performed 65 tire repairs and 40 tows.

Supervisors cited the significant cuts in landscape personnel as problematic. An overall reduction was noted in the number of small gardens and landscape work compared to prior years. Two regions earmarked funds for gardening by community groups and garden clubs this past summer, resulting in park flower gardens, and the Sensory Garden at Garfield Park was restored. Supervisors also noted a lack of quality standards for landscape maintenance. To address this problem, the CPD has initiated special programs such as the training of ballfield maintenance staff by the White Sox's Roger Bossard.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Improve Work Order System**

The work order tracking system measures backlog by order in number of days, but does not provide detailed management reporting that could help direct resources better. At some point in the future, an automated time and cost-accounting system similar to the one the City of Chicago is now piloting in several departments could be used to monitor budgeted vs. actual costs and direct resources more efficiently. The work order and capital projects systems could eventually link with the CPD's financial systems to provide current information on encumbered and expended capital funds.

**Audit the Job Order Contract**

The CPD's internal auditor has conducted a prevailing wage audit of JOC, but has not yet performed an audit of JOC for cost-effectiveness. An audit should be performed by the CPD's outside auditor to determine the cost-effectiveness of JOC, with a recommendation to end, continue, change or expand the program. Monitoring of contracts in this manner is essential to successful privatization efforts.

**Conduct Audit of 1994 Capital Improvements Projects**

The CIP currently includes approximately 15% for design costs and 20% for contingency, both of which are higher than industry averages. An audit should be performed of completed capital projects to determine cost-effectiveness, quality of work and timeliness. This should include bid specifications and contracts for design, drawing and construction.

**Improve Opportunity for Public Involvement**

In the opinion of Friends of the Parks, the CPD should develop a better plan for community involvement in the development and execution of the CIP. The new administration moved quickly to address safety issues in its first two years, which relegated many community concerns to a lower priority. The process for park advisory councils' input into the capital improvement plan should be improved. At this point, public involvement is highly dependent on a council's relationship with the Park Supervisor and too often is perfunctory.

**Restore Funding for Land Acquisition**

In the opinion of Friends of the Parks, land acquisition should be elevated as a priority in the CIP to address Chicago's relatively low ratio of park land per capita. Funds should be budgeted annually to

take advantage of opportunities for acquiring land as they arise. Money not spent for land acquisition during a given year should be rolled into the next year's budget.

## VII. FINANCE

### CONCLUSIONS:

**Financial control and accounting mechanisms are now in place where before there were none. In addition, the CPD is starting to do long range financial planning and provide park specific budgets. Park supervisors need to be better informed of where moneys for local programming are available at the regional and central administrative levels.**

### PAST:

Part of the reason for the Civic Federation's 1993 evaluation was the lack of financial accountability within the CPD. Evidence of the CPD's financial problems could be seen in the CPD's rising tax levy. Between 1983-92, for example, the CPD's property tax levy grew by over 40%. A number of factors contributed to this growth in the tax levy. First, the CPD had no real accounting system for expenditures or revenues. Bills were paid as they came in. Second, the tax levy was, except for minimal fees collected in its programs and garages, the CPD's only real source of income. During the time of the 1993 study, the CPD was experiencing the same phenomenon being experienced by other local government where expenses were rising at a much faster rate than revenues. Third, the CPD was operating without a planning budget. Finally, the museums succeeded in getting approved increases in their operating levy and capital improvements fund, which impacted the bottom line increase in the tax levy.

It was the fact that expenses outgrew revenues and the lack of a real budget, that was the Civic Federation's biggest concern regarding the CPD's finances in its 1993 study. **The Civic Federation found a system plagued with patronage hiring, bad management, and a bureaucracy that perpetuated itself.** Some of the observations in that study focused on the fact that the *1993 Budget*:

- perpetuated the status quo and did not attempt to develop cost-efficiencies;
- did not contain any trend analysis or real historical perspective;
- primarily reported salaries and did not present information from a program-based perspective; and
- limited itself to reporting information at what was then the cluster level. Individual park budgets were not available.

As was noted in the 1993 Civic Federation study, the Government Finance Officers Association recommends that a government's budget serve as a policy document, an operations guide, a financial plan, and a communications medium. In 1993, the CPD's budget lacked evidence of all four of these criteria.

In terms of specific problems, yearly budget analyses by both the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks cited the waste in the Central Administration. Friends of the Parks' budget testimony in 1992, for example, stated, "the FY93 budget proposes to raise property taxes by \$23 million and to spend more tax dollars for less park and recreation services. The proposed FY93 budget plans to centralize operations at the downtown office and begins to dismantle the decentralized system implemented in 1988."

However, some positive steps were being taken to increase revenues. Steps to privatize some non-park services began for the first time in 1993 with the privatization of the golf courses. In addition, proposals to privatize the underground parking lots were requested which led to the privatization of the parking garages in 1994.

PRESENT:

### **Budget Process Developed**

There are two important parts to any government's annual budget: (1) the budget document as a communication device; and (2) the methodology through which the budget was prepared. In terms of budget presentation, the *1995 Budget* and *Appropriations* documents are well-organized and contain important new features such as graphics, an index, and descriptive text on new policies and initiatives. The new budget format indicates the number of full-time equivalents for each park by job title, the comparison of actual expenditures to budgeted projections, and increased information regarding operating costs at the park level. The budget also now contains a five-year capital plan.

In 1993, the Civic Federation report found that the budget was constructed using input from only a few individuals within the CPD's management. The 1995 budget was constructed over approximately eight months with a goal of maximizing input at the local park level. The following is a summary of the steps that were taken as outlined in the *1995 Budget* book:

1. Regions and departments were instructed on financial issues such as calculating fringe benefits and cost of living increases.
2. Regions and departments were asked to create a budget that reflects their 1995 resource needs.
3. Each region held at least one community forum to allow for public input into the budgetary process.
4. Each region held a retreat with regional managers and area managers to determine the region's 1995 priorities.
5. Each region then developed an "Operational Plan" to determine staffing and material needs for the upcoming year.
6. The Budget Director developed a forecast of revenues for the upcoming year and gave each region limits for their budgets.
7. The regions then finalized their budgets based on their "Operational Plans" and the fiscal constraints.

8. Regional budgets were submitted to the Budget Director who worked with regions to finalize figures and made sure the overall budget was within projected revenues.
9. Budget Director submitted budget to General Superintendent to ensure that overall budget matched General Superintendent's 1995 priorities.

### **Budget Constructed at Field Level**

In the fall of 1994, field staff were trained in zero-based budgeting and had a short course on how to attract community input. They developed park-specific budgets for the first time. The exercise was good in that it provided supervisors with information about their parks that was not previously readily accessible. It was also a frustrating experience, however, because the time frame for community input was limited to two weeks and because the final approved budgets bore little resemblance to the one the supervisors submitted. There was a broad range of continued supervisor involvement past the initial preparation period. Those supervisors who were not engaged in the later stages of the budget process told us they were shocked by the final results. Many experienced cuts where they had requested additional resources. Even less clear was the criteria by which some parks fared well in the budget process and others did not. There did not seem to be uniform district policy either in the extent of supervisory involvement or in allocation criteria.

In 1995, the process began much earlier and is more comprehensive. It was preceded by the creation of an 18-month projected operational plan for each park. There was training for this process but it was intentionally open-ended to give local staff planning latitude. As this report is prepared, regional budget hearings have begun to gather public input. The process so far this year is earlier and more comprehensive.

Friends of the Parks found that public involvement is still limited in the preparation of the budgets at the local level. Ideally, park supervisors have on-going relationships with the broader community and have a sense from participation in the neighborhood strategic planning of what parks need to provide. Absent this ideal situation, which presently occurs in only a few communities, the park supervisor is expected to convene local meetings including the park advisory council and other interested community members to discuss and plan for the park year.

This year, four local meetings were held in each region to solicit input from the community. Participation level and tone differed in each region and was generally related to the emphasis the region has placed on public inclusion over the past year. Many local community based groups did not attend, even though invited.

A major improvement in the budget process is the specified allocation of the local park non-personnel budgets. For the first time, Supervisors had a sense of what funds they had to spend. They were informed of line items such as arts and crafts materials, film for documentation, office equipment and supplies. These are items that, for years, some teachers and supervisors used to buy with their own money. Some Park Supervisors seemed unaware of the budget, while others



knew about it, but had not attempted to use the funds. In some cases, misunderstanding regarding access to funds and ordering of supplies suggested a lack of communication between the Finance Managers and the Area Managers.

In the budget press release, the administration indicated that it was “committed to an increase in recreational and cultural programs.” Approximately \$1.5 million has been added for salaries of employees involved in recreation . This increase is not reflected in local park budgets, but is in support areas. The following table shows total funds available at all levels for recreation in 1994 and 1995:

	<u>1995</u>	<u>1994</u>
<b>Personnel</b>		
Park/Playground Supervisors	\$36,351,736	\$34,843,936
All instructor titles		
Beaches and Pools Personnel		
Special Rec./Therapeutic Rec.		
Program coordinators in Program Support/ CityWide Rec.		
Contracted Services in parks and park operations budgets		
<b>Renegade Fund</b>	540,000	540,000
<b>Materials &amp; Supplies</b>	2,977,288	604,405
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$39,869,024</b>	<b>\$35,988,341</b>

Note: Not included in the above figures are attendants, regional administration staff, and health benefits, and other related charges for the recreation staff.

An example of where the above funds are found is that each Regional office now has a “Park Operations” section in its budget. The Park Operations sections contain moneys distributed to local parks for contractual services to hire additional arts/crafts instructors. Other local dollars allocated to the Regional offices include fieldhouse equipment/fixtures, recreation material/supplies, and moneys from Day Camp operations. In addition, there are moneys available in Marketing & Program Support and the “Renegade Fund.”

**Financial Accountability Improved**

Before the current restructuring initiative, the CPD had very few finance mechanisms for determining the financial strength of the organization. For example, it took more than nine months to close the books on a fiscal year. Under the current system, the Finance Department is attempting to close the CPD's books on a quarterly, if not monthly basis. A lack of finance information contributed to such problems as when the new CPD administration identified \$60 million in capital projects underway with only \$15 million in resources available for those projects. In order to combat that problem, the CPD states that it is now sticking to a strict accrual basis method of accounting. As the *1995 Appropriations* book says, "Revenues are recorded when resources are available to finance expenditures, and expenditures are recognized when the commitment is made." Using its new financial accounting system, the Finance Department is in the process of developing a five year financial forecast.

### **System-Wide Accounting Process Implemented**

The decentralization process includes a Finance Manager in each of the regional offices. These finance managers are responsible for reviewing the accounts of the local parks within their regions. Information is relayed from the regional finance managers to the central finance department. Using this decentralized system, the CPD can have a better sense of where finance problems are occurring within the system.

### **Local Procurement and Expense Process Changed**

Procurement of materials and other expenses have been longstanding problems of the CPD. Issues of concern have included the loss of property to theft, the misordering of materials and supplies, and an uneven distribution of resources throughout the system. In order to combat those problems, the CPD has instituted tighter systems including:

- Park bank accounts are for deposit only and funds are swept regularly into regional bank accounts;
- Janitorial Drop Ship Program; and
- Trades Drop Ship Program.

As part of the new regional financial system put in place, a new system of financial oversight was implemented. CPD management said that they had 250 disbursements points (the local parks) without records of transactions. Revenues and expenditures of park bank accounts were not recorded or traceable. The CPD felt that to gain financial control of the system it was necessary to scrap the local parks' discretionary spending ability.

The local park checkbook the park supervisor controlled was taken away. To replace the local park fund, a new system of expense and reimbursement for activities at a park was implemented. The new system includes five steps that take significantly more time than the previous system. The steps to make small purchases for a park activity are: (1) go to store and determine prices, (2) request a

check for the exact amount, (3) bring request to region office, (4) pick up check when cut, and (5) purchase materials. The alternative is: (1) go to store and purchase with your own money, (2) bring receipt to regional office, and (3) pick up reimbursement check from regional office when the check is cut.

The supervisors felt that the new procedure doubled the time to get necessary supplies. In addition, the new system “tripled our driving time and took us away from the park for mundane dropping off and picking up.”

When the supervisors paid for supplies out of pocket, repayment to supervisors in some cases took three to six weeks, and more in some regions. This has discouraged supervisors from using their own money. One park supervisor spent \$800 for the equipment for a baseball league. It took two months to be reimbursed. The new system has limited spontaneity in meeting communities’ unexpected needs. For example, these funds were often used to celebrate team victories with refreshments, which has been reduced.

In interviews with Friends of the Parks, Park Supervisors said that most Supervisors had followed procedures faithfully in handling their local park bank accounts. Supervisors felt that the Park District should have closed the accounts of the minority of their peers who had problems. Instead, they said all Supervisors were regarded in the same way as the few who mishandled funds.

Even though the controlling of accounts and procurement had to occur, a more inclusive approach might have been used in controlling local park spending. One way to solve this problem is through the procurement card system that is being piloted in the North region. Under this system, local supervisors can go to their local retailers and purchase items with a debit card. There are limitations placed on the card in terms of the types of items that can be purchased and the amount of money that can be spent. A dollar limit on these cards could be determined by the regional office based on the park's or region's budget allocation. This system provides an accounting of expenditures in the monthly statement.

### **Sports Fees Increased**

In January 1995, the CPD increased fees for softball and volleyball, the two sports with the most leagues, along with some other fee increases for aerobics, tennis lessons, and extended day camp. The fee for softball leagues in Grant and Lincoln Parks went from \$35 to \$235, an increase of 570%.

Both the process and the fee increase itself were problematic. The changes were made without public involvement. The CPD did not consider an across-the-board team increase (football, soccer, rugby and basketball were not included). The fee increases dramatically affected only two sports. Supervisors stated that the fee increases for softball and volleyball have reduced the number of teams playing in the South Region by 49%. Friends of the Parks believes that had a fair fee increase been initiated across-the-board for all sports, teams would have been able to continue to use Chicago's parks for their league play. The Park District's slogan "Come Out and Play" runs counter to their

new fee policy which discouraged, and in some cases reduced, the number of teams playing in Chicago's parks.

In July 1995, the CPD recognized that the number of teams had been reduced from 2,271 in 1994 to 2,032 in 1995. It reduced its softball fees for teams playing in Grant and Lincoln Parks by \$35 from \$235 to \$200. Teams which paid a higher fee in 1995 will be eligible for a rebate in 1996.

### **Property Taxes Capped by State Law**

The most important item constraining the CPD's capital budget in the future is the property tax cap imposed by the Illinois General Assembly beginning in 1995. The cap limits the growth of the corporate property tax levy for non-home rule units in Cook County to five percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less. The highest of the last three years levy is used in computing the cap, to accommodate local governments that have voluntarily reduced their levies. The levy for debt service is more restricted, in that issuance of bonds for new capital projects will require a public referendum, while refunding of existing debt may be done without a referendum. The tax cap's restriction on debt issuance is bound to hamper most park districts' service delivery in future years, given the capital-intensive nature of park services. In the absence of a public referendum, the CPD and other park districts will probably have to defer maintenance or move to more corporate funding of capital projects in the future, creating an additional constraint on funds available for personnel costs. We recommend that the CPD collaborate with other non-home rule park districts in the region to design an overall approach to address this problem.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **Develop Program-Based Budgeting**

In the *1995 Appropriations* book, the point is made that recreation as a percentage of the budget has increased while administration as a percentage of the budget has decreased. It is unclear at this point how that shift has translated to the field. In our interviews, field staff commented that they cannot see the priority shift translating to their own local activities. Specifically, it is difficult to determine the percentage of CPD funds actually earmarked for recreational activities and the maintenance of open spaces. Therefore, we recommend the creation of a CPD "Program Budget" in addition to the regular annual budget documents. The purpose of this document would be to inform local staff and the general public as to how the CPD allocates its resources to serve the public. One effect this document would have is to demonstrate that decentralization resulted in more dollars for local programming rather than the creation of another bureaucracy at the regional level. The initial document need not be on an individual park basis but could detail the allocations for various services on a regional level. Recording the allocation of program dollars would establish the basis for continued movement of CPD funding to the local level to create program expansion.

#### **Develop Performance Indicators**

One way for organizations to become cost-effective is to establish measures to determine the success of the outcomes produced. Performance measures or indicators are one way to measure service delivery. The Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks understand that internal indicators have been developed by the CPD for a number of its functions. We applaud the CPD for this action. However, we believe that indicators should now be developed to measure a broader scope of CPD activities. The Civic Federation's 1993 study recommended the following factors when creating this type of measurement tool<sup>1</sup>:

- The indicator must be relevant to the desired outcome.
- Data for the indicator must be available and able to be gathered in a timely fashion.
- Data for the indicator must be valid, directly attributable to the program, and accurate in describing service performance without a wide margin for interpretation of results.
- Indicators which are difficult to measure, but just as important, should not be downplayed. In instances where an obvious indicator is unavailable or unattainable, a close surrogate should be used.
- The importance of the indicator must justify the costs of collecting pertinent data.

In using the above factors, the Federation recommended that these indicators be developed with input from staff throughout the system. The development of performance indicators might be the first task of the recommended Stakeholder Forums.

### **Evaluate Fee Schedule as Part of the Budget Process**

Neither the Civic Federation nor Friends of the Parks objects to the charging of fees for recreational activities that require special instructors or are not part of the recreational or open space activities of the public at large. However, in our interviews it was apparent, specifically in the neighborhoods, that the number of people participating in the summer leagues has been reduced. We recommend that the CPD analyze its fee schedule as part of the budget process. Specifically, it should look into ways it can charge nonresidents higher fees for leagues and possibly charge lower fees for leagues or teams willing to play in underutilized fields. In addition, the CPD should consider a broader base of fee possibilities beyond just volleyball and softball. Specifically, there may be additional revenue opportunities in the CPD's golf operations. The CPD receives \$610,000 from the operation of its golf courses, with \$360,000 of this amount used for capital improvements. This is significantly lower than the revenues of cities with comparable public golf course operations. For example, New York City generates \$2 million for its golf operations and Minneapolis generates \$1 million from its golf courses.

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled from: Harry, Harry, Louis Blair, Donald Fisk, and Wayne Kimmel, Program Analysis for State and Local Governments, (The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1976), pp. 13, 32, 37, and 49, and Anthony, Robert, N. and Regina E. Herzlinger, Management Control in Non-Profit Organizations, (Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Homewood, Illinois, 1980), pp. 242-4.

Recommendations for changing fees for recreation programs, rental of facilities, team fees, golf and parking fees should be made as part of the annual budget recommendations. Any change in the fee structure should only come when the budget is approved in December. The budget narrative should contain an explanation of the rationale. In reviewing the yearly fee proposals, priority should be given to community interests for use of park facilities and fields. In addition, the CPD should consider how new fee structures affect low-income populations and steps the District can take to guarantee services for children and adults in those areas.

#### **Work Collaboratively with Other Park Districts to Address Tax Cap Issue**

The present administration's action to hold the line on property taxes for the past two years is commended. The CPD is not alone in the future revenue limitations it is facing as a result of tax caps. We recommend that it collaborate with other non-home rule park districts to design an overall approach for addressing this problem.

## VIII. RECREATION PROGRAMMING

*The following section is based on interviews and data collection conducted by Friends of the Parks.*

### CONCLUSIONS:

**Program changes, especially in the areas of afterschool, teen and cultural programming have occurred in some local parks. However, basic recreation programs at parks are restricted by the inflexible assignment of budgeted positions. The central Department of Citywide Recreation remains out of the regional structure, but impacts local park scheduling. An earlier emphasis on increasing attendance is being replaced, through Neighborhoods First, by attention to program quality. Interesting program partnerships have developed but are still limited by lack of program readiness at local parks.**

### PAST:

Parks, prior to decentralization, were run from a Central Administration which determined budgets, personnel allocation and program staffing levels with little regard to local input or community needs. A general core of park programs was set in each park. Physical instructors and recreation leaders ran basic team sports programs designed around a centrally determined citywide tournament track for the major sports: basketball, football, baseball, boxing and track and field. These programs had been established in the 40s and 50s and remain virtually the same. The addition of soccer, gymnastics and the introduction of some programs for girls/women were the main innovations of recent years. Basic cultural programs available in parks included music, drama and artcraft (woodcraft, sewing and craft projects). Individual artcraft instructors, in some cases, developed their own visual arts programs.

Programs were marketed by flyer and a standard program brochure that differed little park by park. These were available at the park and only then by supervisors with initiative. Many parks did not even have a basic program available for distribution. In some cases, the supervisor kept the brochures in the closet and handed them out only if requested.

The Park District's reorganizations in 1988 and 1990 did not change the basic recreation program formula. The same staff positions were allocated in local park budgets. For example, woodcraft instructor positions were continued at many parks without determination of the interest and participation level of those classes. Recreation brochures were centrally produced but often late to appear and inaccurate. Scheduled classes frequently did not occur. Program Support, a department charged with setting a core program, experimented with community-initiated pilots for afterschool and cultural projects, but no evaluation or follow-up was conducted at the local parks. Some individual staff ran great programs using their own initiative and personal funds. These met with similar lack of central support from the Central Administration and were not expanded.

District-wide recreation changes were not addressed in the system by the administration except for a gymnastics initiative promoted by one of the Commissioners. Management of service delivery was limited to devising a cluster system out of the previous Host Park system. An evaluative pilot, Models of Excellence, led by the Chicago Community Trust's Government Assistance Project, was an innovative approach because it involved park staff at both the administrative and service delivery level to determine a means of getting community input and evaluation.

The 1993 reports of both the Civic Federation and Friends of the Parks reported the lack of change in the recreation programming in the parks and called for increased services including:

- After-school programming;
- Teen programming;
- Expanded cultural and educational programs;
- Cooperative ventures and joint programming with schools, community organizations and social service providers;
- De-emphasis of citywide competition as program driver;
- Comprehensive marketing and outreach; and
- Funding at the local level to support community-based programming initiatives

The lack of public awareness of programs of the Park District has been identified as a long-standing problem in CPD recreation service delivery. The Department of Communications traditionally served as the public relations arm of the administration and devoted little energy to promoting recreational programs. It was the media liaison and focused on the issues and events identified by the Central Administration. Local park use of services was limited to access to the Reprographics Department to print the class schedules which differed little from park to park and year to year. Under the last administration, the Communications Department began to place local news stories featuring the interesting events at parks. Local park schedules were not changed.

PRESENT:

### **Regional Resource Teams Created**

New resource teams were created for the six regions to support local park needs. The new Area Manager position, reporting to the Region Manager, includes the responsibility to assess and improve programs at local parks. However, in the field, Area Managers reported that while program development was an important and interesting aspect of their jobs, other demands took a higher priority. Initially, the Area Managers had to inform and educate their park staffs on the new policies and procedures developed by the departments of Finance, Marketing, Personnel and Citywide Recreation. More importantly, many Area Managers do not have degrees in parks and recreation. This significantly affected the focus of the resource teams, and program quality was not initially addressed.



The core park programs were continued by the regions with the same staff as before. Area Managers with a general mandate to improve program level concentrated on increasing numbers in classes. The quality of the classes was not a priority. As a result, many of these classes continue to be poorly attended, loosely structured and without specific curriculum goals.

### **New Departments Created**

*The next two sections describe the newly created Department of Citywide Recreation and restructured Department of Communications mentioned in this section.*

Three central departments were created downtown to deal with recreation programming: a transition team (headed by the Chief Operating Officer and involving department heads as needed); Marketing and Program Support; and Citywide Recreation. The transition team performed the following tasks in program development:

- Developed extended daycamps in summer 1994 to address the needs of working parents;
- Trained area managers and supervisors in zero-based budgeting techniques and cursory community outreach worksheets, in anticipation of program planning for the *1995 Budget*;
- Instituted staff training for all staff levels;
- Expanded Near North region's after-school pilot, PARK KIDS, based on the Kaleidoscope Kids model from the Near North's two pilot sites to 38 citywide sites; and
- Expanded Near North region's teen development pilot, which includes drop-in centers with game rooms and leadership development projects.

The Department of Marketing and Program Support was charged with creating a comprehensive approach to program development and recruitment, based on a corporate product model. As a Marketing staff person summarized: "The product of the Park District is programming; the charge is to develop, fine tune, monitor, package and promote recreation programs."

The department has made major headway in improving the CPD's image and visibility with its attractive promotional efforts, including the following:

- Creating a bright logo and slogan;
- Publishing the first city directory which included a survey form and hotline number;
- Developing T.V. and radio commercials (using pro bono assistance);
- Publishing regional, seasonal program listings;
- Creating attractive brochures for specific programs (summer camp, Theater-on-the Lake, etc.);
- Designing staff I.D.s, business cards and uniforms; and
- Creating two promotional pieces as *Sun Times* inserts.

The Marketing and Program Support Department has spent considerable effort to cultivate programming partners, and to promote the District's new emphasis on important areas that enrich program opportunities, including the following:

- Developing such programs as Dancin' in the Parks, the Arts-Partners-In Residence, and the Mini-Fests that have successfully brought Chicago's rich arts and museum resources out to community parks and ended the perception of the District as solely a sports-oriented system.
- Developing relations with the City's major foundations by tying the Park's programming efforts in with foundation initiatives to improve urban life.
- Exploring the Park's role in citywide efforts like the Youthnet.
- Seeking connections to the city schools through environmental programs like the Kid's Grow Gardens.
- Attracting the support of Chicago's business community by creating sponsorship opportunities.

The Marketing and Program Support Department's third goal, to offer technical assistance to parks to develop local programs, has been its most recent focus. An arts resource packet is available at the regions to direct the Area Managers and Supervisors to help select appropriate contract services. Arts in Action is a developing technical support concept to bolster the capability of parks art staff.

Field interviews with staff at local parks indicated a mixed reaction to Marketing and Program Support's value as a local level resource. While many reported that the promotion efforts and materials project a more professional image of the CPD, their main concern was promotion of their local programs. Most acknowledged the helpfulness of the regional Marketing/ Communication staff although the turnaround time for flyers (still the mainstay of local park program promotion), is long and requires longer range planning than the supervisors have been used to. Some parks are still experiencing difficulty getting printing done, and with program participation as one of the new performance measures, field staff consider larger printing budgets essential.

Field staff reported that their operations have been frequently driven by directives from the Marketing Department. Experimenting with program length and registration procedure, which the Marketing Department initiated based on marketing best practices and survey results, aggravated the supervisors because their input was not sought. The length of programs was changed several times and Park Supervisors were concerned that the public would interpret the changes as poor planning or be confused.

Few Park Supervisors were aware of the technical assistance available from the central Marketing and Program Support Department. Although presentations have been made to Area Managers in all regions, there has been little direct involvement between central and regional staffs beyond setting up the pilot programs. Those that were designated sites, particularly of the popular mini-fests, were happy to have the extra resources for their parks but were not sure of the selection process or how to obtain future program resources from Marketing and Program Support.

## **1. Citywide Recreation**

The Citywide Recreation Department has responsibility for coordinating the physical recreation aspects of the parks. It includes beaches and pools, citywide athletic competition, gymnastics, therapeutic recreation and Junior Citizen programs. It is unclear why the two recreation areas (physical recreation and cultural programs) are in separate departments. Essentially, this split maintains the sports/cultural dichotomy of previous administrations except that cultural programming now benefits from being a part of the Marketing and Program Support Department, suggesting that the sports programming unit operates "out of the loop."

Major initiatives under this section have been:

1. The Mayor Daley Sports Camps, which offers top level instruction, T-shirts, lunches, and athletic equipment.
2. Beach Blast, a summer program to provide transportation for residents of landlocked public housing communities to Chicago's beaches.

Citywide competitions are now optional and their calendar no longer determines programming at the local parks. Many park staff were happy to be released from the requirement to participate. The Southwest region still requires participation, but is insuring that no regular classes are canceled as result. The Citywide Recreation Department was not involved in the decision to make citywide competition participation optional.

Field staff response to Citywide Recreation varied. Most interviewees did not directly access the department outside of citywide games and special services. The setting of standards and technical assistance in setting up leagues, etc., appears to be little tapped by the field, according to Friends of the Parks interviews. For Inner City Games, a new initiative promoted by the Mayor's office, for instance, Area Managers were designated as the liaisons from each region rather than Citywide Recreation staff. Frequent directives from the Citywide Recreation Department to implement specific recreation programs that were new or innovative, but had no basis in a park's community need or willingness to participate, have been difficult for Park Supervisors to follow. An example of this is the short notification and central design of the extensive water polo camps that opened in August.

Some divisions within Citywide Recreation could benefit from re-examination. Beaches and Pools should be under local jurisdiction in a decentralized system. A citywide training program could be instituted to maintain a consistent quality of recreation staff such as lifeguards. Therapeutic Recreation needs to have access to the same resources that are being developed for the regional recreation programs. Its place in the Citywide Recreation Department isolates it from the effect of community input that decentralization encourages.

## **2. Communications**

The Central Communications Department currently views itself as a service for the (1) General Superintendent, (2) administrative departments, and (3) the regions, through the outplaced Marketing and Communication (M/C) staff.

The emphasis is on creating professional, timely and attractive notices of park programs and events. The Communication Department addresses a previously identified problem within the District: distribution of material. A plan for dissemination of produced materials must accompany requests for printing. General distribution efforts have been made through systems such as the public school internal mail system. The Communication Department also evaluates the effect of produced materials in cooperation with the Marketing Department.

Uniform use of logo and park colors, and attention to attractive graphics and fonts has resulted in distinctive CPD brochures and flyers. Field staff generally welcomes the assistance of the M/C staff on the regional level. Through the use of sample designs, some standardization, uniformity and efficiency is becoming apparent in regionally produced materials. The necessity of working backward from event timetables is assisting supervisors to approach classes and events with a sense of planning. But the long wait for flyers has led some Park Supervisors to produce their own pieces.

Park Supervisors need to have more ready access to computers and/or increased park budgets to produce sufficient printed materials.

### **Creation of Neighborhoods First: Recreation Service Delivery Solutions**

Previous CPD administrations did not address program service delivery comprehensively. Each administration has recognized that programs in Chicago's parks were problematic. While some excellent programs were developed, they were due to the initiative of individual instructors and Supervisors and were unsupported and little recognized.

The "Neighborhoods First" initiative aims to upgrade program offerings with a focus on staff development. Neighborhood First is intended to create, with input from the local park level, a blueprint for parks operation which will set standards and give the local staff tools for managing their parks. The entire staff of the park, both program and maintenance, is involved. The program will build on what local staff needs to create a program-ready park. It relies on coaching rather than training and will seek local input in its development. It will put the downtown departments at the service of the neighborhood parks.

Elements that should make this a viable approach include:

- Community outreach assistance that equips local staff to improve how they network.
- Evaluation systems that help staff keep on track .
- Performance reviews based on ability to create and run effective programs.
- Management tools that identify, for staff, the elements that will produce successful programs:

- a facilities manual that makes park appearance the responsibility of the entire staff and makes program readiness the criterion.
- a park management report that helps supervisors keep track of all elements that create a good park.
- an operational plan that involves all staff to look at, detail and take responsibility for programs for an 18-month period.
- a community map with resources detailed.

- Technical assistance in developing daycamp, afterschool and teen center programming.
- Mentors in the areas of community relationship building, program planning, youth development, business and operations, education and instruction methods (this is currently being piloted in the Near North Region).

Neighborhoods First is headed in the right direction. Park staff helped develop the tools and a team of nationally recognized mentors helped develop the criteria and will conduct initial training. Materials clearly state that this initiative is to be tested by parks to determine its usefulness. Input to make the tools more practical, based on park staff expertise, is specifically requested. Park staff should take advantage of this opportunity for genuine staff input.

The effort will result in a curriculum being developed for ongoing development of park employees. Initial reaction to the Neighborhoods First program has been very receptive. Coaching staff have been complemented on both their approach (non-threatening) and their ability to help. There is a lot of paperwork involved that will initially aggravate staff, but several supervisors interviewed have recognized the value of this "workbook" kind of approach.

### **Security Was Improved**

In 1994, a new park beat car was introduced in each police district. The CPD appropriated \$3 million in 1995 for 25 beat cars. During the past year, police have had a greater presence in the parks. Park supervisors and managers agreed that security has improved. They received better service from the police with the park patrol car. Often, during the interview process, park police were at the park. In every case, an established relationship was apparent. In the communities that have piloted the Community Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), the supervisors report better park security. Recently, new security coordinators were added at the regional level.

### **Park Maintenance Still a Problem**

In the interviews Friends of the Parks conducted, Park Supervisors expressed a concern with cuts in attendant staff. Supervisors and recreation staff, who should be operating within their professional roles, must frequently provide basic cleaning duties. Clearly, clean parks are part of the program readiness that Neighborhoods First is promoting, but having supervisors and program staff clean the facility is not standard practice in most park systems.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Combine Recreational Support Departments**

The CPD should combine the two Central Administration departments that guide recreation service delivery: Marketing & Program Support and Citywide Recreation. A strong Program Support unit would develop physical, cultural, and other programs with and for the regions. The current Citywide Recreation functions of Beaches and Pools, Therapeutic Recreation, and Gymnastics should be decentralized with essential support features contained in a consolidated Program Support unit. Marketing would be the promotional arm of this consolidated department.

### **Communicate Availability of Resources to Local Staff**

The CPD should communicate the role and availability of the central administrative departments more clearly to the local park staff and train them to take advantage of those resources. The Central Administration should place more emphasis on responding to the program needs of the regions rather than driving programs at local parks.

### **Include Park Supervisors in Restructuring Plans**

The CPD should seek direct Park Supervisor input whenever possible. The low performance of some Supervisors should not preclude seeking input from this group. By placing the responsibility on solutions at the park level, expectations are raised, abilities are recognized and rewarded, and experience is honored. As many resources as possible should be moved to the regional level rather than concentrating them at the central administrative level. This will provide the supervisors with the necessary elements to build their park programs.

## IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

*The following section is based on interviews and data collection conducted by Friends of the Parks.*

### CONCLUSIONS:

**Public participation has been the task of the Kellogg Project in the parks, but it has operated outside the regional support structure until recently, limiting the CPD's outreach effectiveness. The aim of parks as community centers is well articulated but few parks have achieved this goal. Partnerships have been established. Resulting programs are accommodated but often lack full park staff support. Major policy and capital initiatives are undertaken prior to consulting affected communities.**

### PAST:

Public participation and the rise of advisory councils occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s as federal funding under the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) program required participation of citizens in the planning of how UPARR dollars would be spent in the neighborhoods. The advisory councils have evolved from practically no park councils in 1980 to groups of one form or another in nearly 200 parks in 1995.

The park advisory councils have had an uneven presence in the evolution of a decentralized Park District. From grudging acceptance by Superintendent Kelly as a by-product of the UPARR program, to the encouragement and development of groups under Superintendent Madison, to the consultant-run attempts under the Kellogg Foundation grant to promote council growth under Superintendent Penn, citizens have attempted through the advisory councils to establish ownership of and exercise responsibility for their parks.

The core park supporters that make up the Chicago Park District advisory councils run the gamut from issue/event oriented groups to highly developed, multi-committee organizations. The most effective councils are characterized by broadness of representation, the ability to establish a working relationship with their supervisor and the group's recognition as park advocates by the wider community.

The 1993 Civic Federation report emphasized the need for Park Advisory Councils to broaden their representational base. The 1993 Kellogg Project piloted a plan for an outreach worker, resource center and training menu as a basis for each cluster. Advisory Council leaders formed an independent coalition outside the District for support.

Other than the Park Advisory Councils, partnerships rarely occurred before decentralization. Since 1986, most partnership initiatives were arranged by individual staff with the personal capacity to

network. Previous administrations established Innovative Program Grants and Flex Funds. These funds were used by outside groups to run new programs in the parks.

PRESENT:

### **Advisory Council Status**

The “Case for Change,” which outlined the strategic plan of the current administration, spotlighted management efficiency. No specific plan was mentioned for the role of the Advisory Councils or for public participation. The potential for Advisory Councils to be the promotional and support arms of the local parks has not been widely encouraged or tapped.

Advisory council development and activity has been confined to the Kellogg Grant activity. (The multi-year, million dollar Kellogg Grant to develop and train advisory councils across the city had been temporarily suspended and redesigned under the previous administration.) The plan developed under the previous administration as a pilot was expanded to four of the six regions. In those regions, a community outreach worker was assigned to target the development of 25 councils and offer a training menu and ombudsperson-like support. In addition, three Advisory Council Networking Sessions were held in which topics of interest to Council members were discussed. These were well-received by Councils and seen as a needed source of networking among the Councils themselves. The last of these was held in October 1994. The next is planned for October 1995.

Resource Centers were developed in each of the staffed regions so that Council members had access to computers and copiers to do Council business. In late 1994, two additional workers for the two remaining regions were assigned. The Kellogg staff were not considered members of the regional teams and their funding was limited to the life of the Kellogg Grant. This undermined their positions in the region (see next section). A recent report of the effectiveness of the Kellogg efforts noted that expansion of the role of the outreach worker to include both staff and wider community involvement, as well as regional differences, made it impossible to determine if the reported increase in Council functioning was due to this project. One of the most important roles of the Kellogg workers was to keep the Councils updated on changes in the CPD.

Among Park Councils surveyed for this report, 37% saw their roles as improved and 49% reported that relations with parks were unchanged. The remaining 14% said that the situation had become worse. Write-in surveys express frustration with the lack of a welcome and cooperative spirit at parks. An increased number of calls to Friends of the Parks from Advisory Council members indicated Council frustration with not having calls returned, having concerns ignored, and not getting information about important initiatives.

In interviews, most Supervisors and Area Managers acknowledged the obstacles inherent in working with Councils, citing difficulty in achieving consensus, lack of broad representation, and public dissatisfaction with limited and shrinking park resources as the hard issues. In the



Near North region, the Region Manager encouraged broader representation of community interests on the Council by requiring Council representation from a broad spectrum of park users and community-based organizations as a prerequisite to local master planning. A quarter of the Supervisors interviewed reported that they rely on their Councils for support and financial assistance. Many just “tolerate” Council involvement.

### **Outreach Responsibility Unclear in the Regions**

The Kellogg community outreach workers were not originally decentralized to the regional offices. This created a separate status for the community relations staff that undermined their credibility and effectiveness with Park Supervisors, other field staff, and the public. (The South Region was an exception; the Kellogg worker there was a valued team member from the outset.) Community outreach workers have recently been based in the regions, but are still funded under and respond to the downtown office of External Affairs.

The Area Managers and Marketing/Communications staff person were identified earlier in the decentralization process as the main outreach resources at the regional level. Both of these positions have such broad job descriptions that they are severely limited in their outreach capacity. More recently, the supervisors are being trained in outreach through the Neighborhoods First initiative. The administration recognizes the need for outreach but seems to underestimate the work it requires.

For the past two years, lack of clarity on community outreach has sent mixed signals about the administration's policy on public participation. Neighborhoods First has the potential to develop a comprehensive outreach program. Training, identification of outreach responsibilities, and cooperation between the Central Departments and the Regions are all included in this ambitious initiative. The manner in which this program is introduced to the public and staff is key to its eventual success.

### **Successful Partnerships Established**

The CPD administration has worked to develop new partnerships, particularly with museums, arts, education and sports groups. This has resulted in targeted new initiatives. Some positive changes are customer service focus groups in the North region, community partnership luncheons in Central and South regions, and the Renegade Grant fund used as a tool to create interesting partnerships in the North, Southwest, Near North and Lakefront regions. Summer mini-fests have been an important part of building partnership programming in the parks.

Participation of the CPD in citywide initiatives are another indicator of a healthier Park District attitude toward community involvement. Two parks are Youthnet sites and one is a Youthnet satellite (a total of five pilot sites selected to anchor youth programs supported by the Mayor's Youth Task Force). South, Central, Near North and North regions are currently exploring further Youthnet involvement. In addition, many of the supervisors and area managers reported satisfaction with their

involvement in the CAPS (Community Alternative Policing Strategies) groups because they tap a broad constituency and address issues that relate closely to the work of the parks.

### **Accommodation vs. Initiative: Letting the Community In**

Another citywide partnership initiative opportunity for parks is linking with the six neighborhood Collaboratives served by the Chicago Community Trust's Children, Youth and Families Initiative. The Collaboratives have developed strategic plans for their broader community to serve the children and families in their areas. The Collaboratives' plans can add consensus-built input, participation and program enhancement to the parks' resources to meet community needs.

The staff of the six Collaboratives were interviewed for this report. The groups are pleased to have access to park district facilities. The groups felt that there had been sincere attempts to accommodate the programs.

However, the Collaboratives have experienced difficulties in establishing programs in parks. A field staff attitude of "our park programs" (CPD initiatives) and "their programs" (those funded and staffed by the Collaboratives) pervades the thinking and vocabulary of even the most cooperative park personnel at levels from Region Manager to instructors. Problems experienced by the staff of the Collaboratives include: park staff not being fully informed by Supervisors/Area Managers about a partnership program, displacement because of a park program, park staff lack of recruitment for partnership programs, and poorly maintained or undersupervised premises.

The Collaboratives would like to see more initiative on the part of the parks to participate in community planning for children and families. They want the parks to be at the table in the community strategy sessions, take a leadership role in shared program planning, and join in community training opportunities. Youthnet is one example of a program which could benefit from this sort of cooperation, but community participants report that, while accommodating, the parks lack initiative and creative ideas.

Clearly, the park field staff is overwhelmed in many cases by the demands placed on them because of the continuing internal restructuring. Unfortunately, the community planning required for involvement in citywide initiatives such as Youthnet cannot wait. In some cases, Youthnet locations will be selected without the parks being represented as the important community resources they have the potential to be.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### **Increase Community Involvement and Resources**

- 1) Adopt incentives and expanded roles for the Park Advisory Councils that demonstrate a broad representational membership.
- 2) Collaborate with citywide groups and other governmental agencies which have staff and funded programs that can be tapped for use in local parks.
- 3) Create program-ready facilities to attract funded and volunteer programs, and create a welcoming and attractive facility that is available as scheduled.
- 4) Join and offer park resources for neighborhood initiatives with similar goals of addressing community needs: youth worker training, open space planning, and Youthnet program planning.
- 5) Park Supervisors and/or recreation staff should consistently attend community meetings for continuity and relationship building.
- 6) Region Managers and Area Managers should take leadership roles in the community area planning processes.
- 7) Develop an ongoing effective community outreach plan that allows communities the opportunity to have a welcome role in planning and implementing programs in their parks.
- 8) Clarify role and future of community outreach worker as a member of the regional resource team.

## X. CONCLUSION

“Re-inventing” systems of governance is difficult, at best. Efforts to change an organizational culture for the better are often frustrated. But that does not mean they should not be undertaken.

General Superintendent Claypool, Commissioner Rogers, and Mayor Daley are bringing positive change to the CPD, which is what leadership is all about. In measuring how far they have come in instituting needed reforms, we must remember where they started from -- a “dysfunctional” bureaucracy rife with patronage and unresponsive to the public. The decentralization of the CPD operations is proceeding and needs to be supported by the citizenry.

Everything is not perfect, as should be obvious by even a quick reading of this report. The process should become more inclusive. The public should be given more opportunity for input. The inability of the union leadership and management to achieve a comfortable level of partnership should be addressed forthrightly. More team spirit should be cultivated.

But nonetheless, the CPD has come a long way in short period of time. This is good news for the citizens of Chicago. There may be “miles to go before we sleep,” but we’ve also journeyed many a mile since we awoke.

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