



**MINUTES OF THE
DIVERSITY COMMITTEE
OF THE
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**
Oakton Community Center
4701 Oakton Street, Skokie, IL 60076
TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2017 – 7:00 P.M.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

Board Members Present: President Susan Aberman
Vice President Mike Reid
Commissioner Michael Alter
Commissioner Khemarey Khoeun
Commissioner Maureen Yanas

Staff Present: Director/Secretary John Ohrlund
Assistant Superintendent of Recreation Jon Marquardt
Office Manager Park Services Dima Kirland

Public Present: Jin Lee
Jelly Carandang
Peter Kitzhoefer
Denise Meuser
Alexa Poladin
Brian Williams
Joseph Tamraz
Jerry Clarito

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner and Committee Chairman Maureen Yanas called the Diversity Committee meeting of the Board of Park of Commissioners to order at 7:09 pm.

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING COMMENTS

On behalf of my fellow board members, I would like to welcome everyone to the 1st SPD Board Diversity Committee Meeting. We truly appreciate your attendance tonight.

I would like all of you to read the bottom of our agenda. It includes the Skokie Park District's Vision, Mission, and Core Values. The District envisions a community where ALL of its residents enjoy a high quality of life through leisure time pursuits, beautiful open spaces, and first rate facilities. Our Mission at the District is to realize its vision through

teamwork, community partnerships, sound fiscal management, and creativity in every area of its operation. The vision was reiterated with our Comprehensive Master Plan of 2015-- which states that we will meet the needs of Skokie's diverse community.

A little bit about me and what precipitated my interest in this. I have been a park board commissioner for over 11 years. I grew up in Skokie and I graduated from Niles North. The ethnic and cultural composition in 2017 is so different than what existed in Skokie 40 and 50 years ago. Today, Skokie is a microcosm of the world. We are the most diverse community in the state of Illinois. 41 % of our residents are foreign born and have found their way here from many different continents.

Diversity is not just a Skokie phenomenon. It's national---it's international. At the state and national parks and recreation conferences that my colleagues and I have attended over the years, we are offered a multitude of amazing educational workshops. In the last 5 years or so --- there has been an increase of workshops offered on the subject of diversity. I have consistently opted to include those in my workshop choices.

My dream was to implement in our community some of what I learned at the conferences---especially in setting up a committee to focus on our cultural differences. Those dreams started to reach fruition last year when the District formed its first staff diversity committee, which is brilliantly co-chaired by Jon Marquardt and Jim Bottorff.

The icing on the cake was 2 months ago, when the board created a Board Diversity Committee. The goals of the committee are to reach out and develop comfortable relationships and dialogues with the various cultural communities (including lifestyle) in Skokie. We hope that this engagement will help facilitate our park board policy in such a way as to be even more sensitive to the needs of the respective groups. We want all Skokie residents (and non-residents) to feel welcome and to utilize our parks, facilities, and programming.

The Skokie Park District already has realized and executed its attention on cultural differences--both on its own as well as collaboratively with other groups in the Village. The list is growing--- and as you know--at the top is our 27 year old Festival of Cultures. Other park districts are following our model!

But we need to look at the big picture concerning daily life in Skokie. The third category at the bottom of our agenda is our Core Values--- how we will fulfill this committee's goals. The first bullet point is COMMITMENT. That's what this new committee is all about --- a commitment to achieving the diversity committee goals. It needs to be an ongoing process. I believe that a most important ingredient to the secret of this committee's success is input from all of you.

Chairman Yanes then called on Jon Marquardt to explain the District's staff diversity committee.

Marquardt said that the goal of the committee is to create a welcoming environment to everyone who walks into District facilities. The committee created a mission statement that was approved by the Board of Commissioners. The intent is to place "welcome" signs in a variety of languages and to have the staff

who speaks different languages identified on their name tags. The multilingual staff have been identified with speaking 13 different languages. The committee is currently working on welcoming signage for the Weber Leisure Center grand opening.

The committee also reached out to Maureen Murphy of the Village of Skokie Human Relations Department to share contacts of new families in Skokie so the District can reach out to them.

An Indian cultural night event “Bollywood Night” is in the works to include bus tours of all the Districts facilities. The committee is targeting the Indian community, but all will be welcome. It is an opportunity for everyone to learn about the Indian culture, and other cultures in Skokie.

DISCUSSION OF “MISSION STATEMENT” TO BE DEVELOPED & PUBLIC COMMENT AND INPUT

Chairman Yanes then opened the floor for a discussion on developing a mission statement for the committee. The following comments were made:

- Skokie has the most outreach and diverse programs and events compared to other neighboring suburbs.
- Many Skokie agencies such as the Skokie Park District, Village of Skokie, the Skokie Public Library, and Chamber of Commerce collaborate on many events.
- The District lacks in marketing to various ethnic newspapers or radio stations. Mainstream media is not promoting District programs. Many of the communities rely on their own ethnic media to get their news. This would be a good way to reach out to the residents of Skokie.
- An inexpensive way to reach out to residents of Skokie would be to have the 36 community leaders that are on the Festival of Cultures committee reach out to their own communities. The District can partner with these community leaders to come up with a way to reach out to them.
- A Chicago publication listed all the neighboring festivals and the Festival of Cultures was not included in it. Staff will look into this.
- Looking for increasing participation of Skokie residents the District programs and find programming those ethnic community residents. An example would be to add Cambodian dancing.
- Even those part of a group should be viewed as individuals. Since it is difficult to identify a particular community and attract them to that “thing” the District is trying to do, it would be a good idea at events like Festival of Cultures & International Movie Night to survey the people in attendance
- The District also needs to find out the comfort zone of different groups. For example, an exercise class for Muslim women was created, women only swim, etc. cultural differences that will make people comfortable enough to come together.

- Skokie Park District is already very inclusive. Look at the current programs and think about if there are any that are keeping kids from other cultures attending these programs.
- The group in attendance should invite their friends to attend the next meeting to increase the diversity of this committee.
- Surveys after events such as Festival of Cultures, 4th of July parade and fireworks, etc. should be considered. All agreed that surveys are a good idea. The District currently surveys the programs such as camps and summer programs. Questions that can be asked are: Did you enjoy this? Why did you come? What would make you come to another event? What haven't you seen that the District can add?
- The challenge is also for the community leaders to turn to their own communities and get them to integrate in the District programs. Everyone is part of the community that has differences and how do we bring everyone in and make everyone's experience richer.
- What is the goal/mission of this committee? Are we trying to outreach to different communities to see what their needs are or do we want to further diversity and tell them we have a place for their community to join. We want to create the opportunity for everyone to come see what the District offers and develop programs that would interest them to keep them coming back. Some are not participating because people are not comfortable entering our buildings, and have a fear of government organizations.
- Consider a diversity training workshop for committee members, community leaders and the general public
- Have informational coffees at various District locations to draw in neighborhoods and ethnic communities to gather input and foster community spirit.
- Skokie United meetings were successful, it is an inspiration for this diversity committee to remove some of the barriers and create space for the community to come together and make the District better.
- Diversity includes not only ethnicity but also, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc. The District should consider all diversity to attract new people.
- District programs and facilities can appeal to various ethnic groups, but getting the groups to participate and engage is a challenge.
- Rental spaces can be promoted and marketed to groups for specific ethnic/cultural events such as Quinceanera celebration, independence days from various countries, Cinco de Mayo and St. Patrick's Day.
- Future meetings should be in round table with all attendees being part of the circle. The District has created the bridge for everyone to be welcome.
- We need to challenge all to come together.

- Translating flyers or program guides was discussed; perhaps translate the top five languages spoken in Skokie.
- What are we trying to communicate and to whom are we trying to communicate.
- An advisory council was suggested. A vision and mission statement can come out of that.
- The mission statement should be put on hold until the direction of the committee is fully conceptualized. All attendees agreed.

SCHEDULE FOR FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 8 at 7:00 pm. Location to be determined.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Maureen Yanes adjourned the meeting at 8:32 pm.

Susan Aberman, President

John Ohrlund, Secretary

Vision Statement

The Skokie Park District envisions a community where all of its residents enjoy a high quality of life through leisure time pursuits, beautiful open spaces, and first rate facilities.

Mission Statement

The Skokie Park District will realize its vision through teamwork, community partnerships, sound fiscal management, and creativity in every area of its operation.

Core Values

The Skokie Park District will fulfill its mission through:

- Commitment • Integrity • Innovation • Service • Openness • Environmental Stewardship