## Comments from Parks Strategy Panel Meeting and CMAP Staff Responses

February 18, 2009

Attenuees		
Via web	Chris Gent	Chicago Park District
In person	Judy Beck	Illinois Association of Park Districts
	Paul Ivers	Cambridge Homes
	Roger Dahlstrom	NIU Regional Development Institute
	Lisa DiChiera	Landmarks Illinois
	David Dubois	Will County
	David Galowich	Urban Land Institute, Chicago District Council
	Jim LaBelle	Chicago Metropolis 2020
	Robert Palmer	Village of Hazel Crest
	Heather Smith	Congress for New Urbanism
	Heather Tabbert	Regional Transportation Authority
	Kai Tarum	Kane County
	Nathaniel Werner	City of Elmhurst
	Mike Walczak	Northwest Municipal Conference
	Paul Heltne	Center for Humans and Nature

## Attendees

## Questions and Responses

- Parks and open space blend together. It is inaccurate to draw a line between what constitutes a park and what constitutes open space. Also, communities like to blend them, ie, a bike path around a wetland restoration project.
  - This was a challenge of defining parks, but a necessary assumption for the purposes of a regional analysis. We recognize that usage is just as important as acreage, but there is no comprehensive list of amenities for all parks and open lands in the region. In the analysis of "underparked" areas in the paper, we did assume that close access to regional open space, such as forest preserves, filled the need for park access.
- The 10 acres/1,000 people standard seems too rigorous. The City of Chicago has a short term goal of 2 acres/1,000 people and a long term goal of 4 acres/1,000 people.
  - We agree that this is a rigorous goal. We had a difficult time applying one standard across the region, but as the NRPA standard, it was a place to start. We recognize that different solutions may make sense in different parts of the region. We also will update the analysis to highlight areas with under 4 acres/1,000 people.
- The analysis highlights the need in the center and satellite cities in the region. These areas were developed in a different era when parkland standards were not the same.
  - This is true, but it should also be noted that several subzones show up in the periphery, perhaps in some communities where development is occurring at such a rapid pace it is difficult to keep up with parkland needs.
- Did you include school grounds? They are often used as parks. Sometimes land is leased from schools by Park Districts after school hours. Glenview is an example.

- No, this could be added to the analysis. This may be a good way to more accurately represent people's access to recreation sites.
- What is the average size of a mini-park?
  - According to the NRPA, mini-parks are approximately one acre or less. (Illinois Association of Park Districts may use < 3 acres.) Mini-parks were not included in this analysis because of their size, and are not able to be counted in the regional land use inventory.
- What is the cut-off for what was considered "low-density" in this analysis?
- Unincorporated areas may need parks due to growth, but they aren't yet within a park district. This can cause challenges, especially because developers may pay a fee in lieu of granting land, and there are time limits on when these funds must be spent.
  - Low-density subzones (quarter-sections) were removed from consideration for receiving parks. But we do recognize that many of these subzones may eventually provide opportunity to meet future park needs. We will be redoing the analysis with future population projections once these are available.
  - In order to define which subzones are "low-density," two steps were taken. First, subzones that currently have no population were omitted (ie, subzones completely within a forest preserve, O'Hare airport, etc.) Secondly, the outermost part of the region, which is mostly agriculture or open space, was not included either. These subzones were identified through an analysis which separated the region into five "density districts" based on land use and a density of 1 household/10 acres or less.
- In the examples given, both subzones are extremely densely developed, with little or no vacant land. Did you consider the impact of displacing people to create parks?
  - At this stage in the analysis, we are still trying to understand an appropriate "sample program" and haven't gone into the details of measuring impacts or implementation. However, it is important to note that even these dense subzones could have some park needs met by creating parkland nearby not necessarily within the actual subzone. Also, we would expect that vacant or underutilized parcels would be targeted for park acquisition. We do not expect to recommend in the plan that any existing residents be displaced for the purposes of park development.
- This cost analysis isn't completely accurate because land acquisition and park development is not a routine part of park district operations, but a special, episodic event that occurs when the opportunity arises.
  - Land acquisition was treated as a special event, but construction was included in the operations and maintenance (O/M) costs. Debt service was also included as a separate O/M cost.
- The land acquisition cost estimates seem extremely high for Lake County. They seem extremely low for City of Chicago, where there is often environmental clean-up needed.
  - This is true. The estimates represent an average annual regional cost, and each park district is unique. In the analysis, acquisition costs per acre were calculated by subzone, and then totaled for a regional estimate of all parkland acquisition need. This total was

then divided over the 30-year time frame of the plan to come up with an annual regional cost. Acquisition costs can be presented by smaller geography, or by showing descriptive statistics besides the mean, to show the variation across the region. Also, it should be noted that the costs of brownfield remediation – often part of constructing a park in urbanized areas – have been examined in more detail in a separate paper.

- Maybe Chicago should be separated, since its O/M costs are higher than others.
  - We do not recommend separating out any county or municipality, as this is meant to be a regional analysis. Results could be stratified by the "density districts" described above. It should be noted that Chicago actually does not have the most expensive O/M cost per acre in the region, so it is not the only reason for the high O/M average.
- Did you include lakes in this analysis?
  - No, they will be included in an upcoming strategy report on Waterways. Although separated out now strategies for parks, open space, waterways, etc will all be grouped together down the road. In order for us to understand the whole picture, we need to analyze each piece individually.
- Did you tie this to the Green Infrastructure Vision?
- With the new fiscal reality, it is good that this strategy can "sell" a two-for-one benefit recreation and the GIV merging.
  - Not at this stage. However, the GIV will be addressed as a later piece of this analysis to illustrate that as actual acquisition opportunities arise, lands within the GIV should be prioritized.

## **Other Comments and Notes**

- These average park district expenditures and revenues seem to match with Illinois Association of Park District estimates. It is important to include user fees in the cost estimates. User fees and charges can help offset all programming costs (not just for the program the user is participating in).
- Planning and acquisition of parks is not easy in this state. It would be good to measure the funding levels of parkland acquisition in Illinois versus other Midwest states federal, state, county, and local expenditures. There are several different levels of government which can own parkland.
- There is an emerging philosophy concerning "islands of maintenance" and how maintaining several separate, dispersed parks is more costly than one large park. The City of Chicago looks for at least 2 acre sites to create new parks because of this issue.
- It is interesting to relate this issue to "community quality" parks are part of the equation, but not the whole thing.
- This analysis sets a good benchmark. It would be great to drill down this information to a local level so severely "underparked" communities are defined. Some of these communities probably aren't aware of the issue or how they perform. Foreclosed properties might be an opportunity for parkland in the future.