



PICNIC GROVE PARK LAND-USE PLAN

Village of Fox River Grove, Illinois

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I. OVERVIEW

The Village of Fox River Grove is located in the southeast corner of McHenry County and includes a small portion of Lake County in northeastern Illinois. The community is approximately 45 miles northwest of downtown Chicago. It is accessible by arterial roadways Route 14 and Route 22 and is located 10 miles north of Interstate 90. METRA Rail provides commuter transportation service to downtown Chicago. A 1993 special census identified 4,257 persons residing in 1,564 households within the village.

The Fox River originates in Wisconsin and meanders through the far western suburbs of Chicago. The ecology movement and the emergence of river and open space advocacy groups in the Chicago area have increased public awareness of the river's potential and created a sizable constituency for further improvements to the Fox River and its shores. In 1999 the American Rivers environmental group named the Fox River as one of the "Ten Most Endangered Rivers in America" because of the rapid growth of the Chicago metropolitan area. Growth estimates indicate that wastewater treatment plants will have to treat 50% more sewage over the next ten years and so discharge 50% more treated sewage into the Fox River. Additionally, chemical fertilizers and other types of toxic run-off from farm fields, city streets and parking lots are polluting the river. Fortunately, Governor George Ryan has vowed to protect the river and legislators and advocates are poised to assist in the effort.

Picnic Grove Park is located within the boundaries of the Village of Fox River Grove, Illinois, on 40 acres of land bordering the Fox River. It contains a rich diversity of habitat on a parcel that has a wide basin near the river and slopes up to a 400-ft. high hill overlooking the river. The parcel is owned and maintained by the Village. This park is one of the largest undeveloped publicly owned properties bordering the Fox River.

Recreational use of the Picnic Grove began in the early 1900s. Since 1965, numerous private individuals and organizations have proposed development plans for the waterfront area of the Picnic Grove. Few of the recommendations in these plans became reality, but they did awaken a few visionary architects and developers in the area to the Picnic Grove Parks' aesthetic potential as an open space along the Fox River. In 1995 the land was developed into a residential subdivision and river front park.

II. HISTORY

In the 1850's and early 1860's, the Chippewa Indians spent many winters on the Picnic Grove Park property. They were peaceful and avid traders who got along well with the early settlers of the area. The men trapped muskrat and mink along the river and sold the skins in nearby Barrington. The women made beaded necklaces and pouches for sale. They inhabited the woods of the adjoining Opatrny and Krupica farms on the site of the current Picnic Grove Park with as many as 65 wigwams. The Indian men made fence posts for the farmers as payment for allowing them a place for their winter camp. The women traded regularly with their neighbors for chickens, flour and potatoes. In early spring, using the Fox River as a highway, the tribe

would travel north to their summer camping grounds pulling all their possessions over the frozen river on hand made sleds.

In the 1870s, as farms became more established in the area, Chicagoans began to use the Fox River and Chain of Lakes area for vacationing. Word of the abundance of game for fishing and hunting and the natural beauty along the waterways quickly attracted more vacationers and entrepreneurs to supply their goods. By 1901 a large number of resorts and hotels, summer cottages, fishing shacks and boarding houses were in existence along the Fox River. The Village of Fox River Grove began as a destination for many of these city-dwelling vacationers. One of the prime locations was the Picnic Grove Park area. Many liked it so much that they decided to settle in the community.

The area had been farmed and sparsely settled since 1860 but real development began to occur when Eman Opatrny purchased the Picnic Grove property from his father in 1900. The natural beauty of the property along the Fox River with its high elevations combined with a wide flat plain bordering the water, inspired Opatrny. Country picnics were the fashion at that time and he saw an opportunity to use his property for that purpose. He convinced the Chicago and Northwestern Railway to build a rail spur from the Northwestern line to his waterfront property and to run special excursion trains from downtown Chicago to the Picnic Grove.

A promoter was hired and round-trip tickets were sold for 50 cents each. The effort was a success. On Fridays, up to 22 special trains of 11 cars each would bring crowds to the Picnic Grove for a weekend of merriment. Organizations such as the Oliver Typewriter Company, Cook County Democrats, Deering Harvester Company, the National Athletic Club, and many church and civic groups patronized the Picnic Grove. In 1902 Opatrny built the Castle Pavilion and Resort Hotel on the property. It featured the area's first player piano and a guest could stay for five dollars a week. Dances were held regularly with music provided by Chicago orchestras. Guests began to come and stay in the "Picnic Grove" for the entire summer season. Soon, the grove had a large restaurant, numerous refreshment stands, six bars, picnic tables, and a large picnic pavilion in case of rain. There was a boathouse with 50 rowboats, a steam powered boat, ballfield, horseracing track, baseball field, bowling alley, shooting gallery, photo studio, and large dance platform

As a location for outdoor activities and water sports, the Picnic Grove attracted a continual stream of visitors that came to support the growing economy. Eman Opatrny began planning the Village of Fox River Grove in 1905 and that year purchased 100 acres to be subdivided into the Village's first neighborhood. The natural beauty of the Picnic Grove and vision of Eman Opatrny are largely responsible for the incorporation of the Village of Fox River Grove in 1919. In 1942 the Picnic Grove was sold to Louis Cernocky, who improved the property further by adding outdoor fireplaces, a bath house, sand beaches, speed boat rides and a kiddieland summer carnival of mechanical children's rides. The land also supported a dance hall and a ski hill. This operation ceased in 1965 as the property began to be contested for development rights. A marina and restaurant complex ceased operation after being destroyed by a fire in the mid-1970's. Plans for a Holiday Inn Hotel and Marina were drawn up but never realized. Several subsequent plans were submitted by developers but the Village stood firm requiring preservation of the riverfront land as public space. In 1994 Terrestris Development won approval for a 98 home subdivision

with the riverfront portion of the property secured by developer donation and a state grant for Village use as a park.

The Village of Fox River Grove is pleased to maintain the Picnic Grove Park as an open-land conservation area. This park is one of the last, large public properties left intact along the Fox River.

III. PHILOSOPHY

Implementation of this Land-Use Plan will allow recreational use while protecting the environmental integrity of Picnic Grove Park. This plan draws on a comprehensive process of reviewing input from Village officials and environmental representatives as well as members of the community. The intention is for the community nature of the park area to continue through genteel recreational usage and enjoyment of its natural beauty. Recreational options are to be expanded to the extent that native Illinois wildlife habitat and floristic diversity is enhanced.

IV. CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, OPERATIONS, AND FUNDING

The Picnic Grove Park plan will be developed and maintained as part of the 10-year capital improvement plan prepared by the Village's Streets and Parks Department. Input will be sought from the Park Commission, Special Events Committee, and Plan Commission as well as the public and elected officials through the budget process.

Some of the key maintenance needs are controlled prairie burns, invasive vegetation removal and restoration, and park infrastructure maintenance. Ongoing operating issues will include the organization, site preparation, and cleanup of community events, signage, hours of operation, and prohibited uses for recreation facilities, and soliciting and managing volunteers, experts, and contractors to address conservation needs.

The funding of recreation, conservation, community events, and infrastructure projects at the park will be realized through Village revenues, grants, contributions, and (possibly) proceeds from concessions and event entry fees.

V. MAJOR COMPONENTS OF LAND-USE PLAN

1. Recreation

A. FACILITIES

1. Fishing Piers (future) – Fishing Piers will be established in the areas shown on map. Signs will designate these for use as fishing piers.

2. Shore Fishing (future) - Shore Fishing will be located at the designated points on the map. Areas will be marked with appropriate signs and ground surface preparation. Shoreline will be protected from erosion by introduction of native plantings and other stabilization products.
3. Boat Docks (future) - Boat Docks will be located as shown on the map. These docks will provide basic amenities to users of the boat ramp and park visitors. Overnight stays or storage will be prohibited.
4. Boat Ramp – A Boat Ramp has been established as shown on the map. The ramp will accommodate non-motorized watercraft.
5. Picnic Areas, Parcel 1 - Picnic Areas have been established in Parcel 1 as shown on the map. Additional tables and benches will be provided.
6. Trail System (future) - A Trail System will be established as shown on the map. The trail will be mixed-use encouraging educational field trips from local schools, jogging, walking, and weather permitting, cross-country skiing. An interpretive area of the trail will be established with corresponding information plaques. The trail will be tied in to a planned Village trail system and Norge Ski Club cross-country ski trail.
7. Sledding Hill – The Sledding Hill will be maintained as shown on the map. The Sledding Hill will accommodate a variety of uses such as sledding and tubing. Bicycles, snowboards, and motorized vehicles are prohibited.
8. Open Areas – Open Areas will be maintained as shown.
9. Horseshoes (future) - Two Horseshoe Pits will be installed as indicated on the map.
10. Volleyball Court - A Volleyball Court is located in the park as shown on the map.
11. Ice Skating Rink (future) - An Ice-Skating Rink will be installed as shown on the map.
12. Playground Equipment (future) – Add to small area south of volleyball court.

B. GUIDELINES

1. Conservation Conditions and Guidelines – The community nature of the park area will continue while native Illinois wildlife habitat and floristic diversity is enhanced. There will be a genteel usage of the parcel with an ecological preservation focus.
2. Prohibited Uses – The Prohibited Uses for this property include Off-Trail Biking,

Carnivals, Permanent/Reserved Use/or Striped Ball-Fields, Golfing and all other uses prohibited by the Village Board after receipt of recommendations by the Streets & Parks Department and Public Works Committee.

3. Application and Review Process – An application must be submitted to Streets & Parks Department for all uses not specifically cited in this document. The Village Board, pending recommendations by the Streets & Parks Department and Public Works Committee, will provide the final decision.

2. Conservation

A. CRITICAL AREAS

1. Preservation Areas - The restoration of wild flowers and native plants has closely followed the 1995 recommendations of Dr. Wayne E. Schennum, Natural Resource Manager, McHenry County Conservation District. Clearing and replanting will be initiated at the park entrance and progress in stages to be determined by the Village Board according to available funding and available volunteer assistance.
2. Parcel 3 - Parcel 3 is a natural wetland to be maintained in a fashion that is beneficial to the wildlife and plants in the area. This parcel is an excellent wild area for educational trips and ecological scientific research. Efforts to protect native animal species and their habitat will be maintained and enhanced. For instance, this is a feeding and breeding area for the red shouldered hawk and it should be maintained in a manner that will encourage their continued presence.
3. Wetlands - The wetlands of the park should be maintained as wetland areas with the exception of the parcel at the Southwest corner of the traffic circle. This will be developed into a garden area with an appropriate park sign and flowerbed.
4. Savannah/Woodlands - The woodlands will be maintained per the environmental assessment by the Superintendent of Streets & Parks. The Woodlands area will contain a trail segment that is designed to educate students about this natural environment.
5. Open Prairie - The Open Prairie constitutes the majority of open area of the Park and will be maintained per the environmental assessment by the Superintendent of Streets & Parks.
6. Conservation Boundaries – Covenants with the residences of Picnic Grove Subdivision require that adjacent parcels maintain a conservation area, which must be maintained in its natural state.

7. Native Animal Habitats – Existing and desired wildlife in the area is to be catalogued and their habitat established and maintained.

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3. Community Events

A. ACTIVITIES

1. Fireworks – The Annual Fireworks Show is held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
2. Fire Department Water Fights – The Fire Department Water Fight is held at the park.
3. Taste of Fox River Grove (future) – The Taste of Fox River Grove Festival may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
4. Water-Skiing Competition (future) – A Water Skiing Competition may be held at the park and scheduled by the Village.
5. Distance Runs (future) - may be held at the park and scheduled by the Village.
6. Oktoberfest (future) - An Oktoberfest may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
7. Winter Sports Festival (future) – This activity may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village. It could include events such as cross country skiing, hill races, skating, and ice-fishing competitions.

8. Easter Egg Hunt (future) – An Easter Egg Hunt may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
9. Historic Reenactments (future) - Historical Reenactments may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
10. Kite Festival (future) – A Kite Festival may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.
11. Music Program (future) – Small summer programs using a portable stage may be held at the park as scheduled by the Village.

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3. Application and Review Process – An application must be submitted to the Streets & Parks Department Village Board for all uses not specifically cited in this document. The Village Board, pending recommendations by the Streets & Parks Department and Public Works Committee will provide the final decision.

4. Infrastructure

A. FACILITIES

1. Road – The entrance road will be maintained for ingress and egress to the park as indicated on the map.
2. Parking – The Parking Area will be maintained in the area shown on the map. Parking for large events will be at remote lots such as the Metra and Commuter Parking lots and the Stone Hill Shopping Center.

(Future) Create parking spaces at the end of Ski Hill Road next to the Park.

3. Water Treatment Plant – This is a brick structure measuring 40 X 60 built in 1996 to service homes in the Village of Fox River Grove.

4. Lighting (future) – Ornamental lighting may be introduced for safety, sledding, and evening events. Lighting conforming to the style established by the Village will be placed for the convenience and safety of patrons. Main areas to be lit are the sledding hill and picnic area.
5. Electrical Service – Electrical Service has been installed to provide power for events and future buildings.
6. Drinking Fountain – A Drinking Fountain has been established as shown on the map to accommodate park visitors.
7. Shelters (future) - Picnic Shelters to be built. Some will include trash disposal and grill facilities.
8. RiverFront Concession/Food Peddlers (future) – A Concession building may be constructed to accommodate food and beverage sales. The Village Board, pending recommendations by the Parks Commission and Public Works Committee, will review requests for concessions and food peddlers. Profits will be used for park improvements and maintenance.
9. Washrooms – A Washroom facility will be constructed to accommodate park visitors. The facility will be accessible to the disabled and have a diaper changing station.
10. Riverwalk (future) - A Riverwalk strolling path may be constructed along the riverfront. This walkway should have appropriate surface, lighting, and seating considerations. The surface should be consistent with expected use.
11. Support Building (future) - A Support Building may be erected as shown on the map to store maintenance materials.
12. Pavilion (future) – A Pavilion may be erected on the site of the old marina. This structure would serve as a shelter from weather, picnic area, concession area, and central meeting building.
13. Runoff Detention Area – A Runoff Detention Area has been built to control the flow of water from the adjoining residential area.
14. Gazebo (future) - A Gazebo may be built to facilitate events and functions. This structure can be available for a variety of uses including music concerts, speeches and weddings.
15. Portable Stage (future) – Purchase for small summer music programs.
16. Nursery (future) – Small out-of-the way area to be created to provide plants for Village parks.

B. GUIDELINES

1. Conservation Conditions and Guidelines – The community nature of the park area will continue while native Illinois wildlife habitat and floristic diversity is enhanced. There will be a genteel usage of the parcel with an ecological preservation focus. We make every effort to maintain a pleasant family atmosphere.
2. Prohibited Uses – The Prohibited Uses for this property include Off-Trail Biking, Carnivals, Permanent/Reserved Use/or Striped Ball-Fields, Golfing and all other uses prohibited by the Streets & Parks Department after receipt of recommendations by the Streets & Parks Department and Public Works Committee.
3. Application and Review Process – An application must be submitted to the Streets & Parks Department for all uses not specifically cited in this document. The Village Board, pending recommendations by the Streets & Parks Department and Public Works Committee will provide the final decision.

-- END OF PICNIC GROVE LAND-USE PLAN --