



THE PACT:

THE PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL TRIBUTE NEWSLETTER

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ATHLETIC FIELD PAC: THE "HI CHAIR CHICAGO" MOVEMENT

Athletic Field Park, 3546 W. Addison St.
Submitted by the Athletic Field Park
Advisory Council. Submitted by Dennis
Puhr, Athletic Field Park Advisory Council.

The members of the Athletic Field Park Advisory Council (AFAC) wanted to be proactive when it came to building a safe and inviting park. AFAC's mission was not just to fundraise and advocate for their park, but it was also about bringing people together and building a safer and inviting community.

Years ago, AFAC had done an Earth Day clean-up and was shocked to see the park full of litter just a week later. AFAC knew they had to embrace the community at large. As a result, they started community clean-ups, "Pickin' Up the Parkways". This made them think about including the whole community and not just the park when it came to AFAC's mission. An AFAC member had also recently heard a TED Talk about how public spaces can change a city's character. Specifically, the talk referenced how New York City was able to make one of their parks safer. It was a very basic and easy idea to make the park more inviting for everyone. The speaker referenced two action steps: trim the trees around the park and add movable chairs. A park with two or three benches that are

anchored into the ground were seen as limiting when it came to building community. Once a person sat in the middle of the bench, no one else sat down. As a result, movable chairs were added to Bryant Park in New York City. People were able to move next to each other, hold a conversation, have a community meeting, or just sit alone and read a book. AFAC even wrote to the council at Bryant Park in New York City. They wrote back stating that the movable chairs were so successful that they were able to sell them at the end of each season and make a profit. They even sent AFAC the name of the company in Georgia that supplied them with their chairs. Bryant Park said no one stole the chairs because they loved the chairs so much, so everyone kept their eyes on the park.

AFAC reached out to the Chicago Park District and was told that placing movable chairs in a Chicago park was not possible. As a result, AFAC decided to encourage neighbors to place a few chairs in front of their homes with the idea of sitting out front and saying hello to neighbors. After a recent incident in the community, a neighbor had pointed out that the community was like a ghost town. You could



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(Continued from page 1) walk through the neighborhood and hardly see a soul, she said. The park council thought that it would be a great idea to have homes in the community adopt a set of chairs with the idea that they would try their best to sit out front and say hello to neighbors. The idea quickly caught on.

Now, about a dozen blocks surrounding Athletic Field Park have homes with chairs out front. In fact, there are two homeowners that have

placed benches out front. Neighbors have picked up on the idea of trying to get to know other neighbors. AFAC members knew that the park was only as safe as the surrounding neighborhood. If neighbors were out and about, it would result in a safer neighborhood and park. AFAC even put together a website www.hichairchicago.com and Facebook page @ Hi Chair Chicago.

Other community building ideas that AFAC has adopted include Movies in the Park, Movin' to the Music, Picking up the Parkways, and this year a community block sale. All of these events are in an effort to get people out of their homes and into the community to get to know each other. Visit www.athleticfieldpark.com for more details.

FOTP ARCHIVES: THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT CONSENT DECREE

WRITTEN BY DANIEL LASPATA, POLICY ASSOCIATE, FRIENDS OF THE PARKS

On May 13, 1983 the Chicago Park District (CPD) entered into a consent decree with the federal government, the result of a three year investigation and 1982 federal lawsuit alleging racial discrimination in the allocation of resources within the park district. The consent decree allowed the powerful CPD superintendent Ed Kelly to avoid an admission of guilt while providing a framework to address the supply, distribution, and maintenance of recreational services, programs and facilities of the park district. The decree sought to promote equal and non-discriminatory treatment of black and Latino communities through the establishment of rigorous and detailed systems, procedures and schedules that could assure equity for these neighborhoods and their parks.

For an initial three year period from 1983 through 1985, an Implementation Committee, separate from the CPD Superintendent and Board of Commissioners, was created to meet quarterly and implement the consent decree on the side of the park district. Parks were divided into eight priority rankings depending on facilities and needs (e.g. swimming pools,



Photo: Community meeting on Consent Decree, 1987.

size of fieldhouse, condition of playgrounds, etc.). Recreational personnel hours throughout these parks were maintained and increased as necessary. Depending on the type of park, staff were assigned to devise, promote, and direct recreational and instructional programming that met the interests of the community. When attendance of these programs failed to meet expectations, responsibility fell on the park district, rather than the community, which then determined the causes of the low attendance and took

corrective action. This renewed commitment to communication, transparency, and community engagement energized the emerging park advisory councils, which would maintain the push for accountability and local oversight over the coming decades.

The consent decree also called for rigorously scheduled landscaping and maintenance, with a baseline set of keeping the parks clean, safe, and well-maintained. CPD was responsible for a daily patrol of the grounds within one hundred yards of buildings, removing all litter and trash. Furthermore, detailed capital improvement plans were laid out, with an annual minimum of \$10 million (\$24.5 million in 2017 dollars) in capital improvement funds to be directed at the replacement, rehabilitation, and improvement of fieldhouses, playgrounds, pools, etc. in under-resourced parks. Priority was placed on the rehabilitation and replacement of fieldhouses, followed by the rehabilitation of athletic fields and other equipment.

The decree was amended in 1988 due to the appointment of new CPD Board of Commissioners members in 1986 and new policies on fieldhouses and capital improvements in 1987, and its duration was extended to November 1990. However, a new five year capital improvement plan was developed in 1989 which was based on objective criteria for determining priorities. This plan led to a reconsideration of the extended decree and its dismissal on May 14, 1989 due to an agreement that structural inequities had been rectified.

The consent decree is summarized on the Chicago Park District's website under the heading "Citizens Inspire Park Reform," but statements like, "The CPD formed a task force, which undertook an exhaustive study and issued a series of recommendations in 1987" overstates the initiative taken by the District. Were it not for investigative work and lawsuits by both citizen groups and the federal government, it is unlikely the Chicago Park District would have addressed these inequities.