



**REGULAR BOARD MEETING**  
**BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS OF PALATINE PARK DISTRICT**  
 Village of Palatine, 200 East Wood Street in Palatine  
 Second Floor – Village Council Chambers  
 August 12, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.



These minutes are not a verbatim record of what was said during the meeting

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by President Ruff

Commissioners Present

Terry Ruff, President  
 Jennifer Rogers, Vice President  
 Susan Gould  
 Joe Petricca  
 Greg Sammons

Commissioners Absent

Staff Present

Benjamin Rea, Executive Director  
 Andrea Fisher, Park Board Treasurer/Director of Finance  
 Sonia Austin, Superintendent of Finance  
 Michelle Eckelberry, Director of District Services  
 Jim Holder, Director of Parks & Planning

Colleen Palmer, Director of Recreation & Facilities  
 Josh Ludolph, Supt of Recreation Facilities  
 Cheryl Lufitz, Communications & Marketing Mgr.  
 Todd Ranum, Athletic Coordinator  
 Lisa Allie, Park Board Secretary/Executive Assistant

Visitors and Citizens Present

Liz Wagman, Tressler LLP/Park District Attorney  
 See attached list

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Rogers moved, and Commissioner Petricca seconded that the agenda be approved. Director Rea confirmed that there was no need for an Executive Session; agenda items #8 & 9 were removed. By a roll call vote, the agenda for the regular meeting of August 12, 2024, was approved as amended. The result of the voice vote follows:

AYE: Jennifer Rogers, Susan Gould, Joe Petricca, Greg Sammons, Terry Ruff

NAY: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda

The Board reviewed the previously distributed items posted on the consent agenda. Commissioner Rogers moved and Commissioner Sammons seconded that the consent agenda be approved. Commissioner Gould requested to have Ordinance 24-07; Surplus of Property removed from the Consent Agenda to be voted on separately. President Ruff acknowledged the request as item #5B under New Business. By a roll call vote, the following items on the consent agenda were approved as amended: Regular Meeting Minutes of July 8, 2024, Executive Session Meeting Minutes of July 8, 2024, Warrant #12 and Ordinance #24-06; Surplus of Property. The result of the roll call vote follows:

AYE: Susan Gould, Joe Petricca, Greg Sammons, Jennifer Rogers, Terry Ruff

NAY: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried.

## Visitors and Citizens' Comments

*Tom Gersic:* This is a government body an open meeting and a government building, comments made here by the public are protected by the 1st Amendment Constitution of the United States of America. You don't have to like them, find them respectful or agree with them. Commissioner Ruff telling the public what we can and can't say, blowing up at a member of the community for saying something that you don't want to hear, and having them escorted out by the police. These things trample on individual rights of free speech, are chilling to the public discourse and they're deeply un-American. Commissioner Petricca you explained your vote to us and thank you for that. Your explanation is shocking. You're looking out for your guy, not the community who elected you. I'm calling today for Executive Director Ben Rea to be removed from his position and replaced. I'm also calling for Commissioner Ruff and Commissioner Petrica to step down from their seats on this board for lying to the public and for acting in bad faith as elected representatives.

*Elle Haferkamp:* There's a lack of transparency going on, factor in this constant communication that all of us have done with a lot of you about everything. Either getting the same answers, getting filtered answers back, or having unfulfilled FOIA's that have been submitted, and from what I understand from people I've spoken to some are not being met. It continues to feel like there's something else going on here and that transparency as a Board which you should do, but is something you're not capable of doing. I really don't understand why the Board is not listening to people who said they want to stand behind the stables. I don't know if the goal is to make the people of Palatine feel that you're being dishonest, but it keeps growing. That's going to lead people to start having conversations of, do we need to show up for the election? I'm not trying to say that as a threat or anything, but it's making a lot more of us pay attention to stuff. If you guys were going to be representatives of the community, please do your job. Please listen to what people are saying. Please have more transparency with us.

*Mike Hoffman:* Joe this this to you directly; I went and looked at the job posting when you guys were looking for an Executive Director. One of the things said we report to the 5-person elected Board of Commissioners, the Executive Director will implement and administer the policies adopted by the board, not the other way around. Also have strong planning capital project management and facility renovation experience. Ben is either really smart and misleading you guys or doesn't have experience with construction, right? I've pointed out all the flaws in Lamp's bid. I've pointed this all out to him and he has refused to get a cost reference to see maybe these guys do know what they're talking about. I gave you 3 bids from FBI buildings the lowest being \$150,000 and the highest \$300,000. How can all three post-frame contractors be incorrect but Lamp who doesn't do construction right? They're just GC how can their numbers be correct I just don't understand why you won't look at it. Everything sucks so that's all I have to

*Linni Pesch:* I'm a former Palatine library employee, retired 24 years of service. I'm a former Palatine Park District employee, the supervisor of the Clayson House Museum, former Palatine Historical Society volunteer and member. I was a 2017 volunteer of the year through the park district and the Palatine Historical Society. I bring all this up because I want to let you know how invested I am in this town and I want to congratulate you. You live in your own world, so you don't even realize how famous you are. Not only in the Chicago metropolitan area but globally. I have a friend in Norway through social media that knows all about this, I have family in Venezuela, and they know all about this, I have family in Peru, and they heard about this and an acquaintance in Australia heard about all this. You put us on the map, you are famous. No matter what the outcome of this is; you brought an embarrassment to my town and their town.

President Ruff told Ms. Pesch that her time is up as she already had more than 3 minutes. Citizens and visitors booed and yelled at from the audience

*Rick Burd:* I'm a resident here in Palatine for 35 years. I'm a member of the Palatine Area Chamber of Commerce, business owner and active in the community. I perform at one of the park district facilities right next door at Cutting Hall as part of Music on Stage. I believe that we are all here, collectively, the Board and the supporters of Palatine for the same purpose. That purpose is to have quality park district programs and facilities for the residents and others outside our district who want to participate. That begins with the leadership, Executive Director Ben Rae, Commissioner Joe Petricca, Commissioner Sue Gould, Commissioner Greg Sammons, Vice President Jennifer Rogers, and President Terry Ruff. I thank you all for your leadership because it does take a lot and I know there's a lot of dissent out here. It takes commitment and collaboration with the residents and it takes cooperation. Right now, we look at Ben who came here in December with 24 years of leadership in Arlington Heights. It's a two-way street when someone interviews for a job the community has to be a right fit for the individual, the individual has to be a right fit for the community, and obviously that took place or Ben wouldn't have been hired.

*Steve Polit:* I rise as a property owner in the Palatine Park District but I'm also a resident of Mount Prospect since 1963. I'm a taxpayer here, and as a resident of a business your process brings me to this meeting. As a former Mount Prospect Park District Commissioner in the 1990s, and the Mount Prospect Trustee for 10 years, I was concerned that no discussions regarding this subject can occur in an Executive Session. In following this issue, I have not seen any open discussions about the positions of the board in regards to open meetings. I think it's important that public content takes place in the public. I might suggest that the residents collect signatures to force the binding referendum to have the five member board become a 7 member board in the next election so that they get two more board members on 7. They get a few more ideas, and a little more work to come forward and represent residents of the Palatine Park District.

*Diane Ross:* At the last board meeting Joe Petricca you stated your job was to protect the Executive Director. In fact, I believe, not a direct quote, the bottom line is to have his back. This is not the good old boys club. According to the Illinois Association of Park Districts, the role of the Park Board Commissioner is to, quote represent your fellow citizens and interpret their ideas. This is from their brochure for Park District Commissioners. Clearly, you did not read or receive that brochure. All of you here as elected officials are here to represent the thoughts and opinions of the people who elected you to represent them, not protect management. Last time I was at the stables, I was able to reflect on the past 25 years of my daughter Lindsay riding at Palatine Stables. It has truly given her back a part of her life that her disability took away from her. You are now removing that again from her life. Do the right thing and again be our voice, not yours.

*Cynthia Carrasco:* I hope you're listening and that you look across the table. For those of you who may know a family that has a child that has severe difficulty walking, is missing limbs, is blind, or cannot hear. On my NextDoor website, there was a comment saying that those who are residents of Palatine and can afford to have their children ride horses are privileged. I'm going to tell you how those families and how I feel; you're privileged because your children have their hearing, they're not blind, they're not missing any limbs and they have mental capabilities. These children can't play soccer, baseball, basketball, or all these other activities in the park district, and those of us who are paying taxes that they can't use. It's for families and parents who can't sleep at night because their children are not like other children, and they want to experience everything else that privileged children have with all their extremities.

*Deb Burdsall:* I've been a resident of Palatine since 1989 and I'm the member of a national board. Before I go to any board meeting I sit down and read our mission and vision because I think it's critical. From what I've heard here I have grave concerns because your mission is to provide safe enjoyable and affordable parks programs and recreational facilities that enhance the quality of life by promoting good health and well-being for the residents by being fiscally responsible of course, but the values are integrity communication accountability collaboration and leadership and I have some concerns being a resident of Palatine. I think that fiscal responsibility is important, but accurate fiscal responsibility and it seems that a careful analysis of the cost and the benefit needs to be looked at in a very transparent method.

President Ruff asked if anyone else would like to speak.

*Frank Skorski:* I can't tell you how disgusted I am with this board. 20 years ago I moved in here and thought I'd died and went to heaven. It was a hell of a good town, village, and it still is. I too have a special needs daughter who partook in riding. At 80 years old I don't plan on getting on a horse again. My family's moved on in terms of they're not gonna be using the stables, but I believe that everyone here has a reason for being here. For some reason, you guys choose to ignore them and that's reprehensible. I know you have an agenda, President Ruff, you wanna shut it down because there's no other reason you would do what you're doing to these wonderful people and their children. I don't understand you're thinking because it definitely does not show any fiscal or financial responsibility. There's nobody that could tell me that this number works and therefore you have to burn it down. I'm disappointed, I'm ashamed of the Palatine Park District. I've talked to the mayor; I've talked to the village council and most of the other elected officials. They cannot believe that anybody would go against this type of public opinion. These people all they wanted to do is just leave it alone.

*Kathryn Hert:* I came here with my parents years ago and the horseman stables was over there with the black troop. We are a family here children, grandchildren. Fast forward 40-50 years that I have worked in Palatine. This is an incredible opportunity for pre-teens to learn empathy, animal care, horse care, and caring about the contest that they have. My family rescued an injured racehorse so here I am still 18-20 years having this horse and I have met so many wonderful people. In particular when I was working with the handicapped children. I had a lot of knowledge from riding at the stables since I was 8-9 years old. I really believe that you should continue to have this place. I understand that maybe the park district and people in Palatine do have the resources to help us but if not, I thought it was a wonderful idea to have some sort of a bond. Thank you for giving me time to talk about this beautiful facility.

*Emma Van Gilder:* I know you guys probably recognize the name but can't figure out how which is quite sad honestly because my sister is the full-time staff member for the stable. I'm trying not to get upset because it makes me very upset with the way you guys treat my sister not giving her any help at all. These girls have been riding at the barn I think I started teaching almost all of them. I started teaching Charlotte Anne when she was 4 as a little rider. I've done probably every single job that can be done at the stables. I've done the pony parties, the pony rides, the little riders, the intro lessons, and the advanced jumping lessons. I've always had at least two horses at the barn. I have three, my lease is one of my horses. I just wanted to come up here and say that you guys thank you for letting me speak but you need to do a better job with the way you treat the full-time staff members.

*Alissa DePue:* I'm a resident of Palatine for about 31 years now, I met my husband Bill in Palatine, and he told me that this is where we'd live. I went along with it, and I came to love Palatine. I worked for this park district, and I was excited about coming to work here. I remember and recall leadership, would tell anyone who would listen that they never wanted to be in the stable business but that doesn't make it any less of a reality. The reality is there was a stable there and we bought it, we, as a community because guess what you work for us. The fact is, you are in the stable business whether you want to be or not. It's not any less of a home for those animals, a place to volunteer for community members, a place to ride for people who love to ride and a place to learn some empathy. You're here to represent us, not to have the Directors back, for the thousands of community members who live here. I have never been so disgusted to live in Palatine and I'm embarrassed. I'm so disappointed in all of you. It's disgusting.

*Allison Walthon:* I'm a resident of Palatine and have lived here for about 7 years with my husband and now my 4-year-old twins. I came to this meeting to tell you about all the children that not only are taking lessons at the stable, but all of the children, like my children that want to take lessons. Part of the reason why we chose this village over all the other villages that we could afford to live in was because of your park district. When I was a child, I took riding lessons. It was one of my favorite things to do and we chose this district because it had the stables. I knew that I wanted my children to learn how to ride. I also know

that I'm a state employee and I can't afford to take them to private stables to get lessons. It costs too much money, our only option is the Palatine Stables, we can afford that, but we can't do that if you shut down the stables and all of the other children who can't afford other options, they can't afford to go anywhere else. We need these stables.

*Bill Davenport:* I'm a 44-year resident of Palatine. I came to Palatine after serving in the army for four years. I had a choice to make when I left the army. Did I stay in Illinois or go back home to Texas which I love? I stayed in Illinois and I've proudly been a member of this community for 44 years. You've heard from the people here, week after week after week every meeting you've had. You've heard these impassioned pleas and cries from people. You've done damage to this community. That's not just the opinion. That's the facts that you've heard from people sitting in this very audience. You have an opportunity to rescind the original motion that you made to close these stables. You can erase that damage by reconsidering. Consider the proposal of either rebuilding or reconstructing at a cost much lower than what your engineer is advising you to do. You have a binary choice. Make the right choice, do the right thing.

*Patricia Moody:* I grew up in Palatine and lived here until I married. I moved to Barrington then Colorado and now I'm back. To shut down something that the community still enjoys, wants, and is beneficial to people with handicaps is unconscionable. You have not given a decent reason for shutting it down, you haven't mentioned why and what you plan on doing with this property which isn't the greatest piece of land in Palatine to be developed. I wish you would reconsider. I have faith in you people but with the reaction heard from the crowd, the way you've been speaking to various people, and calling police on people with an opinion I think when the next vote comes up I may not be voting you guys back in so please reconsider and do the right thing.

*Chelsea Orr:* I've lived across the country, I'm from Arizona originally. I am a resident here in Palatine and this is a new thing for me. When I moved here, I didn't know that having a stable was a possibility. Owning horses is really, really expensive. I rehabbed horses in both Louisiana and Arizona. It's very expensive in this area and I think you'll be hard-pressed to find places for the horses here. I've had experience across the whole country, and my aunt owns horses in Arizona. She's a real estate agent for horse properties specifically. It's much more expensive here because of the facilities that are needed. Having it as a part of the park district is really important, and something that made me decide to move here. I've just moved here and now you're shutting it down so I had to say something. It's a unique feature to have a stable as part of the park district. It seems like being an equestrian is kind of like a rich man's sport but having it as part of a park district makes it more accessible to your average person.

*Sharon Lee:* I do the NWSRA program at the stable. We have riders from 3 to 30, we have riders that can barely walk that we get up on a horse. They are exactly the same as everybody else when they're on that horse and they're so happy. Thank you for extending the program for the fall. We start again on September 9<sup>th</sup> and I invite everybody to come and watch one of our nights. We are there on Monday night and I think you have some free Monday nights. It would be nice to see you so you can see what you're shutting down because I've heard they're going to try to move it somewhere but that doesn't mean they can get there. I've heard Rockford, Batavia, but I don't know. They can't go there far because special children can't ride in the car that far. Please reconsider, and come see what we do on a Monday night

*David Cox:* The reason I wanted to come up is because Sharon teaches our daughter, and she was nonverbal when she started about 20 years ago. I just want you to think about something, every Saturday morning for 20 years she wakes up: Is it riding today? Is it riding today? If you guys shut it down, one of you come explain to my daughter why it's no longer available.

*Unnamed Child:* This stable means everything to me and when I think about it closing my voice cracks up, and I can hardly breathe. This stable it's like my second home and if you guys close it, I hope you understand you're breaking so, so many hearts.

*Unnamed Child:* I think a couple of meetings ago one of you said that you would listen very closely to what we had to say, but I'm not so sure you're actually listening. Some kid just came up here and she was almost crying and yet the look on your face. I can't believe you. This is ridiculous. If you were truly listening, if you were truly listening to us then you would have a little heart and you wouldn't close down this important part of our community. I just can't believe it. Are you crazy or something? Why aren't you listening to us? I can't believe it. This is just crazy. Who even voted for you? I don't see why anyone would vote for you. That's just weird. You don't seem to care at all about the members of your community which you should. I don't get how somebody who works for the community is clearly working against the community.

*Cary Lisota:* The more I hear everyone talk I couldn't leave this meeting without coming up here telling you guys we leave every one of these meetings with such hope. I don't know how you guys sit here, listen to this, and don't say anything. I understand how these meetings work, you're not allowed to talk, you're not allowed to respond to us. I can tell you that I, along with thousands of people, have sent very kind emails requesting your responses. Ben requesting a phone call from you, I'm still waiting for. Just to have a conversation, an explanation as to why. Human decency here, we deserve the respect of the why. We know it's not the numbers because you would put this towards any other facility that you care about. Whether it's 2.6 million or \$500,000 we all know that, but we deserve the respect of why. I ask you just for that decency because then maybe we could all start to make sense of this but right now we can't make sense of this. I don't understand, what human being would not treat us with that kind of respect and kindness. We're asking you for that, that can't be that difficult

*Cynthia Norton:* I hope after hearing all these people speak that you know how much the barn changes lives. The camaraderie and the horses there. I taught Lindsey and the children that had difficulties. I got horse lessons as a Christmas present. Then I grew to keep lessoning, teaching people, working with the disabled, and being on the show team. I never dreamed in my life that I would do those things and for all these children, it's going to do that for them. I've had parents come back to me and say you taught my child not just how to ride, you taught her about life. That's what these people are talking about here. Every single one of them, it's changed their life in some way and it's everyone. It's the kids, the disabled, and the adults. This barn is changing lives, and to tear it down would be a tragedy because it has so much more to offer. It has so many more lives that can be changed.

President Ruff announced that this would be our last speaker.

*Unnamed Speaker:* Last August 12th I had a horse show and when I got home I texted my friend and said Happy Birthday I'm sorry I missed it for a horse show. I felt bad and promised him I'd be there next year. That's today, but I wasn't able to keep that promise because he passed away in January. This is going to sound stupid but three days after that I had my first lesson with this school horse named Bucky, and I see my friend in him, he had the same attitude. On my way here today, a song came on the radio that I've always associated with my friend. I see him in Bucky and this other horse I met recently named Annie who happens to be his sister's name. I didn't believe in signs and all that before these horses came into my life, but they saved me from this dark place I was in and they've done that for so many people. The least we can do to repay them would be to keep the roof that they've always known above their heads.

President Ruff thanked everyone for their comments and moved on to New Business item 5A Approval of Audit Services.

#### New Business

The Board reviewed a previously distributed board summary pertaining to the Approval of Audit Services. Commissioner Rogers moved and Commissioner Sammons seconded that the Board of Park Commissioners approve the lowest qualified respondent of the audit services RFP with Sikich for a total of \$77,890 over a three-year contract period. Commissioner Sammons asked if we have any experience

with this group; Director Fisher said that we have used Sikich in the past and that we have been with Lauterbach since 2018. It was about time to go and ensure that we are getting the lowest bid for auditing services at this time. It was a minor savings, but it was time to switch it up again. The motion was approved by a roll call; the result follows:

AYE: Joe Petricca, Greg Sammons, Jennifer Rogers, Susan Gould, Terry Ruff

NAY: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried.

#### Visitors and Citizens' Comments

6:30 pm another citizen came forward and asked to speak

*Karen Petersen:* I've lived in Palatine since 1974 and I've always been very proud to live here. I'm very proud of this community, it's a wonderful community. I taught at District 211 for 35 years and I'm simply here to ask you and urge you to reconsider what you decided about closing the stables. You could make a huge, huge, positive colossally wonderful decision. Please consider it. I ask all of you to examine your heart and to look into the truest part of your being and consider this. It would mean the world to so many people.

#### New Business

President Ruff requested a motion for Stables Surplus Ordinance #24-07. Commissioner Sammons moved and Commissioner Petricca seconded that the Board of Park Commissioners adopt Ordinance #24-07 authorizing the Palatine Park District to rehome the Palatine Stables Horses and Ponies as indicated in Addendum A of the Ordinance.

President Ruff asked if there was any discussion; Commissioner Gould said that this is the ordinance that she wanted to take out of the consent agenda because it deals with the horses and what is going to be done with the horses. She continued to explain the ordinance and said this needs to be tabled. She also added that horses are herd animals and what we are proposing to do with them is horse abuse; they are going to get sick from different food and levels of activity that they are not used to. Commissioner Gould stated that this whole process of keeping the stables going needs to be discussed; following the protocol that we usually do. Commissioner Gould addressed the public and stated I know that I'm preaching to the choir, right? I'm a horse person and all of you are too or if you're not your kids have dragged you into it.

Commissioner Gould said that we need to reconsider this whole project and moved to table the discussion. President Ruff asked for a second. Various Commissioner comments were made; President Ruff again asked for a second. No second was received; the motion failed.

President Ruff requested a Roll Call. Commissioner Rogers asked to clarify that the vote is for the ordinance; President Ruff confirmed that they are voting on the ordinance. Commissioner Gould asked the public how they feel about that. Various comments and questions from the public were shouted at the Board. The motion was approved by a roll call; the result follows:

AYE: Jennifer Rogers, Joe Petricca, Greg Sammons, Terry Ruff

NAY: Susan Gould

ABSENT: None

Motion carried.

Various comments and questions continued to be shouted from the public.

#### Executive Director Reports

Executive Director Rea had no report or new updates for the board.

Commissioner Reports/Future Agenda Items

Commissioner Gould stated that she’s said everything she wanted to say and that she hopes these people are going to be listened to because you are doing a really lousy job of it.

The public continued yelling at the Board members.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Park Board on this date Commissioner Rogers moved that the regular meeting be adjourned. Commissioner Petricca seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call; the result follows:

AYE: Joe Petricca, Greg Sammons, Jennifer Rogers, Terry Ruff

NAY: Susan Gould (did not respond)

ABSENT: None

Motion carried at 6:39 p.m.

A question from the public was directed at the Board about why they are not responding to their own commissioner who is giving facts; why is there no discussion on this motion? Commissioner Gould answered that she is the black sheep.

The public continued to yell and shout comments at the Board members as they exited the room.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Allie  
Park Board Secretary

Attest:

Approved:

Lisa Allie  
Secretary

Terry Ruff  
President

<u>2024 Park Board Meetings</u>		
August 26, 2024	October 28, 2024	December 9, 2024
September 9, 2024	November 11, 2024	
September 23, 2024	November 25, 2024	