

Statement for Park District of La Grange regarding Gordon Park

I am Harlan Hirt, 421 S. Spring Ave. Although I am a member of Friends of the Park, this statement does not relate to the issue being pursued by that group. I am also a member of the La Grange Environmental Quality Control Commission, but am not speaking for the Village. However, I can state that I am a professional engineer; and as a citizen of the Park District hope this statement will contribute to the management of Gordon Park. Even though Gordon Park does not appear on tonight's agenda, I trust the comments will be noted when it does appear.

Background

As far back as 2007 the Park District identified that its proposed solution to drainage issues in Gordon Park would be filling or raising the elevation of the Park. From a cursory engineering review, one would think that because there already were Village sewers in the Park, the issue would be one of grading to utilize the outlets. Therefore, a more detailed review of the drainage issue was undertaken by requesting to examine the related files of the Village and the Park District.

The Village sewer atlas identifies that there are combined sewers in "Shawmut Avenue" (the platted right-of-way). The west and southeast parking lots are drained into a tributary on Locust which joins the Shawmut sewer, and the outfield areas would drain into a lateral on "Linden Ave", although the atlas does not confirm if this sewer remains viable. Also, about 10 years ago, the Village constructed a relief sewer from Shawmut Avenue along Hazel, and through the Park to a Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) drop shaft, just southwest of the water tower. Records show that the Village did receive a Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) permit for this project. There are several surface drains that contribute to this project.

However, no records were identified that there is any formal agreement between the Village and the Park District regarding the right-of-way for this sewer or service to be provided to the Park District.

It has been observed that there is one inlet to the Village system at the intersection of "Shawmut Avenue and Linden", that provides drainage for areas north and west of that point.

However, it has also been observed that this sewer can "back-up" adding to the flooded area (apparently the overflow sewer at Hazel and Shawmut does not always provide adequate relief).

In 1999 the Park District installed a network of underdrains in the area of the four ball fields. This includes a main lateral drain in the center, traversing north to south, and it has three surface inlets along the drain. The original plan shows it hooking into the Linden Ave sewer, but when the Village built the TARP connection, a line was provided that connected the underdrain directly to the Village sewers entering TARP. In 2000, the Park District contracted to regrade the area of the ball fields so that their surface drainage would enter the new system, (while the concept of underdrains would maximize infiltration). Information provided identifies that these two projects cost about \$250,000.

No record was provided to show that this construction was permitted by MWRD.

Evaluation

The historic drainage outlet for Gordon Park, the Village's Shawmut Avenue combined sewer, was clearly inadequate. While the Hazel Avenue diversion and connection to TARP certainly helps, it does not appear totally adequate. The west and southeast parking lots drain into a lateral to Shawmut Avenue, and no problem has been identified with sustained ponding on these lots. There are no inlets from the eastern lot and it appears that runoff moves to the outfields between the diamonds and then to the inlets on the underdrain. However the southern third lacks a good drainage path so standing water is observed west of the southwest infield. The status of the lateral on "Linden Ave" is unknown.

The Park District projects in 1999 and 2000 substantially improved the drainage of the ball field area. On several occasions following hard rains, the outfield areas were inspected and found to be sufficiently dry that playing could have occurred. (I'm speaking to this point as one who has had substantial experience coaching and umpiring ball games.)

However, as was documented in the local media, the infields have not been maintained as designed and constructed in 2000. Instead of having a high point in the center, dragging to smooth the fields has resulted in a low center and a ridge around the grassy edge. (It has been observed that the Park District did

address this issue at a Sedgewick Park field, but has apparently chosen to not maintain the fields at Gordon Park in a similar manner.)

I asked the Park District if there has been a formal evaluation of the drainage problem and whether the underdrain system was working, which should have contributed to the project design, but was advised that there is none.

It does appear that drainage improvements in the tennis court area are needed. Low spots hold water, and at best, some flow is channeled to the "Shawmut Ave-Linden Ave" inlet. About half of the northeastern segment (a small soccer field and ball diamond) appears to drain to the northeast, while the rest would drain to the outfield of the northeast field.

Proposal

The northwest ball field, extended to the north fence, would be converted into a football/soccer field. The center would be raised about 4 feet above existing grade and have about 2 feet of crown. The field would be ringed with a storm drain that would also intercept drainage from the northwest. A jogging/walking path would be provided around the field.

A water splash pool, play equipment, performance area and a service building would be added where the southwest field is. There would be no general filling, but berms would be provided in some areas. The storm sewers would continue through this area enroute to TARP.

Except that the tennis courts would be removed (and regraded) the proposal (with one exception) does not appear to affect properties suggested for sale or the parking lot to be swapped with the Village. (The exception is that an inlet to the new sewer would be placed at the eastern edge of the east parking lot.) None of the suggested new parking areas are proposed.

A new sanitary sewer would be provided from the service building to the Shawmut Ave sewer, and the existing Linden Avenue sewer would be abandoned after filling the manholes.

The two eastern ball fields would not be affected by this phase of the development, but the underdrains west of the centerline would be removed.

Problems

The proposal, which was advertized for bids on Sept 8 in the Suburban Life has not been approved by the Village, even though the construction would affect Village facilities. No information was provided to suggest that the Park District has authorized the construction of the Hazel Avenue relief sewer through Gordon Park, nor that the Park District was authorized to connect the underdrains to the Village's system.

The new storm drain would be tied directly to TARP through the Village's port, which violates the tenets of the TARP system. Only excess combined sewage is supposed to enter TARP (even though the MWRD did give the Village a small variance for Hazel Avenue). No evidence was provided that the Park District has requested a permit from the MWRD.

The existing underdrain (with surface inlets) will also need to be reviewed by the MWRD in the permit process.

The proposal does not appear to include a holding or equalization basin. This approach to reducing peak flows to sewers is a standard requirement for projects that increase surface runoff or redirect flows. I am not aware of any exception for park districts, even though one can understand that such basins can be a safety issue. There might be the potential to convince the MWRD that a trade off between the new building and pathways could be made for the removal of the existing buildings and tennis courts and restoration of these spaces as green areas allowing compensating infiltration.

From the limited review afforded me, it is not clear why the proposed field must be raised 4 feet. It appears that the same crown on the field and intercepting drainage inlets could be constructed with only 3 feet, and this would save a substantial amount of fill. One foot of depth on a football field is about 600 cubic yards.

Conclusion

It appears that the project was rushed through the design, approval and bidding process, without adequate public or governmental review.

Construction should not begin until the project is reviewed and approved by the Village and the MRWD.

It appears that substantial revisions will need to be made to

receive the required approvals.