

2011 Park Board Candidate Survey For Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation

The Park District Mission Statement is: *to foster diverse, community-based leisure opportunities, through a harmonious blend of quality recreation programs, facilities and open space which will enhance the quality of life into the future.*

1. How well do you think the Park District is balancing recreational services with its function as caretaker of the community's open lands? Please describe any changes you would make, if any.

Kathy Cornell: The citizens who live in and support the Glen Ellyn Park District are very fortunate to own and have access to a variety of parks, fields, playgrounds, open natural areas and recreational facilities. This is a tremendously important and valued part of the Glen Ellyn community. The Park District has done an uneven job of balancing the enthusiasm for open lands that was expressed in the 2005 survey with the recreational facilities it has provided. I think we can do a better job of providing open land in the community if properties become available; however, our finances will make this difficult due to recent deficit spending and excessive borrowing.

Meanwhile, we should dedicate adequate funds to maintaining and improving the parks that we have – this means making our natural areas more enjoyable through planting trees and removing invasive species to make way for healthy additions. We can also enhance the beauty, usability and accessibility of these open areas by adding walking trails and resting areas. This can be done with prudent budgeting and a focus on maintaining and improving the recreational facilities and programs that our community expects and enjoys. A balance is key - it needs to be achieved and thus far it has not happened.

Richard Dunn: The Park District has a wide range of well-run recreational programs. However, the Park District has failed as a caretaker of our open lands on issues including tree preservation, wetlands protection and even basic maintenance of parks.

An issue of recent importance is the construction of the Ackerman Sports and Fitness Center on open lands. A more appropriate location for this type of facility would have been a commercial/industrial zone. By instead constructing it in Ackerman Park, we lost prime field space and violated the terms of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources grant under which the land was purchased. The Park District now must purchase replacement open space before it will be eligible for any future IDNR grants.

Catherine Galvin: The District will have to continue its balancing act of providing services while protecting open space land. This will require measuring carefully the recreational programs and land preservation needs. The district has limited space available and as such, must utilize its space available to meet the highest public needs. Baseball, soccer and football are activities with huge participation. Additionally, Lacrosse is a popular sport and we need to give it the field space and opportunity to grow in our community.

Most importantly, we need to continually seek opportunities for the use of/and or the acquisition of additional land.

Ed Hess: I think we are unusually balanced compared to other park districts. We are not the Forest Preserve but have several areas that rival forest preserve property.

Gary Mayo: I believe that the Glen Ellyn Park District has not placed enough emphasis on maintaining open lands and creating new open space. I know that my running mates, Kathy Cornell and Richard Dunn, share that view. Huge amounts of money have been spent on large capital projects in recent years, while very little has been spent on enhancing our community parks. I would like to see budget dollars shifted to create better accessibility to natural areas (e.g., a walking path in Ackerman Woods), to provide better maintenance of open lands (e.g., regular removal of invasive species), to plant more trees on Park District property, and to provide better maintenance of our playgrounds and facilities. Another example of the failure to function as caretaker of our open lands: Ackerman Sports & Fitness Center was built on land that had been dedicated as open space under the terms of a grant from the Illinois DNR that was used to help purchase the land. The Park District also ignored an agreement with the Dupage County Forest Preserve to restore a 9-acre oak savannah at Maryknoll.

2. Is the Park District's approach to its mission in line with the needs and desires of the community or should it be reevaluated? Please explain your answer.

Cornell: It is past time to reevaluate the approach our Park District has taken to its mission statement. That statement calls for a "harmonious blend" and we have not nearly achieved that. Too much investment has been made in recent years in expensive capital development projects, over-emphasizing facilities at the expense of open space and improvement of our playing fields. The community strongly expressed that open space is Priority #1 in the 2005 Park District survey of public opinion (in the 2009 survey it wasn't even listed as an option). But it has been at the bottom of the list for the Park District board and staff for years.

Dunn: The Park District's approach to its mission has not been balanced. Community surveys conducted by the District have consistently shown a strong desire to acquire open land and low support for the expensive construction projects that the board has undertaken.

The depressed property market offers a unique opportunity for the Park District to purchase additional open land. Unfortunately the old board's mismanagement of Park District finances has left us with insufficient funds to take advantage of this opportunity.

Kathy Cornell, Gary Mayo and I will focus on acquisition of land and maintenance of our existing parks before constructing new facilities.

Galvin: Continual evaluation should be done to assure that residents are receiving the "best bang for their buck". As you may know, the Mission Statement of the Park District

addresses open space, facilities and recreational opportunities. When elected I will uphold the Mission Statement of the Glen Ellyn Park District while seeking review of our actions to be sure they meet the needs of the community.

Hess: Yes the PD mission is still as valid as the day it was done, and is being followed closely.

Mayo: In practice, the Park District's approach has been anything but aligned with the wishes of the community. This is best illustrated by the Community Surveys in 2005 and 2009, which have been largely ignored by the leadership of the Park District Board. In the 2005 survey, the community indicated that land acquisition was the highest priority, followed by renovation of the Lake Ellyn Boat House. Very little land has since been acquired, and nothing has been done with the Boat House (also the highest community priority on the 2009 survey). Land acquisition was inexplicably omitted as an option on the 2009 survey. The Park District clearly needs to reevaluate its approach, as well as its Mission Statement.

3. Do you think trees in our parks should be given more specific protection from the impact of construction projects both in parks and nearby private lands? Please explain your answer.

Cornell: Glen Ellyn and our parks are known for scenic beauty, and much of that beauty comes from the trees in our parks as well as along our streets and in our yards. Protection of the trees in our parks is a serious responsibility and must be taken into account in all planning of property use and improvement. I think trees are more vulnerable to distress from nearby construction projects than most people realize – for example, root systems can be vast underground and disrupting them can ultimately be very damaging. Being more careful and using better planning can improve the protection of the trees on Park District property. We can make that happen. In terms of distress caused by construction on private property (and Village-owned property), the board can develop a policy that encourages interaction with park neighbors so that they are educated and aware, and can do their own careful planning and oversight. In addition, a stronger voluntary tree protection ordinance that is currently under consideration by our village government would help promote the village-wide use of best practices.

Dunn: The Park District currently does not have a tree preservation ordinance. Park District staff claims to replace trees that are removed, but this is not an official policy and staff does not follow it in practice. The Park District should implement a tree preservation policy which avoids removing trees and replaces them on a per-caliper-inch basis when possible.

Galvin: The Park District already supports and has incorporated into its policies adherence to the Village Ordinances pertaining to Forestry Management and Tree Preservation. My review of both documents provides in great detail specific protections from the impact of construction projects on trees. I believe that the public needs to more

aware of these requirements and then seek feed back from the community at large to determine if they feel more protection is needed.

Hess: The Park District has no jurisdiction on private lands; however we plant more trees every year to enhance the Parks.

Mayo: Protecting the existing trees in our parks should be given the highest priority, and the Park District Board should work to ensure that the appropriate policies are in place to provide this protection. The Park District should replace all trees that are removed from the parks, manage plantings to ensure a diverse canopy, plant trees on parkways adjoining parks, and plant trees to provide shade for playgrounds.

4. What sort of care and planting program would you recommend for the natural areas of our parks? Please explain and give examples.

Cornell: The Board's vision needs to include and publicly state the importance of trees and other plantings in our parks. Removal of invasive species should be done regularly on all park properties and just as important, planned care for the natural areas should include keeping trees and other flora healthy and robust. We need to add trees for shade and for visual effect in our parks and playgrounds, and make it a priority to add native plantings when possible, while also providing variety to enhance the parks and provide an educational aspect for the benefit of the public - to see firsthand and learn about what individuals can accomplish. Environmentally oriented best practices should be used consistently.

Dunn: The care and planting program for natural areas should include a continuing effort to eliminate invasive species of plants, plant new trees, eliminate diseased trees, and expand natural flora. There should be staff and budgetary support for this effort. The restoration efforts at Churchill should be expanded to include Ackerman Woods, Manor Park, Panfish Park and our other natural areas that are currently neglected.

Galvin: Several stewardship programs are already in place. The Park District Naturalist has provided in great detail the eco-restoration projects to remove invasive plant species at Churchill Park and other areas. I personally attended an event at Danby Park, hosted by Commissioner Creech, early last spring and volunteered my time in removing invasive buckthorn which will now allow greater diversity of plant life in this area.

Also, Natural Public Lands Day was a great success last year. This year, plans are underway to plant trees at Maryknoll Park with a local preschool for Arbor Day. The Park District is a steward of our public land. As a Commissioner I feel it is important to share and provide with the public information on these events and to volunteer at these activities. As stewards of our lands it is incumbent upon us to lead by example.

Hess: I would like to see the natural prairie areas increased and where landscaping is appropriate see perennial plantings used as much as possible to save recurring annual landscape costs.

Mayo: It is unfortunate that our natural areas have been allowed to grow up with invasive plants such as buckthorn. We should focus on removing these invasive species in all our parks, not just at Churchill as is done currently. We should use environmentally sound techniques when restoring natural areas.

5. A large sports facility was just completed last year at Ackerman Park, costing the community approximately \$11 million. What impact do you think the new center will have on the use of the rest of Park District facilities, in particular, historic Main Street Recreation Center and Spring Avenue Recreation Center?

Cornell: It is already clear that we have unutilized and underutilized space at Spring Avenue, largely due to facilities that are now more attractive at Ackerman Park. I think the programming at Main Street is still in good shape, and that building should be utilized to its optimal level. A re-thinking of the use of Spring Avenue needs to be done soon, as we learn about usage patterns at Ackerman. It is in the best interest of the Park District that our facilities be used to their best and fullest capacities.

Dunn: The new Ackerman facility has already had an impact on use, particularly at Spring Avenue Recreation Center. I believe it is necessary to perform a detailed facilities usage study of the Main Street and Spring Avenue Centers to determine how to optimally use these facilities. The Park District should cooperate with our school districts and other organizations to find opportunities to maximize the usage of surplus space and save taxpayer dollars.

Galvin: Frankly, Ackerman will have no impact on the Main Street and Spring Avenue facilities. These two facilities host Pre- School and Pre-K programs, as well as dance and gymnastics. The Ackerman Sports and Fitness Center was purposely not designed to impact these programs. Furthermore, the classes at these two facilities, in addition to those at Ackerman, provide diverse and new recreational opportunities for all residents. Our goal should be to continue the current success we have at Main Street and Spring Avenue while monitoring changes in programs at Ackerman Center as needs evolve.

Hess: No or little impact at all. Ackerman Sports Complex has facility that is not at Main Street or Spring Avenue. It provides new facility that the GEPD did not have.

Mayo: We have already seen an impact on the Spring Avenue Recreation Center (SARC), since ASFC opened, to the point where it appears that the utilization of that facility may not justify the costs. This issue will need to be studied carefully, with input from the community, to determine the best and most cost-effective use of SARC in the future. It does not appear that Main Street Rec Center has been impacted directly. However, a facilities usage study that would have provided necessary data was voted down by the Board. We need to complete this study to guide planning and decisions for Park District facilities. All Park District facilities and programs are affected indirectly by the costs of operating ASFC and by the interest costs to service the large debt incurred. A primary goal needs to be making ASFC profitable to generate money for other programs and needs.

6. It is possible that the Main Street Recreation Center building could qualify as a local landmark through the village of Glen Ellyn Historic Preservation Commission with either little or no restoration to the façade. Would you support such a designation?

Cornell: This is a topic that is near and dear to me, as I was involved in saving that historic building when the Park District had proposed to tear it down. The resulting restoration was done in a cost-effective way when the Park District finally devoted appropriate funding to improve the property. It is now a structure that we can keep and treasure well into the future. I believe there are substantial advantages to making Main Street Recreation Center a landmarked structure. Among them, this would be a visible statement that our community values the historic and charming contribution Main Street makes. In addition, it may allow us to seek historic preservation funding for future improvements. My research into local landmarking shows that while the facade will have some protection from inappropriate alteration, the facility can be improved and updated as needed for use by residents.

Dunn: Yes, I would support the designation of the Main Street Recreation Center Building as a local landmark through the Village.

Galvin: Historic Landmark identity would be a great plus for any building in Glen Ellyn. However, before supporting this designation I would need an agreement that the District would not be sacrificing its rights to address the needs of the structure. Great care and thought must be taken to guarantee that ADA requirements, public safety, maintenance and upkeep would not be restricted in the event improvements to the exterior are needed that may not be consistent with Historic Landmark designation.

Hess: I would have to research the plus and minus benefits before I could answer. Right now I do not have all the facts.

Mayo: The Main Street Recreation Center holds a special place in the hearts of many Glen Ellyn residents, as evidenced by the resounding defeat of the referendum that would have destroyed it on 2006. The fact that the Park District took that proposal to the voters is a sign of just how out of touch the Board was with community interests. I would fully support designating the Main Street Rec Center as a local landmark, to ensure that the building is protected and that any future changes are properly reviewed.

7. The historic WPA-built Lake Ellyn boat house is a public favorite; its restoration received the third highest amount of interest out of the 13 projects listed on the 2005 Park District public opinion survey. Would you support restoration that includes preservation of its original historic elements and would you support landmark status for this building and the historic park?

Cornell: The Lake Ellyn Boat House is an icon of our village. It is beautiful, historic, and symbolic of the essential charm and attractiveness of Glen Ellyn. As a park, Lake Ellyn Park is beyond compare. I am in favor of a carefully planned and implemented restoration of the facility that would respect its historic features. I believe landmark

status would elevate it even more in the eyes of our citizens and friends. It would protect this charming, engaging structure for future generations to enjoy. With modest improvements to the interior, it can also be a facility that would be more widely used by our citizens and organizations – for social occasions, for group meetings, and for routine enjoyment. It is accurate to call the Boat House a gem of our community

Dunn: I support modest restoration of the Lake Ellyn Boat House when the funds are available. The 2005 community survey showed high support for this project. I support designation of the Lake Ellyn Boathouse and Lake Ellyn Park as local landmarks.

Galvin: Once again I refer you to my answer to question 6 relating to my position on Historic Structures.

I also know that 2009 and 2005 surveys conducted by the District also rated the boathouse as a top priority. Although these two surveys are not very old it would seem appropriate that with a new board being elected that reaffirmation of these priorities should be conducted. Over the years attitudes may change. Here again we must have indications of what the public's highest priorities are so that we can plan accordingly.

After that, should the boathouse renovation remain in the top tier of projects we can then discuss how the community would like to see the boathouse renovated.

Hess: Restoration in the theme of its origin would be great.

Mayo: The Lake Ellyn Boat House is one of the “crown jewels” of our community. The current state of disrepair, and low utilization of this resource, is truly a shame. I would strongly support a restoration with modest improvements that maintain the original structure and character of the building. I would likewise support designating the Boat House and surrounding park as local landmarks.

8. There has been public disagreement over recent Park District projects and expenditures. Do you feel that the Park District communicates its plans sufficiently with residents and would you make any changes in the process of gathering public opinion?

Cornell: It is time for the Glen Ellyn Park District Board to make itself available and accessible to the public – to share openly the decision-making processes and the issues being faced, and to engage the larger community as partners in the operation and improvement of our parks. The current board voted against providing detailed minutes of meetings to the public, and also voted against videotaping meetings for broadcast on our local cable access channel and/or streaming online. This is a situation that must be addressed and corrected immediately. Commissioners should be available via email, they should return phone calls, and they should welcome and respect public input. My fellow candidates Gary Mayo, Rich Dunn and I are in agreement that this will happen on our watch.

Dunn: The Park District does not currently provide timely, accurate information about its plans to the public. Community input should be both solicited and listened to early in the planning process. Plans and budgets should be made available on the Park District website and placed in the Glen Ellyn Library. The board recently voted down an inexpensive proposal to broadcast video of board meetings and voted to provide less detail in meeting minutes. I believe we should reverse these decisions in order to make meetings more accessible to the public.

Galvin: I have been an advocate of transparency in government at all levels. At this time I feel the Park District has made giant strides in informing the residents of its plans and activities. However, there is always room for improvement some of which could include more public hearings on projects, improved website communication and continual expansion of email communication. Additionally, a new survey of the public should be conducted to ascertain if the public feels whether or not their needs are being met by the District.

Hess: I would like to see more public participation of the PD meetings and would like to see an unbiased reporting of the actual facts by way of some type of electronic posting.

Mayo: I believe that the current majority on the Board has discouraged public input, and, when they have received input from the community at-large have largely ignored it. The board voted down videotaping meetings and voted to put less detail in board minutes. Our Park District needs to be much more transparent in the way it conducts the public's business, and needs to make a much greater effort to gather public opinion. I would start by making Board members and staff more accessible via the web site and email. Public opinion surveys should be done on a regular schedule, and professionally prepared to insure the validity of the results. Our Glen Ellyn community deserves to have its voice heard by its elected officials, and the Park District needs to be much more responsive to that community voice.

###