

# Annual Report

## 2021–2022

**Gold Medal Award Winner**  
 Vernon Hills Park District is proud to be a 2021 National Gold Medal Award winner for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management.



Vernon Hills Park District received a prestigious honor in the park and recreation industry at the National Recreation and Park Association Annual Conference in Nashville, TN on September 21, 2021. The American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), is pleased to announce Vernon Hills Park District received the prestigious Grand Plaque in the National Gold Medal Awards for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management.

Vernon Hills Park District received the Grand Plaque in the Class V category, Park and Recreation Agency with a population of 30,000 or less. For nearly 50 years, the Vernon Hills Park District continues to bring memorable experiences and enjoyment to all ages through diverse programming promoting healthy lifestyles. Today the District encompasses five facilities, ten miles of recreational paths, and twenty-five parks situated on 460 acres of land. Through the collaborative efforts of the Park Board, professional staff, generous sponsors and dedicated volunteers, the District is also an award recipient of the 2019-2024 Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency Award.

## Agency Accomplishments

### Capital Bill – REBUILD ILLINOIS GRANTS

- Grosse Pointe Park Tennis Court Renovation - \$200,000
- Laschen Park new playground - \$250,000
- Lakeview Fitness Desert Aire Dehumidification System - \$510,000

### Added 10 New Community Garden Plots with Underground Water Line System

### National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA)

#### Gold Medal for Excellence Grand Plaque Recipient

### Adoption of 5-Year Financial Forecast

### Laschen Park Tennis Courts and Pickleball Courts Renovation

### Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) \$1,750 Safety Grant - Safety Fencing

### Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (INCCRRA)

#### \$220,928 Child Care Grant

### United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Composting Initiative Recipient for Community Gardens

*Thank you to Solid Waste Agency of Lake County and USDA for the support, funding and opportunity.*

### Solar Rooftop Panel Annual Energy Savings - \$4,000

*Produced savings to power 14 average sized homes!*



### Family Scholarship Fund

# \$4,400

*in financial assistance was provided to*

# 13 families



### Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency 2018-2023

Vernon Hills Park District is recognized as an Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency 2018-2023 by the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association. The two statewide associations administer the Illinois Distinguished Accreditation program with the goal of improving the delivery of park and recreation services to Illinois residents. It is a voluntary, comprehensive evaluation process to demonstrate that agencies have met state guidelines to provide exceptional services to their community.

## Excellence in Financial Reporting

For the 26<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the District received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officer's Association (GFOA) for its Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). This is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting.

At the conclusion of each fiscal year, a financial audit and Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) are completed. The audit is a mandated financial report compiled by a professional auditor. The goal of a ACFR is to clearly communicate the Park District's financial story. To achieve this award, the District's ACFR has to demonstrate a constructive "spirit of full disclosure", clearly communicate its financial story, and motivate potential users to read the ACFR. The District's ACFR and budget can be found on the District's website.

## Enhancing Value

Park District programs and services are funded largely through user fees, while property tax revenue primarily funds operational and maintenance costs of park amenities and facilities. The District's tax rate for the fiscal year 2021 was .4458 per \$100 of assessed value, compared to .4337 in the previous year. The Park District represents only 5% of the total property tax bill for Vernon Hills residents.



## Overview of Vernon Hills Park District Property Taxes

### Vernon Hills Park District at a Glance

Fiscal Year	2022
Population	27,180
Tax Rate	\$0.4458
Total Budget	\$11,678,588
Bond Rating	Aa2

Of the 18 Lake County Park Districts,  
Vernon Hills Park District has the lowest tax rate.

A bond rating relates to the credit worthiness of an organization. The Park District bond rating improved due to a healthy fund balance and good financial management.

Source: Moody's Investor Service

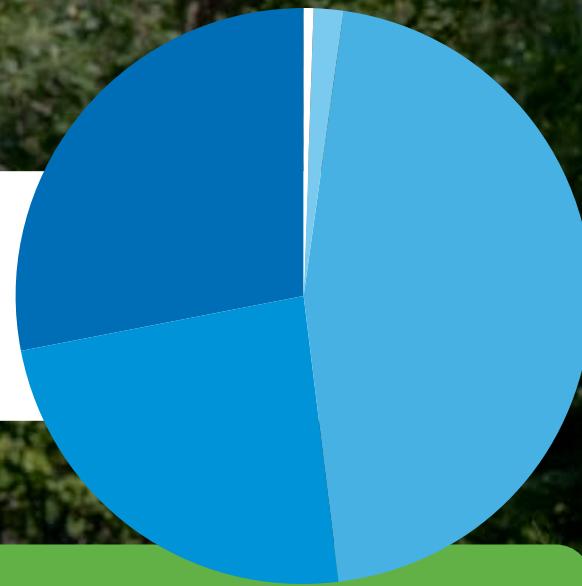


# Operating Revenues and Resources

*Fiscal Year ending May 31, 2022*

**Total: \$11,972,249**

The largest sources of revenue were derived from user and impact fees (51.8%) and property taxes (45.9%).



## User Fees 27.8%

User fees are charged for recreation programs. The fees are based on the level of desired cost recovery and vary depending on community or individual benefits. Programs that benefit the community as a whole such as special events have low fees offset by property taxes. Programs that benefit individual users such as swimming lessons have higher fees. Fees are reviewed annually by the Board during preparation of the operating budget.

## Impact Fees 24%

Impact fees are payments required by local governments of new development for the purpose of providing new and expanded public capital facilities required to serve that development.

## Property Taxes 45.9%

As a government entity, the Park District has the power to levy and collect taxes on all taxable property within the District through the preparation of a tax levy ordinance. The Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of your property will determine the amount of property taxes you will pay to the Park District. In 2022, only 4% of your total tax bill will go to the Park District.

## Facility Rentals 1.5%

Facility rental fees are commonly collected from individuals or affiliates, and include athletic fields, meeting rooms, and picnic areas.

## Investment Income 0.1%

Investment income includes interest payments received from short term investments.

## Miscellaneous Income 0.7%

Miscellaneous income includes monies received from donations, awards, and rebates. The Park District does not receive any sales tax revenue.



# Operating Expenditures

## Fiscal Year ending May 31, 2022

**Total: \$11,823,536**

In addition to the operating expenditures, the Park District spent \$1,773,844 in capital improvements.



### Salaries and Wages 39.5%

The District has 47 full-time and 119 part-time positions. Additionally, 82 seasonal employees are hired annually to fill openings in summer camps, the Family Aquatic Center, and park maintenance.

### Contractual Services 24.2%

These expenditures reflect outside services. The District outsources some mowing, landscape, and cleaning services. Additionally, the District maintains several agreements with recreational providers who perform services that enable the District to offer a variety of programs to all ages.

### Debt Service 15.1%

Debt service includes principal and interest payments owed on outstanding debt issues. Debt Service expenditures include retirement of general obligation bonded debt, which was accumulated in prior years to finance large scale projects.

### Benefits 15%

These expenditures are for employee health insurance premiums and employer costs associated with social security and pension benefits.

### Supplies 6.2%

Materials and supplies are needed to provide programs and park maintenance services.

### Capital Projects & Bonds Proceeds

**\$1,773,144**

**\$1,111,293**

#### Capital Projects

The District maintains a five-year Capital Improvement Plan, which staff and Board review on a regular basis. Expenditures reflect the annual expenses associated with the current fiscal year. Funding of capital projects is provided through the issuance of debt obligations and from operating surplus.

#### Bonds Proceeds

Bonds proceeds are monies received by issuing bonds to pay for capital improvement projects.

# Improving the Parks

From vibrant gardens to peaceful trails, habitats for wildlife, active recreational facilities, and a backdrop for nature lovers, our 24 District parks are in excellent condition. Our Park Maintenance teams consists of 10 full time staff plus 8 part-time and seasonal employees.

## Park Trees, Native Plants, and Benches

**75 Trees Planted – 32 different varieties!**

**Naturalized ½ acres south of Kids Castle Playground at Deerpath Park**

**Land Stewardship: at 4 parks, 3.3 acres**

**17 lbs. of Native Seeds Collected for Redistribution into District Parks**

**32 Memorial Trees**

**5 Tree Adoptions**

**9 Memorial Benches**

**10 Bench Adoptions**



## Composting Grant for Century Park's Indianwood Garden

The Vernon Hills Park District and the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO) are working together as part of a US Department of Agriculture Grant for utilizing compost soil as a viable alternative for both farming practices and community gardens. This two year program started in the Spring of 2021 and concluded in the Fall of 2022. The grant assisted in approximately 160 yards of badly needed composted soil to be added to the Indianwood Drive Garden plots. Gardeners were required to submit four surveys about the effects of the compost soil on their crop.

## Lake Management Plan

The Park District works closely with many agencies, both local and state, to ensure that our waterways are both safe and clean. At Little Bear and Big Bear Lakes in Century Park, we received one of the first lake assessments in 2012 by both the Illinois Environment Protection Agency and the Lake County Health Department – Ecological Services Division.

Both reports did show some deficiencies that the Park District needed to work on. In 2019, the Park District saw a revisit of both agencies and reports showing the vast improvements that were made since 2012. All of the small actions that we implemented had shown these agencies that we were committed to Little and Big Bear Lake maintenance and improvements.

At this point, it was prudent to bring in a third party vendor to assist in creating a Lake Management Plan, beginning the process of a long term plan for the Lakes. This plan began in May 2022 and will continue on for at least the next five years. Improvements are focused on shoreline restoration, sediment removal, fish habitat, and general water quality.

## Why are trees being removed?!

The Parks Department has removed what appears as a large number of trees. There is good reason for every tree we remove. Trees reaching the end of their life span (such as Crabapple), pines (Austrian and Scotch Pines) that cannot handle our heat/droughts in summer and lack of long freezing temps in winter, and short lived pioneer trees (Boxelder, Cherry, Willow, Mulberry, & Cottonwoods). Most of the trees that are removed were either purposely planted or naturally started growing too close to each other. We are now implementing that trees be planted far enough apart to allow them to grow to full size without competing with other trees.



## 2021/2022 Park Accomplishments

### Parking Lot Resurfacing

In 2021, the parking lots at the Sullivan Community Center and Family Aquatic Center were resurfaced. These lots are original asphalt from the 1992 build.

### Poured in Place Surfacing

#### *Hawthorn Club Park and Sullivan Community Center*

As a continuing effort to be more inclusive for everyone to play, the playground surfacing at Hawthorn Club Park and Little Learners Preschool were converted from wood chips to poured in place rubber surfacing. This helps with maintenance costs as well as a great surfacing for everyone to enjoy.

### Hartmann Park Fitness Stations

The Vernon Hills Park District collaborated with the Special Recreation Association of Lake County (SRACLC) to provide new fitness stations at Hartmann Park (290 Oakwood Rd). SRACLC purchased the equipment through their foundation and fundraising efforts. The Vernon Hills Park District created the new space and installed the fitness stations located along the walking path that circles the three T-Ball fields.

### Lakeview Fitness PARC Grant

The Vernon Hills Park District was awarded a \$2.25 million PARC (Park and Recreation facility Construction) grant from Illinois Department of Natural Resources for Lakeview Fitness. Plans include additional swim lanes, new group exercise spaces, larger cardio and weight rooms, and locker room renovations.

### New Playgrounds Century Park and Sugar Creek Park

As part of the Capital Improvement Plans, the playgrounds at Century Park and Sugar Creek Park were both replaced in 2021.

The 22 year old playground in Century Park was replaced with a Kompan playground that includes unique equipment that Vernon Hills did not previously have. Additionally, the wood chip surface was converted to synthetic turf. The playground is located on the north end of the park, next to the cricket pitch field at 1190 Lakeview Parkway.

The 21 year old playground at Sugar Creek Park was replaced with a Fitcore Extreme Course. This new playground has components seen on Ninja Warrior™, and a poured in place rubber surfacing, not woodchips. Sugar Creek Park is located at 1081 Creek View Drive.

### Laschen Park Tennis and Pickleball Courts

Vernon Hills Park District and the Village of Vernon Hills worked together to replace the tennis courts at the former Laschen Center, 294 Evergreen Drive. The existing four tennis courts were replaced with two tennis courts and two pickleball courts.

In the coming years, a playground is expected to be installed in the green space between the pickle ball courts and parking lot. The entire space will be named Laschen Park.



## Customer Engagement

Communication systems are in place to share our stories and receive feedback from the community. We look forward to hearing from you and continuing to improve our programs, facilities, and recreational experiences.

### ActiveNet

Emails are sent to a participant group based on programs that are offered through the District's registration software, ActiveNet. Participants are selected by gender, age, and previous program registration at the Park District.

### School Newsletters

A monthly newsletter is digitally distributed to students' households in grades K-5 who attend the Hawthorn Elementary Schools. The newsletter contains program and special event information specifically targeted to these age groups.

### Park Kiosks

Four kiosks in Century Park and two kiosks in Deerpath Park contain posters promoting programs and special events.

### Marquees

A digital marquee is located at the Sullivan Community Center and Lakeview Fitness. Events and programs are promoted on the marquees.

### Email Marketing

Newsletters are sent to a subscriber list of 13,400 through Constant Contact. Newsletters provide event information, program details, and District news.

### Social Media

Facebook Likes: 6,147  
Instagram Followers: 2,465  
Twitter Followers: 807  
Total Impressions: 1,623,189  
Total Engagements: 90,731  
Average Engagement Rate: 5.6%



### Website

The District utilizes reports from Google Analytics to track website activity on a monthly basis. Landing and Exit pages are studied to reveal what the users' interests are.

### June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

Average Sessions per Month: 16,667  
Average Pageviews per Month: 58,182  
Average Users per Month: 10,884



### Web Users Demographics

Male 54.9%  
Female 45.1%

### Age

35-44: 25.81%  
25-34: 23.41%  
45-54: 18.29%  
18-24: 12.96%  
55-64: 11.89%  
65+: 7.64%

**Text  
VHPARKS  
to 22828  
to join our  
e-newsletter  
mailing list!**

*Message and data  
rates may apply.*