

Frequently Asked Questions on The Depot Addition Project

Why was 401 Thatcher selected for the proposed project?

The River Forest Park District manages approximately 30 acres of park land in the community. This amount of open space leaves limited opportunity to develop an indoor recreation space on 3 acres to accommodate the building, parking, and setbacks.

The Park District identified its indoor space needs to include a gymnasium, two 800+ SF program spaces, and enough space to house the Park District administrative staff. In addition, to maximize the value of many of our programs, such as summer camps, the need for outdoor recreation space adjacent to the facility is necessary. We considered building a facility not adjacent to a park, however, this significantly limits our recreation program opportunities. With all these considerations in mind, the Park District felt it was necessary to find a site adjacent to a park to maximize the dollars spent on a facility.

The Park District has up to \$5.5 million available under our current tax rate structure. To construct the proposed facility with parking will cost approximately \$5.5 million. This does not include a land purchase price. The only means to solicit additional funds would be through referendum approval. In 2011, the Park District asked for referendum approval to purchase the Oilily property, and our residents rejected this proposal.

After considering a number of possible building sites, the Park District determined the best facility location would be at The Depot in Keystone Park. The factors in selecting this site include:

1. The Park District already owns The Depot. This facility currently houses the Park District administrative staff, has 2 program spaces, and is one of our summer camp sites. If the administrative staff can be re-located, the space in the lower and upper levels of the building can be reconfigured to meet our need for two 800+ SF program rooms. In addition, this building already has an elevator that can be recycled into a larger facility.
2. The facility would be located adjacent to a park. To offer a summer camp program and many of our specialty sports programs, the program needs indoor space and outdoor space for activities. With a gym located at our primary park, we will have the opportunity to increase the participant numbers in our programs and enhance the program experience.
3. The Park District shares the east lot with METRA commuters, with 10 parking stalls reserved for the Park District. For commuter use, the lot is typically used 48 hours a week, between 7:30am-4:30pm, Monday through Friday. Outside the commuter hours, the lot is empty with its only use for Park District programs. The Park District's programming needs are opposite of commuter needs, with our program offerings in the early mornings, early evenings, and evenings on weekdays, and all day on weekends. A shared use of the lot could potentially have this lot used 96 hours a week. This doubles the use of an already tax supported parking lot and saves the need to pave over green space somewhere else for more parking.
4. In addition to the gym and the program rooms, the facility would also house the administrative staff. Our ability to centralize our staff with our programming space and adjacent park will provide a recreation hub in our community and minimize our operation costs to maintain the facility. The design of the new facility will not require additional full time staff to operate.

What other sites were considered for a new facility?

Over the past couple of years, the Park District has reviewed potential sites inside and outside the community, as well as indoor space partnership opportunities. Properties considered include the Oilily property, the Hines Lumber property, properties for sale along or near Lake Street, the golf driving range on Madison, use of Forest Preserve of Cook County property, and the Menards site. The Park District has limited funds for building any indoor space and using those funds for purchase of land would not allow us to construct the actual facility. Land value around the community includes:

1. Oilily: \$3.0 million
2. Hines Lumber: \$1.65 million
3. Menards: \$10.0 million.

Locating a new facility on property that is already not publicly owned will result in a loss of property tax revenue to our village, schools, and other governmental taxing agencies, and the loss of retail tax revenue to our Village. This annual dollar amount would be in the tens of thousands of dollars which would have to be absorbed by our resident taxpayers.

How full is the METRA parking lot every day?

The east METRA parking lot is a monthly pass parking lot. **Ten (10) parking stalls in the lot are reserved for Park District use.** The heaviest use of the lot occurs weekdays, between November and March. Daily observation of the lot during the winter months typically shows the lot never completely full with at least 3 parking stalls available. It was noted that only one occasion this past winter was the lot full. The lot was typically half full on Fridays. During non winter months, the lot typically has at least 8 parking stalls available.

There is also monthly parking available on Central Avenue west of Thatcher, and these 8 stalls typically go unused.

The west parking lot is a daily fee parking lot and is full on weekdays between 7:30am to 4:30pm.

What is the impact of a new facility on Keystone Park?

A new gymnasium, office space, and reconfiguration of the parking lot would eat up 15,000 SF (0.34 acres) of green space in Keystone Park. The impact on the park is the loss of the tot ball field, however, the lighted soccer field and the sled hill would remain. To build this same facility at a different location would require approximately 3 acres for the building, parking, and required setbacks. To compensate for the loss of the tot ball field, the Park District and the Forest Preserve of Cook County have entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement for the Park District to have priority access to the FPCC ball field at the corner of Lake Street and Bonnie Brae in return for the Park District to assume maintenance responsibilities for this field. This Agreement is fully supported by the River Forest Youth Baseball and Softball Association.

Will the current playground remain?

The location of the current playground will move only a couple of feet to the north side of the proposed gym and will include the "Train", swings, a 2-5 year old play structure, spring units, and a rubber play surface.