Date: October 18, 2021

To: The Wilmette Park District Board of Commissioners and Steve Wilson, Executive Director

From: The Board of Go Green Wilmette

Re: Suggestions pertaining to the Gillson Park Comprehensive Plan, the Lakeview Center, Park District Operations and Park Management

Thank you for your dedication to making Wilmette’s parks and programming such an integral and enjoyable part of life in our Village. We recognize the challenges you face in addressing the needs and desires of many different constituent groups in our community.

New WPD Commissioners may not know that the Park District hosted Go Green Wilmette’s very first meeting at the Community Recreation Center in 2005 and has been supporting our efforts to create a more sustainable community ever since.

We appreciate your efforts to examine flooding, traffic flow, natural habitat areas, dune protection, tree canopy and other important issues in all our parks and especially at Gillson Park. As we have shared before, Go Green Wilmette generally supports improvements to our parks that integrate sustainable features that will benefit Wilmette now and in the future.

As you consider the Gillson Park Comprehensive Plan, renovations to the Lakeview Center, and improvements to all parks, Go Green Wilmette would like to share some specific suggestions as summarized in the following points: (Most of these suggestions have been previously presented and discussed with Steve Wilson and former WPD Commissioners.)

Gillson Park Comprehensive Plan

- Maintain and add to the green spaces in Gillson Park. Green space, especially areas with native plants that support both humans and wildlife, has disappeared to the point of collapse in the U.S. At the same time, research demonstrates that green space has positive effects on human health and ecosystems and helps combat air and water pollution. Keeping and adding natural habitat to Gillson Park is a forward-thinking strategy that will enhance Wilmette now and for decades to come.

- Implement structural changes that limit storm water run-off into Lake Michigan, such as the conversion of hardscape surfaces to permeable surfaces. Go Green Wilmette believes that no new impermeable surfaces, including roads, parking lots and concrete sidewalks, should be added to Gillson Park except where necessary for pedestrian safety.
• Adopt strategies that help reduce the park’s contribution to climate change and help mitigate the inevitable impacts of climate change, such as adding solar panels, reducing energy use, implementing sustainable groundskeeping practices, and planting more native dune grasses to protect against erosion.

• Prioritize the protection and preservation of mature trees in the park as they have much more green infrastructure value than younger ones.

• Plant additional native trees, shrubs and plants throughout the park.

• Encourage park visitors to walk and bike to Gillson by providing safer “active transportation” conditions, thereby reducing the need for parking and minimizing the carbon footprint of park visits.

Lakeview Center

• Go Green Wilmette supports enhancements and renovations to the Lakeview Center, including the enlarged viewing deck, to better serve our community so long as the building footprint is not increased and no additional parking is created.

• Explore nearby parking opportunities such as the existing CTA lot so that no additional parking in Gillson Park will be necessary. Restrict large private events at times when parking is at a premium.

• Require that all events held at the Lakeview Center follow sustainable guidelines. Practices such as the composting of food scraps, use of reusable or compostable tableware, waste reduction, and recycling could be included in the rental agreement. (GGW would be happy to share our green event guidelines for this purpose.)

• Designate a portion of any rental fees collected from private events at the Lakeview Center towards maintenance of native habitat and the purchase of additional native plants and trees.

• Add information, art, and displays that inform visitors about the unique natural features of Gillson Park.

• Incorporate bird-friendly design to minimize bird collisions along this important migration route.

• Use only dark-sky compliant lighting at the Lakeview Center and throughout the park.
Operations and Parks Management

- Create and adopt a sustainability plan for all Park District operations and park management that aligns with the Village’s Sustainability Plan.

- Hire or designate a Sustainability Director to coordinate sustainability efforts.

- Hire or designate a trained staff member to maintain natural areas within Gillson and other parks.

- Hire an ISA certified arborist to maintain and preserve Park District trees and add more native trees to all parks.

We appreciate your consideration of our suggestions and look forward to continuing to partner with the Park District.

Sincerely,

Go Green Wilmette