

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING OF THE GURNEE VILLAGE BOARD	
GURNEE VILLAGE HALL SEPTEMBER 29, 2025	
Call to Order	Mayor Hood called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.
Other Officials in Attendance	Patrick Muetz, Village Administrator; Ellen Dean, Economic Development Director; Jeremy Gaughan, Deputy Police Chief.
Roll Call	PRESENT: 4- Ross, O'Brien, Thorstenson, Woodside ABSENT: 2- Garner, Balmes
Pledge of Allegiance	Mayor Hood led the Pledge of Allegiance.
<u>A. DISCUSSION ITEMS</u>	1. Presentation by District 50 Superintendent Dr. Robert Machak: Woodland School District 50 update. Dr. Machak began his presentation by recognizing Family Mentor Program coordinators including Tia Martinez, Director of Innovation; Maria Christopherado, Special Education; Gabriela Navarro Dias, Language Acquisition Department; Rihanna Field, Head Start Program; and Kristen Kurthers and Lavanna Garner for their efforts in connecting new parents to Woodland resources. He stated Parent Mentors are Woodland family members who have completed formal training before being assigned to a classroom. They volunteer four days a week, for two hours each day, working individually with students, leading group activities, supporting teachers and taking part in weekly training and workshops. Dr. Machak reported that new employees receive equity training. The primary goal is to support Woodland students' return to the classrooms. As part of the Strategic Plan, the District reduced referrals and suspensions for minority students by 10%. Dr. Machak said that September is the Attendance Awareness Month at Woodland School. That gives them the opportunity to partner with families and students to build positive habits. Regular attendance provides students with more opportunities to gain experience, connect with peers and grow academically and socially. Dr. Machak emphasized that consistent attendance sets students up for current and future success and Woodland is committed to making attendance a daily priority. Dr. Machak concluded by thanking the Park District, the Township and the Village of Gurnee for providing resources, building connections and collaborating on future projects. 2. Presentation by District 56 Superintendent Dr. Luis Correa: Gurnee Grade School District 56 update. Dr. Correa stated he appreciates their partnership with School Districts 50 and 121 because they are trying to serve the entire community. He shared the following information about Gurnee Grade School District 56: D56 Student Demographics: • Hispanic/Latino population – 43.44% (steady increase) • Black/African American – 23.04% • White – 20.99% • Multiracial – 6.80% • Asian – 5.02% • Free and Reduced Lunch population – 55.42% • Students with ELL Services (Students who receive support to learn English)– 23.80% Strategic Values: • Visionary Leadership • Thriving Ecosystem • Modern and Effective Learning Design

- Empowered Workforce
- Impact and Stewardship
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Capital Improvements:

- Parking Lots at Spaulding and Viking
- Floors, roofs and HVAC Systems
- Added Flexible Seating/Furniture for Middle School students

Updated Safety Protocols:

- Upgraded security cameras and implemented three-point entry system at all schools
- Strong partnerships with local emergency response agencies in Gurnee and Lake County

Implementation of Standard Response Protocol (SRP)

- Implemented Standard Response Protocol at all schools:
 - Hold
 - Secure
 - Lockdown
 - Evacuation
 - Shelter
 - Reunify

Portrait of a Graduate:

- Academic Champion
- Critical and Creative Thinker
- Effective Communicator
- Determined Learner
- Thoughtful Problem-Solve
- Engaged Collaborator
- Contributing Citizen
- Learning Framework:
 - Connects to the Portrait of a Graduate by outlining how the skills, knowledge and competencies shown in the portrait will develop in students
 - Aligns curriculum, instruction and assessment on what to teach, how to teach and how to measure the students' learning to support their growth
 - Establishes shared expectations for teaching and learning across grade levels and subject areas by giving the staff clarity of effective practices
 - Guides professional learning by finding strategies and approaches for the educators
 - Supports continuous improvement by providing a structure of monitoring the students' progress and adjusting practices based on their needs and outcomes
- Celebrating Our Diversity – Four Community Events Each Year:
 - Hispanic Heritage Celebration (October)
 - Black History Month Celebration (February)
 - Maker Faire (March)
 - APIDA (Asia-Pacific Islander Desi-American) Celebration (May)

3. Presentation by Gurnee Park District Executive Director Mike Szpylman: Gurnee Park District update.

Executive Director Szpylman stated that the Gurnee Park District has a slightly larger population than Gurnee because it serves part of Waukegan and one subdivision in unincorporated Warren Township. He pointed out that part-time and seasonal staff provide most of services of the organization. He stated that they have a safe, challenging and rewarding environment for young members of the community.

Executive Director Szpylman explained that the organization is a member of The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPS) and follows the key pillars of:

- Equity at the Center
- Health and Wellness
- Conservation – Gurnee Park District is one of the leaders in this area

Executive Director Szpylman explained that in 2004, the Park District finished its current Comprehensive Strategic Plan. Through a survey process, the Gurnee Park District received a positive rating from residents that were above national averages:

- Parks – 96%
- Facilities – 97%
- Programs – 96%

Comprehensive Plan Key Themes:

1. Maintain and enhance standard of excellence and access in parks
2. Continued improvement in user experiences, maximize use of existing spaces and expand facilities as needed
3. Elevate operational excellence through proper investment in the people / team and resources
4. Maintain fiscal responsibility and explore new, creative funding sources
5. Offer inclusive and culturally diverse experiences for all ages and abilities
6. Continue innovative and diverse community connections and outreach efforts

Executive Director Szpylman provided usage statistics as it relates to the services provided throughout the twenty-eight parks and other facilities:

- 55,936 aquatic center visitors in 2025
- 5,567 active fitness members
- 130 preschool students
- 925 campers – Summer 2025
- 293 C.A.R.E enrollment - before and after school children

Park District Revenue Sources:

- 48% - Chargers for services
- 43% - Taxes
- 5% - Bonds
- 3% - Investment
- 1% - Miscellaneous

Completed and Upcoming Capital Projects:

- Hunt Club Park Community Center (HCPCC) Playground - Completed
- FitNation Parking Lot - Completed
- Purchase of Markus Property - Completed
- Hunt Club Park Neighborhood Playground – Coming up – Funded through grants
- Vicki Paddock Park Pathways – Coming up – Funded through grants

Executive Director Szpylman said that when they finish the Hunt Club Park Neighborhood Playground, it will be the largest footprint that they will have in the GPD playgrounds, and the first one with a zipline in it. He added that they are grateful for the collaboration with the partners who were present at the meeting. He mentioned that the Village provided funds and resources for events such as:

- Collaboration In Action Events
- Summer Concert Series
- Christine Thompson Park “Get Together”
- Training in the Park
- Bonfire & Brews
- Gurnee Days

Executive Director Szpylman explained that a current initiative is working to get funds to increase the scholarships. He mentioned that the Gurnee Park District includes \$40,000 in the operating budget for scholarships, however, in the last couple of years, that money has run out before all scholarship applications are awarded.

4. Presentation by Warren Newport Public Library Executive Director Ryan Livergood: WNPL update.

Executive Director Livergood expressed that he values the relationship that the Library has with its community partners. He divided his presentation into three categories: collections, programs and services and space.

- Collections:
 - Library of Things
 - Nintendo Switch
 - Hotspots
 - Telescope
 - Circuit Machine
 - Hundreds of other items
- CCS Consortium:
 - Thirty-two (32) libraries sharing a catalog including Lake Villa, Grayslake, Lake Forest, Round Lake, Waukegan and Zion-Benton
 - Easier to access resources from other libraries and easier to return library materials
 - New online catalog experience - coming soon
- Digital Collections:
 - Ebooks
 - Audiobooks
 - Digital Library of Illinois
 - Kanopy
 - Pressreader
 - Hoopla
- Digital Newspaper Collections Additions:
 - The New York Times
 - Chicago Tribune
 - Daily Herald
 - The Washington Post
 - Chicago Sun Times
 - Lake County News-Sun
- Digital Miscellaneous:
 - Ancestry
 - Consumer Reports
 - Udemy

Executive Director Livergood mentioned that if residents within the library district desire to use only online resources and do not have a library card, they can get one online. Those resources can be accessed using the library card at no cost.

- Programs and Services:
 - Storytimes – children develop literacy skills they need in life to be successful
 - Book discussion groups – Book lovers come together to talk about what they are reading and find out what to read next
 - Technology – People go to the library to use a computers or internet service if they do not have it at home
 - Tutor Time – People in the community reserve an hour with the staff to get one-on-one help in technology literacy
 - The Workshop – Crafting, imagining and making. It is a maker space to work on creative projects

Executive Director Livergood stated that the library collaborates with different partners in the community, who distribute items to families in need, such as Keeping Families Covered, local schools and the Brushwood Center.

- Space – A space editor evaluated the space and gave them feedback on improvements they could apply.
 - Removed part of the front collections to create a café seating area
 - Pillar booths – Their design was to provide more space for individuals
 - New shelving for collections
 - The renovation project for the adult section will take place during the Spring of 2026

Executive Director Livergood explained that the staff is currently working on the strategic planning process. During the week of October 29th they will conduct a series of meetings with their stakeholders.

5. Presentation by Warren Township Supervisor Elmer Fallos: Warren Township update.

Supervisor Fallos stated that on November 6th, Warren Township Center (WTC) will turn 176 years old. He said that Adam Krieger, Executive Director of Youth & Family Services, and Jamaal Malone, Teen Center Director, will start the presentation by providing some updates.

Director Krieger stated that the Warren Township Center conducted a survey for its clients receiving therapy. Almost 95% said that they would refer WTC to their neighbors. He detailed that the Center:

- Provides mental health services
- Charges of a nominal fee
- Creating a welcome space

Krieger stated last year Youth and Family Services celebrated its 50th anniversary. He explained that they are taking the following measures:

- Expanding the range of ages to serve from birth to seventeen, and young adults from eighteen to twenty years old
- Taking a family approach by encouraging parents to get involved in the therapy services they provide to their children
- Staff includes five full-time therapists (three are bilingual), two part-time staff and two interns
- Focusing on accessibility:
 - Reducing barriers to all services
 - 67% of clients are school-based referrals or recommended by a neighbor
 - Since the beginning of FY2025 they have:
 - Served over 200 families
 - Provided 2,400 sessions
 - Wait-list – working to reduce it
- Survey to find mental health conditions in their clients:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - ADHD
 - Relationship problems between parents and children
- Preventing measures – mental health education:
 - Visiting schools
 - Visiting the community
 - Hosted QPR – model to reduce suicide
- Other groups:
 - Equestrian therapy
 - Social skills development
 - Anxiety group
 - Parenting in English and Spanish
 - Parent-child relationship (starting soon)

Director Krieger recognized the Warren Township Center partnership with Warren Newport Public Library, Gurnee Park District, Village of Gurnee and the School Districts 50, 56 and 121.

Director Krieger closed by saying that they are trying to bring back the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, but they are struggling to find enough mentors.

Director Malone said that the mission of the Teen Center is to support local youth, from 6th to 12th grade, by providing a safe, supervised and social environment that promotes healthy, safe life skills.

- Summer Program - concluded:
 - 150 households registered
 - Provided social enrichment
 - Registered participants in regular activities:
 - Sports
 - Games
 - Arts
 - Technologies – STEM lab upgraded with three new 3D printers
 - Teen-led cookouts

- Weekly offsite trips
 - Arcades
 - Water parks
 - Bowling
 - Ice cream parlors
 - Movie theaters
 - Annual baseball trip
 - Fishing
 - Walking trips to the forest preserve in the area.
- Start of the school year:
 - Approximately 170 participants registered during the first month.
 - Expectation of growth because the needs of the community continue
 - Starting on Wednesday night, the dual program provides tabletop-based gaming for students who go after hours
 - Pizza movie night – It provides kids with a safe space to enjoy a movie
 - Non-clinical enrichment life skills groups for girls and boys
 - Team empowerment groups – the groups cover topics such as hygiene, self-esteem, peer pressure and what to do

Director Malone said that he would like to see all programs and activities open to all residents, if the kids fit the bracket of 6 to 12th grade. He added that former high school participants are now volunteering in the programs. Director Malone explained that there is a nominal fee is \$25 for the whole school year. There is a scholarship program for those students who cannot pay the fee. He concluded by saying that the calendars and registration for all the programs are online.

Supervisor Fallos introduced the Warren Township personnel who were present to the Village Board members. Next, he said that the food pantry is growing because of his efforts to make the place bigger to meet all the needs that the community has for food. Supervisor Fallos explained that lately, the number of seniors in need has increased. They provide them with food, amenities, and clothes.

Supervisor Fallos shared some information and dates for past and upcoming events:

- Senior Center has more than 5,000 memberships
- Sean Hatch - selected for the Illinois Bowling Special Olympics Games in Minneapolis for September 2026
- Trick-Or-Treat – October 19th at Warren Township Center
- Warren Special Recreation Association (WSRA) – Won 2nd Place at the State Summer Games for basketball
- Camp programs continue to increase in numbers
- WSRA Leadership engaged in the community – Woodland School District 50, Gurnee Park District and other entities through student, parent and employee driven opportunities with training in behavioral management, Care Inclusion 101, internal and external de-escalation, techniques, and policies and community integration
- Warren Township Center bought two buses to move the participants back-and-forth from the Greenleaf Center activities to the playgrounds.

Supervisor Fallos thanked the organizations present for the work they do together through their partnership. He said that the State of Illinois requires Townships to assess property, maintain highways and provide general aid for people that need help with electricity, water and rent.

Supervisor Fallos explained that other supervisors were able to save money to build the Senior Center, the Teen Center and to have the youth and family counselors.

Mayor Hood stated the Village of Gurnee started the Gurnee Care Commission in response to all of the needs in the community. Trustee Woodside is the Commission Chair. Mayor Hood said that the Village is looking to branch out in providing financial assistance. He encouraged

the community partners to continue to share information and needs with the Village. He asked the representatives of the organizations to contact Trustee Woodside when they would need more resources.

Adjournment

It was moved by Trustee O'Brien, seconded by Trustee Ross to adjourn the meeting.

Voice Vote: ALL AYE: Motion Carried.

Mayor Hood adjourned the meeting at 8:03 p.m.

**Andy Harris,
Village Clerk**