

OAKDALE NATURE PRESERVE PARK

OAKDALE’S ROOTS

The history of Oakdale dates back to 1895 and the creation of what became the Oakdale Camp Meeting Association that held annual evangelical revivals on the property until the late 1960s. All of Oakdale’s existing structures were built by this Association or its successors to support these revivals. The Tabernacle or Auditorium was built in 1915.

The 27-acre facility was purchased by the Freeport Park District in 1971 for \$75,000. The 50-acre “Rotary Woods” was added in 1987, and the remaining 56-acre Newell & Buss “Prairie”, originally acquired by the Jane Addamsland Park Foundation (JAPF) in the 1990s, was purchased in 2002 by the Park District from the JAPF with an Open Lands Trust grant. The total acreage at Oakdale now is 133 acres.

AUDITORIUM BACKGROUND

As a Park District facility, the Auditorium supported Oakdale’s nature and outdoor education programs and events, hosted stage productions, music performances, scout gatherings, family celebrations and weddings. However, use dwindled to 7 rentals over the final three years the building was available for public use (2010, 2011, 2012). The presence of bats and their excrement combined with infrequent use created a situation where the cost of cleaning the building for the rental far exceeded the rental revenue.

OAKDALE MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT

A master plan for the 133-acre park was developed in 2015 with the help of a Chicago planning firm, Ratio Architects at a cost of \$20,000. A series of four (4) Focus Group meetings were held with the public in mid-August and additional input gathered in a follow-up meeting on August 24 where preliminary concepts were presented to the Park Board.

The Ratio Plan established five goals.

1. Restore, maintain and preserve the ecological integrity of Oakdale Nature Preserve.
 - a. Remove and control native exotic and invasive species from about 10 acres/year.
2. Achieve a sustainable ecosystem health and biological diversity.
3. Reduce or eliminate maintenance of unused facilities.
 - a. Phase I
 - i. Auditorium upgrades
 - ii. Remove Lodge
 - iii. Upgrade parking and paths
 - iv. Screen maintenance building
 - v. Replace existing shelter
 - b. Phase II
 - i. Build a three-season shelter for 200 people

1. New restrooms
2. Kitchen
3. Fireplaces
4. Overhead doors for 3-season facility
- ii. Shift parking entrance
- iii. Remove existing restroom
- iv. Improve fire-ring
- c. Phase III
 - i. Convert three-season shelter to four-season building
 - ii. Add nature center to Mogle Center
4. Provide for educational opportunities (provide shelter and restrooms for approximately 3 bus loads of students (180 people).
5. Develop a unique venue for revenue to support and enhance the other goals.

The master plan document, “[Oakdale Nature Preserve Master Plan](#)” can be viewed on the “Information” page of the Park District website at www.freeportparkdistrict.org/information.

The Park Board began the restoration of natural areas (Goals 1 & 2) in 2017. Those efforts will continue over the next decade and beyond.

OAKDALE AUDITORIUM MASTER PLAN AND STRUCTURAL AUDIT

The Board then began addressing Goal 3 of the Ratio Master Plan and solicited a request for qualifications (RFQ) to conduct a building analysis and concept development for the adaptive reuse of the auditorium. The board wanted to determine if any of the facility needs identified in the Ratio Master Plan could be incorporated into the existing auditorium before adding new structures. Dewberry Architects was selected in the fall of 2017 to conduct this study at the eventual cost of \$19,675.

The Dewberry study was a two-step process. Step one determined whether the auditorium was structurally sound. The second step engaged the public, Park District Staff and Board in a planning process to establish how the building will be or could be used.

As the structural analysis was about to begin, years of accumulated bat guano and the inherent histoplasma fungus spores that can cause very serious respiratory issues, became a critical issue. An estimate to clean the building (\$32,600) was considered but the Park Board opted to have Fehr Graham Engineering and Environmental, a local firm with expertise working in hazardous environments, conduct the structural analysis at a cost of \$8,175. Their inspection was completed in early December 2017 and the structural analysis was delivered to the Park Board in February 2018.

The building was found to be structurally sound but deterioration was noted in the footings, and replacement (of the footings) was recommended. The holes in the roof mentioned in the report have been repaired. A short video showing the building interior and the final

report “Oakdale Auditorium Structural Audit (& video)” can be found on the “Information” page of the Park District’s website at www.freeportparkdistrict.org/information.

After verifying the structural integrity of the building, Dewberry Architects hosted three (3) community input sessions on April 9, 2018. A total of 40 community members participated in these input sessions. Written comments from staff and the community were submitted for consideration in the days following April 9. On May 15, 2018, five concepts were presented to the Park Board for review and three options emerged for further consideration.

#1 Repurpose the Auditorium as an outdoor pavilion.

#2 Complete a historic restoration of the building.

#3 Preserve the steel frame to keep option #1 or #2 possible in the future.

The final report was presented to the Park Board on July 17, 2018. The complete report, “Oakdale Auditorium Master Plan” can be found at www.freeportparkdistrict.org/information.

Cost estimates for each of the three options are:

#1 – Repurpose as outdoor pavilion. Remove exterior enclosure of windows, doors, siding, floor and roof to expose steel frame. Sandblast frame and apply high performance coating to resist rust. Replace footings, install new roof, foundation and concrete floor. Leave sides open.

Projected budget - \$761,875.

#2 – Historic Restoration of the Building. Remove exterior enclosure of windows, doors, siding, floor and roof. Sandblast and apply high performance coating. Replace footings. Install roof, floor and sides paying particular attention to the type of materials so the restoration is historically based but complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Life Safety features rooted in the building code.

Projected budget - \$1,257,810.

#3 – Preserve the steel frame. Conduct a laser scan of the building to document the structure. Remove entire exterior enclosure (roof and walls) to expose the steel frame. Remove the concrete slab floor. Repair building footings. Sand blast the frame and apply a high performance coating to resist rust. This work essentially preserves the steel structure enabling option #1 or #2 to occur in the future if/when funds are available.

Projected budget - \$258,750.

On Tuesday, August 7, 2018, the Park Board voted to place an advisory referendum on the November ballot. “Shall the Board of Park Commissioners of the Freeport Park District spend up to \$1,257,810 of public funds renovating the auditorium at the Freeport Park District’s Oakdale Nature Preserve Park?” Yes or No.

This ballot question is non-binding or advisory which means the referendum will not increase property taxes. It was prepared by the Park District's attorney and approved by the County Clerk. The most expensive or largest of the three options under consideration was specifically selected so all three options ("up to") can be considered.

OAKDALE USAGE EVALUATION

Throughout the process, usage of Oakdale (and other parks) has been considered. Oakdale is located at 4433 S. Cranes Grove Road which is 3 miles south of South Street on Baileyville Road.

In 2014-15 the Park District worked with Health Systems Research from the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford to conduct a use study of eight (8) parks including Oakdale. The study found Oakdale's annualized attendance was 5,040 visitors. Read and Krape Parks were not included in this study. The final report for this study "[2014-15 Freeport Park District Use Study](#)" can be found at www.freeportparkdistrict.org/information.

On October 2, 2018, staff presented a report to the Park Board on Oakdale facilities use, including the auditorium, between 2010 and 2012. A pdf of the "[Oakdale Auditorium Use Report](#)" can be viewed online at www.freeportparkdistrict.org/information. The information used to compile this report was generated by the district's recreation registration software that was purchased and installed in 2010. The final year the auditorium was available for rent was 2012. In addition to building use, it tracks the time that staff spent preparing the building for rentals. These numbers show that maintenance staff spent an average of 27 hours preparing the building for each use. Daily rental fees for the building were \$200 for residents, \$250 for non-residents and \$100 for not-for-profits.

The ballot question is non-binding or advisory which means the results of the vote will not authorize an increase in property taxes. The results of the vote will be used to assess public opinion on the auditorium and provide Park Board members with valuable information as they consider the auditorium and Oakdale as well as the rest of the District's parks and facilities.

Report compiled on October 19, 2018