

**Deerfield Park District
Mitchell Park Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2020**

Meeting came to order at 7:08 p.m.

Present: Alan Baruch, Loren Rivkin, Chris Goodsnyder, Joel Seeskin, Hazel Herzog, Jake Kraemer, Debbie Serota, Alyson Feiger, Christine Digrazia, Ellyce Rumick, Suzan Hawkinson, Graham Ambrose, Gale Gand, Dan Shapiro, Katie Bittner, Niki Antonakos, Jean Spagnoli, Ken Abosch, Rick Patinkin, Jeff Nehila

Introduction of New Member

Executive Director Nehila noted that Gayle Byck from the D113 Board of Education was appointed to the committee.

September 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes Review

The committee reviewed the September 10, 2020 Mitchell Park Advisory Committee with no corrections or additions.

D109 and D113 Educational Information

Part of the committee's objective is to talk about educational proposals and opportunities for the community. Director Nehila thought it was important to find out what the schools were teaching. Katie provided a synopsis of the current curriculum for D109.

Niki gave an overview of the current D113 Social Studies Department curriculum related to the housing case and integration issue.

Niki explained that at the high school level students are required to take a United States History class. The US History class can be taken during the school year or summer school. Summer school could potentially be where some of the students aren't getting the same information because sometimes there are non-Deerfield High School teachers teaching US History in the summer. It's also possible that some students in the AP US History class may not have gotten all the information due to the pressures of this type of class. However, the topic will be part of the curriculum going forward. Two electives cover the topic of the Deerfield case, Sociology and Issues in Modern American Society. These classes cover the Deerfield case and there may be some overlap with US History. In US History in the standards and survey levels, the Deerfield case is taught in the Civil Rights section and the course emphasizes the role of youth in that movement. Students read articles and have discussion of the Deerfield case within a broader context. Current events are also folded into that discussion as well as sometimes with a webquest to help students be informed. This fall, for example, the recent local activism and renaming of the Mitchell Park/Pool was discussed. Students were very interested in this. Students also have discussions based on two articles: "Deerfield's Race Case" and "The South in the North."

On the AP level, the district has made sure this is part of the curriculum. This school year this was taught the first content day of the year. The idea was to show the personal nature of history and to introduce the importance of asking questions and reading documents, as well as to show the "backstory" of current events. Students prepared for class by reading "Deerfield's Race Case" and then by visiting the Deerfield Public Library's "Six Pivotal Points in the Fight to Integrate Deerfield," where they examined all

the primary documents and chose a key detail in each of the Six Pivotal Points, describing the detail and explaining why it is important to the story. They also provide students with other interesting resources to get them to understand where they are in their location but try to get them to understand that there's a long history to that location as well. This is similar to what is done in the American Studies course. This is an interdisciplinary class, combining the study of American literature and US History. (Two teachers, two sections of students in a two-hour block.) There are two American Studies teams at DHS, each with one section of the course. The teams plan separately but the approach is similar.

In one section, students photographed areas of the town and explained what these pictures represent. They then read "Deerfield's Race Case" and listen to the podcast "Why is Deerfield (Still) So White?" Discussion in class combined all of these pieces and linked to current events (Black Lives Matter movement and the move to rename Mitchell Park).

In the other section, the history of the housing case is part of a unit on civil rights and the play "*A Raisin in the Sun*." Students read "Deerfield's Race Case" and created an "asset map" of Deerfield in preparation for the lessons. To add to their understanding of events from the article, we showed an excerpt from Chicago Video Project's *No Place to Live: Chicago's Affordable Housing Crisis*. Current events are also folded into that discussion as well.

This class also included the following activities:

- Groups of students came up with a list of essential facts everyone in Deerfield should know about the housing case.
- Ms. Antonakos gave a brief overview of Mitchell's plan for the town's green spaces. We later connected this to a study of the effects of climate change on neighborhoods that were once redlined.
- We connected to the national question of how to rename of change monuments and made sure students knew where to find information on the park district's website for this continued discussion.
- We connected the housing case to the broader historical context of both suburbanization and housing discrimination, including redlining.
- As we studied Lorraine Hansberry's play (published in 1959), we made direct connections to the history of Deerfield, and as our study of civil right continued into the 1960s, we continued linking to related events in the town's history.

In our Civics Electives, specifically Sociology, students read the *New York Times* article "The South in the North" and place the Deerfield case within a unit in which they learn about the broader phenomenon of housing segregation, with emphasis on Chicago and suburbs.

Sometimes this course also includes the story of Amy Roost and Angelle Smith "The Adopted Black Baby and the One Who Replaced Her."

As this is a current events-based course the material changes. Students often will re-read "Deerfield's Race Case" for the basic story line. They may also read the story of Amy Roost and Angelle Smith, "The

Adopted Black Baby and the One Who Replaced Her” and Amy Roost’s “Why is Deerfield (Still) So White?” The Zion Woods development has become part of the discussion.

In 2019 AP Government students read and discussed Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, with emphasis on the local history connection. This was a great way to tie into the Deerfield Public Library’s programming for *The Fight to Integrate Deerfield*.

In the past, we held a teach-in on local history. Following the Deerfield Public Library’s work collecting oral histories in *One Book, One Zip Code*, the department put together a museum-like experience for students in what was then called the Student Union. It included:

- Video clips with oral histories of “old town Deerfield”
- Portraits and profiles of important figures in the town’s history
- A feature specifically on the housing case
- Historical timelines and demographic data
- And more

Other materials that are used periodically are “Cross Found on Home Lawn in Deerfield” (1959) and regarding Deerfield Citizen for Human Rights, we have a video with Theodor Repsholdt (transcribed excerpts), and an article on the involvement of another member, John Foster, in the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, thanks to this committee, Niki has reached out to Jean and the Historical Society has provided additional resources and materials.

D113 also provides an outline of the curriculum on their website and recently added are the resources from the library and a map of Deerfield Park District parks.

Ellyce commented that it’s great that D113 is providing this insight about Deerfield but why don’t they provide insight to other areas. Niki responded that as part of the larger study of the civil rights movement in US History we do look at other areas such as Cicero and their resistance to integration as well. We also use a documentary, *Civil Rights on the North Shore*, about the role of various North Shore communities and their attempt to integrate. The district will also change the curriculum based on new resources that may become available.

Chris proposed a sister city program that would include genuine meaningful opportunities for children in underserved communities.

Director Nehila thanked Niki for her presentation. Niki will email the presentation to the committee.

Director Nehila commented that if anyone is looking for records or archivals the park district can provide them.

Jean shared an idea she had for park district programs on culture, diversity and heritage as a way to expand the educational component.

Jacob shared information on a project he's been working on. After reviewing the Deerfield Public Library's webinar on the author of the book with the Art Shay photos, he reached out to a University of North Carolina Professor and the Professor offered to look into getting grant funding to provide the high school a license for all students to use the book when learning about Deerfield's history. After explaining what the committee was doing, he was very interested in the committee's work and also offered to talk with committee members if interested. Niki commented that she would be interested to learn more from him. Gale spoke with him as well and he offered to attend a committee meeting.

Katie reported that she mentioned to the D109 teachers and superintendent the possible renaming of a school for the Beverly's. D109 and D113 both have an Equity and Inclusion Committee.

Gale asked if the committee would be contributing towards the wording on a plaque at the park. Director Nehila responded that the community education component including the idea of a museum will probably come after this committee. We will have to recruit people to help put that all together. This committee should focus on the recommendations. Director Nehila stated that the museum is going to be a recommendation from the committee.

Park Naming Discussion

Director Nehila tallied the results of the name suggestions, Floral and Beverly were the top names with the most votes. He would like to know if the committee is comfortable with those two suggestions to bring to the board. Debbie commented that at the last meeting it was mentioned that the board might not consider Beverly. It is up to the committee if they want to have Beverly as one of the options.

Dan commented that he recalls that at the last meeting there was a recognition of narrowing this down to one concept and one name of a person/family. It seemed that was the direction the committee was going. There was a lot of favoritism for Beverly for the person and Floral for the concept. The committee may not all agree but maybe could come to a consensus. Chris commented that he would like to include Progress as one of the choices for a concept name. Hazel mentioned that there was some question about how the Beverly's would feel about it. Gale commented that she spoke to a couple of the Beverly children and they would be fine with it. Katie mentioned that some of the D109 teachers spoke to the Beverly's also and they would be honored. Dan commented that it is time to come to a consensus and make a recommendation. As well intentioned as everyone is about what the name should be, the discussion could go on for two or three more meetings. It's time for the committee to narrow the focus and get the recommendation to the board.

Jake asked what happened to the suggestion Milgram's Floral Park. He liked this suggestion.

Suzan commented that part of the work of this committee, the assignment came from a sense that there was something that wasn't being said by the name of the park that needs to be said. We struggle when we try to choose the name of a person because of a story that's related to that person. If we think about the large umbrella, so to speak, the weight of renaming the park is going to be a struggle for those that hear a new name of a person's name. Progress Park has a great idea of moving forward but has the developer's name in it and so there's some issue in that too but it has the idea that points us into a future that is anchored in the past. Listening to the whole storytelling this evening of the connection of

this area to the larger Civil Rights Movement and back and forth into the present. She hopes the name the committee gives to the park can bring people who hear the name onto the beginning, middle or wherever they are and onto the rest of the learning journey. She thinks it's not as useful to name the park in order to honor a person or a family when the project you are trying to do is lift the reflection of your community, the thoughtfulness of your community about its past and the possibility of its future.

Director Nehila commented that staying with that concept there is Progress, Progressive or another word. Graham stated that the Progress name was a reference to the developer's company. Loren commented that the name was brought up early on but the possibility that it is perceived today might not be worth the risk.

Gale mentioned doing some type of formal apology to help the community heal. Suzan commented that the park, the place, the actual land has a story that is correcting its name right now. What would the space be named if it was named the quality, the character, the strength of the community that we long for. Mitchell Park doesn't quite name the sadness that exists in this place around that space. Would equity, would equality, is there a name that whoever interred would be challenged into the thing that we wish were true. Not just aspiration. In hearing what is being taught in the schools starting in fourth grade, she doesn't believe this is the same community from 60 years ago. And so how do we name that? There's a value that's being claimed here that is aspiration but is also a current value that we intend to season our children with and hopefully the adults will catch as well. Graham proposed Dignity Park. Hazel mentioned Diversity Park. Gale mentioned that this was discussed before and is ironic and could be problematic. Jean suggested 2020 Park, being the year and 20/20 being perfect vision.

Director Nehila commented that he was ready to take recommendations to the board. Loren commented that this could go on forever if we go back and look at other names. Director Nehila asked if Beverly and Floral were the top two choices and polled the committee. Director Nehila can let the board know there were other names mentioned. Loren mentioned that he also would like Progress Park mentioned to the board.

Loren mentioned that at the last meeting one suggestion for a way to honor James Mitchell was to rename the community center for him. Loren asked if the committee should try to make a decision about that tonight as well. Chris offered a hybrid suggestion to name the administrative offices or the conference room after him if we didn't want to rename the whole center. Dan stated that he is concerned the committee is getting out of their lane. He wants to honor what the committee's charge was from the board. Rick responded that the committee had 3 objectives: determine a new name for the park; determine another way to honor James Mitchell; and develop/enhance the educational component.

Director Nehila commented that renaming the community center or parts inside could be another way to honor James Mitchell. Jean suggested a hyphenated name for the community center, Mitchell-Jewett Community Center. Part of the agreement in the sale of the Jewett property to the Jewett Park Association, which later became the Deerfield Park District property, was that the park would remain named Jewett Park. Director Nehila hasn't found any documentation that the community center would

need to stay named after the Jewett family. Chris mentioned naming the educational facility for Mr. Mitchell. Rick commented that it would defeat the purpose and would be problematic to name the museum for him. Would it be safe to say that if a museum came out of this it would be the main community educational vehicle for the charge of the committee? Graham commented that the best long-term use of that land and model homes would be a museum where the history could be honored, and a permanent home could be given to the Historical Society. People could come from all over the nation, this could be a big windfall for the community. Debbie would also like a plaque at the park directing people to the history. Chris had previously mentioned having a QR code on the plaque.

Director Nehila commented that he envisions a flower garden with an informational plaque in it as a piece of the educational component.

Gale asked if Director Nehila was going to mention that the committee wants to rename the pool. Director Nehila responded that the board made it clear at the last meeting that they weren't interested in changing the pool name. Gale commented that the board will go through this again if the pool name doesn't get changed. If the pool name stays the same, Hazel asked why the committee needs to come up with another way to honor James Mitchell. Niki mentioned her department chair lives in town and stated that there isn't a sense that Mitchell did anything particularly wrong, but they try to educate more about what his vision was for the town. She feels like that makes sense as an educator of children in town. They should know something about the association of Mitchell with the site, but it gets corrected in a manner that puts it in a broader context.

Rick commented that Deerfield is unique in that we have two pools, one on the east side and one on the west side, for a community of this size. That is because of James Mitchell. Jean commented that Mitchell wanted the children of town to have nearby activities to walk to safely.

Niki commented that the education piece and the honoring James Mitchell piece and if these two things come together and are appropriate to be in a museum that might work. That's a place where we could show the materials presented to the committee and a map of the parks, so the vision is obvious to the people in town and they understand him in that manner. That would be a way to tell the story of James Mitchell so that it's not about Mitchell Park. If we think about these two things coming together, the board might really like that. They are the deciders about whether to pursue this. As we go forward, we will hear more ideas about this.

Chris asked Director Nehila if he could find out if there is interest in doing a sister city program. Director Nehila believes that it's a great idea and he will discuss with the board.

The committee feels that the pool name should be changed. Their recommendation would be to rename the pool also and if it doesn't get renamed there is no need to name something else for him. Suzan mentioned that if the park gets renamed but not the pool, we would be reminded that we can get a lot of things right and one thing wrong and that matters. You have an example of a human story. It's not like the movies where good and evil reside as two different beings, we carry both inside us. An interesting potential consequence is that James Mitchell's story gives some depth to not trying to make everything seem so clean because it's not in real life.

Director Nehila thanked the committee for their time. He will bring the committee's recommendations to the board at the October 15 meeting under Other Matters so it can be discussed. Formal action could not take place until the November 19 board meeting.

Hazel thanked Director Nehila for his leadership. Director Nehila apologized for the confusion related to renaming the pool. Chris acknowledged the committee and thanked everyone for working together. Suzan stated that it was great working with the committee and thanked them for letting her be a part of the conversation.

Director Nehila commented that he will be in touch with the committee when there's information to report on. He also thanked committee members for their time.

Matters from the Public

There were no matters from the public.

The being no further discussion, meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.