

MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
RESOLUTION #19-74

ADOPTING A POSITION PAPER ENTITLED "STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS TO PROTECT
OUR PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND COMMUNITY: EFFECTIVE VISITOR AND RESOURCE
PROTECTION SERVICES AT THE MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT"

WHEREAS, the McHenry County Conservation District (hereinafter referred to as the "District"), is a conservation district organized and existing under the laws of the State of Illinois (70 ILCS 410); and

WHEREAS, District Public Safety staff were requested to review the sharing of policing and protection services with the McHenry County Sheriff's Office; and

WHEREAS, the parties met and data was collected and evaluated as per the request of the Board of Trustees; and

WHEREAS, the reports have now been completed and recommendations made.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Trustees of the District that it is necessary, desirable, and in the best interest of the District and the residents of McHenry County to adopt the position paper entitled "Strategies and Solution to Protect Our Parks, Open Space and Community: Effective Visitor and Resource Protection Services at the McHenry County Conservation District" as presented and Secretary of the Board of Trustees are hereby authorized to execute this resolution and the Executive Director is authorized to execute other necessary documents to execute the intent of this resolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, this Resolution #19-74 has now been executed this 26th day of November, 2019 by the President and attested by the Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the District.

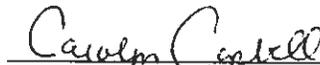
Ayes: 6

Nays: 0

Absent: 1

Abstain: 0


VERNON SCACCI, PRESIDENT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES


CAROLYN CAMPBELL, SECRETARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Strategies and Solutions to Protect Our Parks, Open Space and Community
Effective Visitor and Resource Protection Services at the McHenry County Conservation District

Creating Safe Parks and Open Space: Perspectives and Perceptions of Public Safety

The McHenry County Conservation District (Conservation District) is statutorily responsible for the preservation, protection and management of open space (70 ILCS 410/). This paper will explore the importance of the role of visitor and resource protection in keeping in accord with this mission as well as discussing the importance of our investment in public safety.

In the era of rising property taxes, concerns over unsustainable growth, pension liabilities and duplication of government services, the McHenry County Conservation District's Police Department has been under scrutiny as a non-essential cost of overall Conservation District operations. It was argued by outside parties that our visitor and resource protection services were duplicative to the activities performed by the McHenry County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). It was further argued that MCSO would be able to provide police response to our sites, eliminating the need for our police department, resulting in a reduction of the operational and staffing costs for the Conservation District. It was argued this transition would result in a substantial savings to the taxpayers of McHenry County. A meeting between Sheriff Prim, essential MCSO staff and Chief King was held to explore this as an option. The goal was to find a way to responsibly provide visitor and resource protection services to Conservation District sites, consider the feasibility of MCSO providing visitor and resource protection services to the Conservation District and to identify any cost savings that might be realized through these collaborative efforts.

Cost Effective Solutions

An in-depth evaluation of staffing levels and expenses associated with police department operations was conducted. The budget of the Conservation District's Police Department was examined in detail during this meeting. We reviewed not only operational expenses, but also salary and benefits for police staff members to provide visitor and resource protection services for 25,500 acres that attract more than one-million visitors per year.

After carefully evaluating the structure and associated costs of the Conservation District's Police Department, it was found that if we moved to a model where the Sheriff's Office was to provide visitor and resource protection services to the Conservation District, the resulting cost would be higher by more than \$350,000 to the taxpayer of McHenry County than the cost of current operations which is \$0.10 per resident, per week.

This assessment included eliminating the positions of Police Chief and Administrative Coordinator including their salaries and benefit packages as the Sheriff already has these elements in place. To accomplish the added work load, the Sheriff would have to hire police staff on at MCSO salary, benefit and pension levels as secured in their collective bargaining agreement. In assessing the resulting costs of eleven (11) additional staff members to provide patrol services to Conservation District sites, an annual expense of \$350,000 above current staffing costs would be required. This increase in costs is because the Conservation District's Police Officers currently command a lower salary, have fewer benefits and a smaller pension obligation than Sheriff's Deputies. The combination of these factors would result in an increased cost to the taxpayers of McHenry County. Finding such, Sheriff Prim stated MCSO providing visitor and resource protection services and public safety to Conservation District sites is not an option that can be further explored in a financially responsible way. A letter from the Sheriff documenting these findings is attached to this report.

Shared Investments

The conversation then moved to exploring current efficiencies of operations and any cooperative efforts that might realize a cost savings to either agency. Sharing of resources were discussed and will be explored further as the agencies continue to work together. This led to a conversation about the approach currently being conducted by the Conservation District and how it differs from traditional police operations. The Conservation District provides both proactive policing services designed to suppress and reduce criminal activity on conservation district sites and reactive police services responding to emergency matters in a comprehensive way when request for police assistance occurs. Visitor and resource protection services are approached with a focus on responsiveness to community needs, the perception of safety and quality of police services provided in line with our agency's statutory mission.

When providing visitor and resource protection services on public lands; staying proactive must be first and foremost. The premise of proactive policing is set in concept of officers interacting with site users. We get out of our cars and talk with people. This accomplishes several things; it reinforces comfort among desired site users and allows officers to intercept individual's nefarious intentions before they create victims.

While other police agencies are busy responding to problems, the Conservation District Police Officers are actively implementing solutions. This policing approach takes more time and effort than traditional police models, but is proven to be more effective and critical in an open space setting. The McHenry County Conservation District Board of Trustees and staff recognize how valuable our Conservation District sites are to the residents of McHenry County and take the responsibility of protecting these places and all who visit them very seriously. Our daily activities intentionally work to proactively implement research based national best practices to ensure we are working in a way designed to bring about the results we want; safe sites and positive experiences for all visitors.

Hot Spots or Safe Havens: Crime in Parks

Why is it that some parks reduce violence and other parks attract crime? The answer is straightforward, safe sites have much to do with how Conservation District places are designed, managed and protected.

At times, despite our best efforts, crime does occur. While we do our best to suppress opportunities for crimes, with the vast geographical location of the lands we own (25,500+ acres over 611 square miles), we cannot be everywhere at all times.

When crimes do occur, the highly-effective and interdisciplinary team comes together to address the situation as well as the threat to public safety. As recent occurrences demonstrate, when crime happens on one of our public places, there is significant community outcry. The media captures the concern of the general public and puts them on display creating a wide-spread concern that has the potential to disrupt the strong reputation we have built for keeping and maintaining safe sites. Only through diligent police action, coupled with a familiarity of our sites, trails and landscapes are we able to address and resolve issues as quickly and efficiently as we do.

Most recently there was a violent event that shocked and raised the consciousness of our residents of McHenry County. The Conservation District's police officers responded in a highly skilled and professional manner and worked around the clock to identify the offender and ensure the safety of the community and integrity of our sites. Within 48 hours of the incident, the offender was identified and located. Within 72 hours, arrest warrants were secured and the offender was taken into custody. We

worked cooperatively with our law enforcement partners and did not rest until the incident was resolved. It is through these efforts that the public knows our police force is there to protect them and keep them safe.

Proactive Solutions Alleviate Community Problems

When crime occurs, the Conservation District is ready and completely committed to a timely, professional and comprehensive police response; however, we are focused on alleviating community problems before they occur and this requires proactive solutions. Once a crime has occurred it is too late to start addressing these problems and a conservation site’s proximity is directly related to property values. Conservation District police officers get out there and engage with visitors on a daily basis to identify issues at the lowest possible level.

It is through these relationships, skills and investigative techniques that problems are both identified and solved. Conservation District Police Officers ask questions about visitor experience. They work to identify potential threats and actively address them before they turn into areas of concern. It is our goal as the Conservation District to identify and address problems before they come to the attention of Conservation District site visitors, neighbors, community and staff.

It is only through robust intentional effort that we can ensure public safety and protect the places we hold in public trust. The safety and protection of our visitors, neighbors, community, staff and natural resources on and around our sites are our primary goal and we work actively to ensure it is effectively maintained.

The following chart is offered to demonstrate a comparison of proactive and reactive policing efforts.

<u><i>Proactive Policing</i></u>	<u><i>Traditional Policing</i></u>
Focuses on Crime Prevention	Focuses on Crime Response
Success is Measured by Reduction of Citizen Fear, Disorder and Crime	Success is Measured by Call Clearance and Response Time
Officer is Regularly Visible and Accessible to the Community	Officer is Rarely Available for Interaction Unless Handling Calls
Engages Community, Stakeholders and Police to Solve Problems	Views Police as the Expert and uses Police Resources to Solve Problems
Actively Engages the Community in Identifying Problems before they Occur	Responds to Calls for Service To Address Existing Problems
Officers are Well Rounded and Able to Handle Varying Situations	Uses Specialty Units to Develop Specific Skills in Individual Officers
Actively Builds Trust Within the Community	Actively Builds Authority Within the Community
Investigates all Incidents to Identify the Root of the Problem	Investigates Incidents only when Criminal Charges are Pending
Uses Education to Reduce Crime	Uses Enforcement to Reduce Crime

Addresses Crime at the Lowest Level	Addresses Crime at the Disruptive Level
Quality of Service Focus	Speed of Service Focus
Service Driven	Incident Driven
End Goal: Solve Problems	End Goal: Respond to Calls

Investing in Our Future

There are many ways to invest in our future at the Conservation District; responsibly maintaining our lands, restoring ecosystems, and protecting our flora and fauna. None of this can be done without providing a safe platform in which all these efforts can realize success. Parks and open space can quickly become a liability when these areas become unsafe and unmanaged and as a result, lose their value and benefit to the community.

By investing in visitor and resource protection, we invest in our stability, in our growth and in the value of experience we are providing to the public. The public we are protecting are the same public who have entrusted us with the care and preservation of these open spaces. This is their land and we owe it to them to care for the land in a way that allows members of the public to visit and enjoy all our open spaces and the outdoor experiences they have to offer. We can only do this if we ensure site safety through robust proactive police intervention.

An investment in visitor and resource protection and public safety is an investment in the future of the Conservation District.

The total annual budget for police operations in FY 2020 is \$1,516,765. This is approximately 11% of overall District operational expenses. The chart below shows our expenses as they relate to other comparable agencies in our area. This chart shows that not only is an investment in safety something that is universally important in managing safe open spaces, but that our current investment is on the conservative side.

Number of Residents in Community- County Population 300,000
 Net Per Resident of Investment \$4.86 annually or less than \$0.10 per week.

Agency	Sworn Staff FTE	Civilian Staff	Budget	Acres	Officers Per Acre	Overall Cost Per Acre
DuPage County Forest Preserve District	23	4	\$2,719,609	26,000	1:1,130.43	\$104.60
Will County Forest Preserve District	12	1FT/5PT	\$1,659,811	22,000	1:1,833.33	\$75.45
Kane County Forest Preserve District	7	1PT	\$884,512	21,000	1:3,000.00	\$42.12
Lake County Forest Preserve District	19	2	\$3,600,000	31,000	1:1,631.58	\$116.13
McHenry County Conservation District	11	1	\$1,504,607	25,598	1:2,327.09	\$58.78
<i>Information from FY 18-19</i>						

McHenry County has over 300,000 residents. By living in McHenry County, each of these residents are positively impacted by the efforts made by the McHenry County Conservation District to protect our water, wildlife and way of life. The McHenry County Conservation District provides many benefits to not only our county residents, but also to the over one million visitors who come to our sites each year. We believe investing in the safety of both our residents and our visitors is a responsibility we hold in the protection and preservation of these public lands.

Our police services are a crucial component in ensuring safe sites for the public who have entrusted us with the care and preservation of these beautiful places.

We believe we have found the most fiscally responsible way to invest in public safety through providing specialized police services for our public lands.