

**MINUTES OF A OF THE RESCHEDULED REGULAR COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
OF THE CITY OF HIGHLAND PARK**

MEETING DATE: December 15, 2025

MEETING LOCATION: City Hall
1707 St Johns Avenue, Highland Park, IL 60035

I. Call to Order

At 5:01 PM, Mayor Rotering called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

II. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia (Remote, joined at 5:06 PM), Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Director of Public Works Bannon, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Assistant City Manager Taub, Deputy Fire Chief Brennan, Deputy Finance Director Lukasik, Commander Curran, Communications Manager Bennett, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska, Social Services Coordinator Alejandro

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on November 24, 2025

B. Approval of the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole held on November 24, 2025

Councilmember Lidawer moved to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on November 24, 2025 and the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on November 24, 2025. Councilmember Blumberg seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Mayor declared the motion Passed (6 - 0).

MOVER:	Councilmember Lidawer
SECONDER:	Councilmember Blumberg
AYES:	Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Lidawer, Blumberg
ABSENT:	Councilmember Tapia

IV. Scheduled Business

- A. Highland Park Community Foundation Annual Report 2025
Highland Park Community Foundation ("Foundation") Vice Chair Eric Ephraim, Secretary Jon Levy and Executive Director Terri Olian presented highlights of the Foundation's Annual Report.

The Council voiced their appreciation for the work that is being done by the Foundation.

The Council and Foundation Representatives discussed the differences from year to year as well as the growth that is taking place. They discussed dependency on the Foundation by the organizations.

- B. Place of Remembrance Update & Budget Determination
City Manager Neukirch introduced the presentation regarding the Place of Remembrance.

Assistant City Manager Taub presented information as it relates to the Place of Remembrance and budget determination.

The Council and Staff discussed the construction and budgetary changes of memorials in other parts of the country, the interest to have the Place of Remembrance completed by July 4, 2027 and ensure that it is reflective of the community and the experience, the confirmation of managing fundraising, and how the determination of the budget will set the framework for what can be designed and constructed. The Council was informed that they will be made aware if any budgetary changes need to be made, and they reiterated how this decision is an economic decision and in no way reflects what happened to those that were involved or impacted by the tragedy. Concerns were voiced regarding the already impending cost of the project, but a majority of the Council was in favor of budgeting \$2M for the construction of the permanent memorial. The Council confirmed that the City will not aggressively pursue fundraising, but will recognize donations that are provided. The Council was in favor of using reserve funds for this project.

City Manager Neukirch noted that fund drawdowns are already planned for Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027, although the construction budget as noted by the Council will be included in the budget.

Assistant City Manager Taub noted that the proposed agreement with SWA will be on the January 12, 2026 City Council agenda for review and approval. She explained that invoices from SWA will be provided on a monthly basis to ensure oversight is managed appropriately related to expenditures.

At 5:52 PM, the Mayor declared a recess of the Committee of the Whole Meeting.

At 6:00 PM, the Mayor reconvened the Committee of the Whole Meeting and asked for a roll call:

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia (Remote), Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Director of Public Works Bannon, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Assistant City Manager Taub, Deputy Fire Chief Brennan, Deputy Finance Director Lukasik, Commander Curran, Communications Manager Bennett, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska, Social Services Coordinator Alejandro

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod

C. Discussion of Proposed New Land Use – Champions Point

Community Development Director Fontane presented information on a proposal for a new conditional land use.

Corporation Counsel Elrod explained the reason as to why the discussion is on the agenda tonight.

John Cooper, property owner, presented information regarding his request for consideration of a new land use.

The Council, Mr. Cooper, Corporation Counsel Elrod, and Staff discussed:

- Community benefit access to the property would be about 48 days out of a calendar year
- The breakdown of the use of the property would be 13% for community benefit and the remaining 87% of use would be for commercial purposes
- Commercial purposes would include hosted events, tours of the property, etc.
- An opportunity was provided to the neighbors as to how they could share in the profit
- The number of parties that have taken place on the property since ownership change and details related to those parties
- Possibility of setting a zoning precedence that could create negatives results not only in this neighborhood but other parts of the City
- Discussions that have been had with the Park District, use of the Heller Nature Center, and alternative plans if the Park District is not interested in providing access
- Possibility of phased growth
- The need for a traffic impact and environmental study for this type of use in a residential area
- Five percent of admission revenue is tentatively planned to be shared with the Park District in order to access the site from their property at Heller Nature Center, although nothing has been decided related to this offer
- Background and experience of Mr. Cooper as it relates to the types of offerings being proposed as uses on the property
- How the property will lend to an inspirational program for those within and

outside of the community

- Employee housing and access to the property
- ADA accommodations
- Impact this proposal may have on the Heller Nature Center and the environment surrounding the neighborhood
- Request to offer more than 13% use of time of the property for charitable organizations
- Belief that the property, including the house, is secluded enough that larger events and torus would not have a large impact on the neighbors
- Anticipation of approximately 300 visitors a day to the property, about 100,000 annually with higher summer season
- Public access to the property is proposed to be through shuttles and a path from the Heller Nature Center; including potential for a ticket booth or a member of staff on the path providing direction and accepting tickets
- Expectation of the neighbors that moved into this area
- The property is an amazing asset to the community and should be enjoyed by all
- The City does not have an obligation to ensure this property is profitable for the property owner
- Concerns with the removal of trees in order to create an access path to the property
- Concerns with no practical concept for what is being proposed; everything seems to be pretty vague
- The need to have come up with creative solutions to offset the concerns of the neighbors and the community
- An understanding of the need to protect the neighbors and their investments
- More emphasis on charitable uses for the property
- The requested text amendment would need to be made by the City Council

Karl Camillucci, attorney for Mr. Cooper, noted that the ask is to move forward with exploring a text amendment and continue to work through this process.

Alex Ulyanov, Highland Park resident, provided information as it relates to what has happened with the new owner and property. He explained noted that Mr. Cooper is waning to operate a tourism business within a residential neighborhood. He noted that Mr. Cooper pressured the neighbors and then changed his approach to attempt to gain support for his proposal.

Michael Friduss, Highland Park resident, continued providing information regarding the background and timeline as to what has transpired after the purchase of the property.

Dr. Cameron Haery, Highland Park resident, continued providing information regarding the background and timeline as to what has transpired after the purchase of the property.

Marl Walton, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns regarding the numerous proposals that have been presented, as well as the noise nuisance that has been produced on the property. He noted that Mr. Cooper has not taken into consideration the neighbors on Mavor Lane and how the path from the Heller Nature Center will impact his property. He explained that the walking path will go right by his yard and it will be disruptive to his daily life. He indicated that Mavor Lane will be impacted by those visitors that will use the roadway as a parking lot instead of parking where they have been instructed.

Robert Simon, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns with shuttling buses on Half Day Road and Ridge Road as that is not the current traffic pattern. He stated that there are members of the Council trying to put lipstick on this proposal. He requested that the Council not allow this request to move forward.

Claudia Martin, an outside community member, explained that she was able to bring youth to the property and provided information as to their experience. She indicated that she is fully supportive of Mr. Cooper's proposal as it will bring economic growth to the community, it gives back to the youth, and it will inspire future generations. She urged the Council to approve the request and support a project that honors Chicago's rich history and contributes to the City's vibrancy.

Josie Moore, Deerfield resident/former Highland Park resident, noted that his 8th grade daughter is taking class that allows her to study the challenges Michael Jordan faced and how those experiences shaped his growth. He noted that this property is rare and provides for a meaningful educational opportunity that is tied to a physical place. He respectfully requested the Council move forward with the request for a zoning text amendment.

Dana Nasr, Highland Park resident, noted that her backyard abuts Mr. Cooper's property and she strongly against what he is proposing. She voiced concern that this small, quiet neighborhood will be turned into a zoo of people. She explained that her home was recently burglarized and it has left her family vulnerable. She indicated that this proposal will only bring more fear to her family. She stated that growth and development of this kinds needs to be in a place where it makes sense, not this neighborhood.

Rich Levy, Highland Park resident, provide his support for this project as he tells everyone he is from the area where Michael Jordan lived. He stated that 200 years ago, the City allowed Ravinia Festival to be built within a neighborhood and this should be allowed as well. He agreed there would be noise and impact to the neighborhood but this project allows kids in the community to visit this unique opportunity right in their own backyard.

Councilmembers Center, Ross, Tapia and Lidawer were interested in continuing to have a conversation and explore this opportunity.

Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Blumberg, Bruckman were not interested in continuing the conversation or exploring the opportunity.

A majority of the Council was interested in moving forward with conversations and exploration.

Mayor Rotering and City Manager Neukirch discussed the public notification process and when this will be brought before the Council for further discussion, plus input from the Park District when it is available.

V. Adjournment

Councilmember Blumberg moved to adjourn the Committee of the Whole meeting. Councilmember Lidawer seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned its meeting at 7:37 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Palbitska
Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk