



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2014

## Executive Summary





## Table of Contents

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1. Introduction	3
2. Vision, Mission & Purpose	5
3. Guiding Principles	6
4. Benefit to DuPage County	7
5. Organizational Goals	7
6. Conclusion & Next Steps	16
7. Appendices	16





# Strategic Plan 2014

## Executive Summary

October 14, 2014

### 1. Introduction

In February of 2014 the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County (“the District”) launched its first strategic planning process in 100 years. The strategic planning process was aimed at identifying and addressing organizational development issues to support its sustainability and long term mission-related goals. The anticipated outcome of this strategic planning process was the development of a comprehensive, strategic framework setting the District’s direction and providing guidance for its evolution over the next three years. To aid in this process, the District enlisted the support of Davidoff Communications, a Chicago-based national Mission-Driven™ Strategy and Marketing firm. The process was led by Lynette Morris, Director of Client Services & Strategy, with support from John Davidoff, CEO and Founder, Davidoff Communications. Statistically valid public research, including an opt-in online survey, an online survey conducted with a market research panel and a county-wide random digit dial phone survey was designed, implemented and analyzed by Carol White, Principal, CBWhite. CBWhite is a Chicago-based market research firm that was subcontracted by Davidoff Communications.

A four-member strategic planning committee comprised of senior staff to provide additional support throughout the strategic planning process. The strategic planning committee was engaged at different points in the process leading up to, including and following the strategic planning retreat held on August 14, 2014, to provide input and perspective on research questions and direction; stakeholder interviews; retreat structure; vision, mission, principles and organizational goals; and strategic priorities and action steps.

### Board of Commissioners

**President D. “Dewey” Pierotti Jr.**

**Commissioner Marsha Murphy** – District 1

**Commissioner Joseph Cantore** – District 2

**Commissioner Linda Painter** – District 3

**Commissioner Tim Whelan** – District 4

**Commissioner Mary Lou Wehrli** – District 5

**Commissioners Shannon Burns/Al Murphy** – District 6

### Strategic Planning Committee

**Susan Olafson**, Director, Office of Communications and Marketing

**Jack Hogan**, Director, Office of Finance

**Andrea Hoyt**, Director, Office of Planning

**Joe Potenza**, Director, Office of Technology

The Board of Commissioners for the District was also engaged at strategic points throughout the process to keep them informed of progress and to ensure that its perspective was included in the project planning, implementation and strategic plan development.

### Strategic Planning Process

Davidoff Communications led the District through its *Mission-Driven Strategic Planning* process, which is a comprehensive process designed to engage the organization’s various stakeholders in a dialogue about the direction of the organization. Mission-driven strategic planning is based on articulating a data-driven assessment of the current state of an organization, defining the ideal state using vision, purpose and

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values, and creating a strategy and pathways to get from current to ideal state.

The process was divided into the following phases:

1. **Discovery:** During this phase, Davidoff conducted a kick-off meeting with the strategic planning committee and department directors, in addition to a review of existing programs/services, marketing, business and financial documents, to better understand the current state of the District.
2. **Market Research & Analysis:** Using a combination of one-on-one interviews and focus groups Davidoff interviewed a total of 26 internal stakeholders (comprised of representatives from leadership, rangers, visitor services, site managers, law enforcement and commissioners) and 53 external stakeholders (including representatives from the County board, DuPage area city mayors and managers, conservation groups, park districts, school superintendents, and local business). Davidoff also facilitated a community dialogue in each of the six districts in DuPage County. These community dialogues were open to the public and promoted through a variety of District marketing channels. A total of 93 residents of DuPage County participated in the community dialogues. Additionally, a quantitative survey was fielded to gather statistically valid data from the general public regarding their perceptions of the District. The quantitative survey was conducted in two phases: a general population survey targeting randomly selected residents of DuPage County and an online opt-in survey that was posted on the District website and promoted heavily through a variety of channels. A paper copy of the opt-in survey was also made available to the public, in both English and Spanish. Over 2,000 responses were tallied from the opt-in survey. The general population survey consisted of a sample size of 800 residents, gathered via an online market panel (n=400) and a random digit dial telephone survey (n=400, cell phone and landline). The general population study was conducted in such a way that demographics of respondents matched DuPage County demographics. Finally, Davidoff researched five peer organizations and conducted additional secondary research to ascertain industry best practices that may inform the direction of the District going forward. The research from this phase was summarized, analyzed and presented to the steering committee as part of the retreat design phase.
3. **Commissioner Debrief:** In a series of two sessions, Davidoff presented an executive summary of the research that was presented to the strategic planning committee and engaged the Commissioners in a dialogue regarding their perspective on the District's mission, vision and strategic directions, as well as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to consider as the District plans for its future.
4. **Retreat Design & Facilitation:** Working with the strategic planning committee, Davidoff designed and facilitated a one-day staff strategic planning retreat engaging 60+ staff representing a cross-section of the organization in dialogue about the District's vision, mission, guiding principles, organizational goals and strategic priorities within each goal areas. A complete list of staff retreat participants is included in the appendix.
5. **Strategic Plan Development:** Following the strategic planning retreat, Davidoff developed a draft of the strategic plan framework to review with the strategic planning committee in two follow-up meetings during which the vision, mission, principles and goals were further refined. The draft of the strategic plan framework was then presented to the Board of Commissioners for review and approval in a series of two meetings on September 16th and 23rd. Feedback from the strategic planning committee and Commissioners was integrated into the strategic plan framework, which formed the foundation of the strategic plan. A draft of the strategic plan was reviewed with the strategic planning committee on October 15, 2014. The strategic planning committee then partnered with key staff to provide feedback and additional direction on milestone timing. A revised draft of the plan was developed and presented to the Board of Commissioners on November 18, 2014. Input from the Board will be integrated into the final version of the strategic plan, which will be delivered by December 1, 2014.

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## 2. Vision, Mission & Purpose

### Vision

The vision of an organization is tied to its mission and purpose and reflects long-term outcomes the organization is invested in achieving. A vision statement should be a concise and compelling ideal state towards which the organization can orient. It should articulate an ideal state of the organization and the communities the organization serves that is ambitious, yet attainable in long term.

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#### Vision Statement

The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is a nationally recognized conservation agency that envisions a community in which all citizens share a connection with nature and an appreciation for cultural history.

### Mission

The mission of an organization describes why it exists and what it does to achieve its vision. It should be unique to that particular organization and written in a way that is clear, concise and easy to communicate to others. Along with the vision, the mission statement guides an organization's actions and decisions. The current mission of the District is mandated by the Illinois Downstate Forest Preserve Act. It has guided the organization successfully through its first 100 years and will continue to guide the District going forward.

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#### Mission Statement

(Mandated by the Illinois Downstate Forest Preserve Act)

The mission of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is "to acquire and hold lands containing forests, prairies, wetlands, and associated plant communities or lands capable of being restored to such natural conditions for the purpose of protecting and preserving the flora, fauna and scenic beauty for the education, pleasure and recreation of its citizens."

### Purpose Statement

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The purpose of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is to acquire, preserve, protect and restore the natural resources in DuPage County while providing opportunities for people to connect with nature.

### 3. Guiding Principles



Guiding principles are precepts that guide an organization’s decisions and actions. They establish the fundamental norms, rules, or ethics that represent what is desirable (values) and affirmative for the organization and help determine the rightfulness or wrongfulness of decisions and actions. Principles are more explicit than values, and are meant to govern actions.

#### Guiding Principles

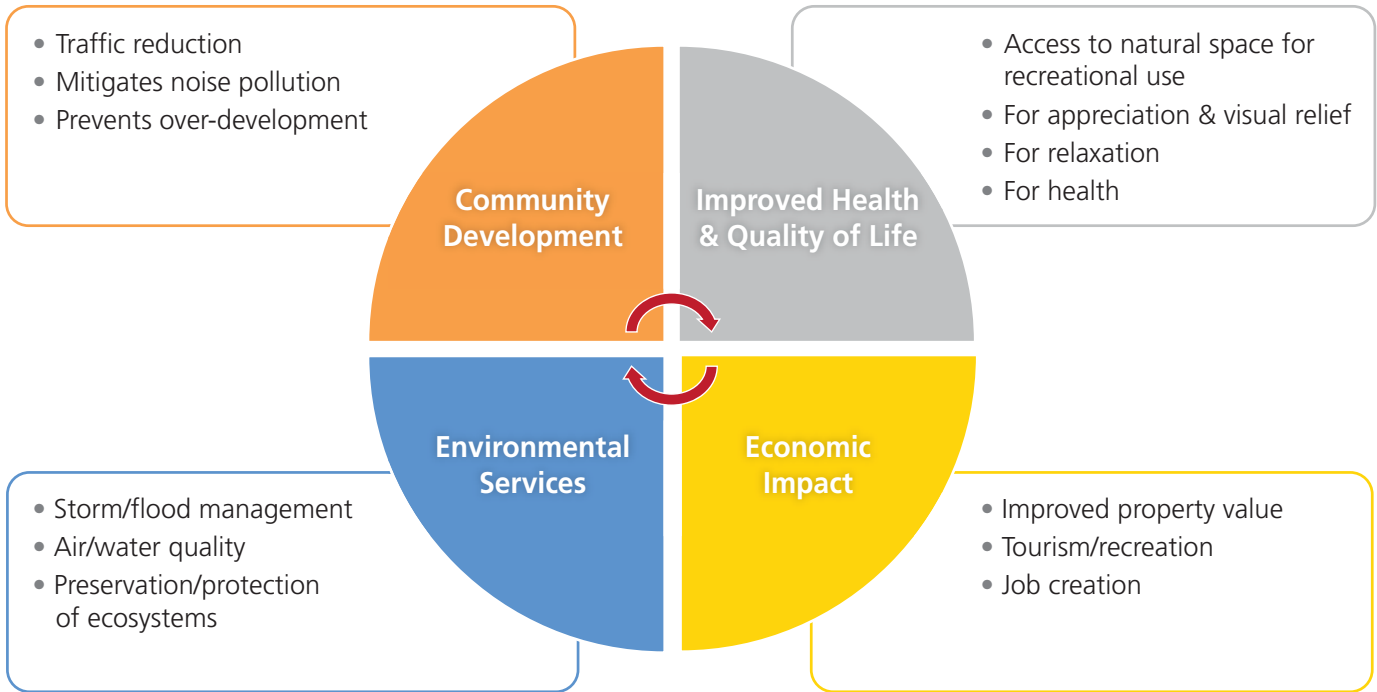
The Forest Preserve District is committed to the following principles that guide its actions and decisions:

- **Stewardship:** The District serves as a responsible steward of the financial, and natural resources that have been entrusted to it by the citizens of DuPage County. We adhere to the principle of excellence in all we do and our actions are guided by a basic respect for nature, one another and the communities we serve.
- **Sustainability:** The District values sustainability from an organizational and environmental perspective. To ensure its long-term ability to continue its mission, the District is guided by a commitment to financial and operational sustainability. The District is also committed to the responsible and sustainable preservation and use of the natural lands, waterways, plant and animal life under its protection for current and future generations.
- **Community Engagement:** We strive to continuously engage the communities and individuals we serve in an ongoing dialogue and partnership to improve our relationships and foster greater trust and collaboration around common goals.
- **Innovation:** As a leader in our field we seek innovative ways to integrate new technology, engage our public, respond to changing needs and advance our mission and vision.
- **Empowerment:** We will provide a supportive working environment that respects and relies upon each individual’s expertise, skills and diversity while encouraging teamwork, creativity and professional development.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** We seek to honor and represent the growing diversity within our community in our practices, programs & services, communications and the accessibility of our preserves.

## 4. Benefit to DuPage County

The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County provides a variety of benefits to the citizens of DuPage County, as well as to those who come from neighboring counties and states to enjoy the District's preserves, education centers, historical sites

and recreational opportunities. In interviews with internal and external stakeholders and from community dialogues the following benefits were highlighted.



## 5. Organizational Goals

Strategic directions and goals outline what the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County will accomplish over the next three years. The corresponding priorities are broad plans that outline how the District will achieve its objectives. Action steps represent more specific tasks and timing associated with each strategic direction.

Through the stakeholder interviews, focus groups and feedback collected in the research phase of the strategic planning process a set of strategic directions emerged on which the District chose to focus during the strategic planning retreat. Retreat participants worked in small groups to review each strategic direction and outline related objectives, priorities, and action steps.

### Overview of Organizational Goals

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5
Leader/Model Organization	Sustainability	Community/Public Outreach and Engagement	Natural & Cultural Stewardship	Connecting People to Nature



Over the next three years the District will work towards accomplishing the following goals:

1. **Leader/Model Organization:** The District will be recognized as a model of organizational effectiveness and a leader in the industry.
2. **Sustainability:** The District will operate in a manner that is both financially and environmentally sustainable.
3. **Community/Public Outreach and Engagement:** The District will proactively provide and promote opportunities to engage communities, affinity groups and individuals in ongoing dialogue to foster greater collaboration, trust, accountability and alignment among the District, the public and its partners.
4. **Natural & Cultural Stewardship:** The District will continue to maintain and improve upon its legacy as responsible stewards of DuPage County's natural and cultural resources, through effective resource management, responsible and strategic acquisition, proactive maintenance and appropriate allocation of financial and human resources.
5. **Connecting People to Nature:** The District will actively engage people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life in opportunities to connect with nature in order to improve the quality of life and health in DuPage County, and foster a lifelong appreciation of nature among its citizens

## Detail: Strategic Priorities, and Milestone Action Steps

### Goal 1: Leadership

The District will be recognized as a model of organizational effectiveness and a leader in its field.

In order to do this the District will:

#### Priority 1

**Invest in Technology:** Invest in technology to improve its internal efficiency, enhance its ability to communicate with and serve citizens, increase accessibility and equip District personnel with the tools they need to effectively manage and maintain preserves as a benefit for all DuPage County.

- Year 1**
- A. Conduct an annual reassessment of internal and external technology needs and prioritize need based on mission.
  - B. Implement technological advancements related to district objectives while being cost effective and efficient.
  - C. Identify opportunities where technology can have a positive impact to our citizens.

**Year 2** Develop management tools related to reporting, forecasting and measuring information.

**Year 3** Create a culture of service excellence with measurable outcomes for performance and efficiency.

#### Priority 2

**Improve Governance Systems:** Develop better systems for orienting new Commissioners to the mission, vision and values of the District; transferring knowledge prior to Board and organizational leadership succession; facilitating greater communication and alignment

between Board and staff, among Board members and between Board and external stakeholders; and providing ongoing training and Board development.

- Year 1**
- A. Develop a formal program to better orient Commissioners about the District and its functions.
  - B. Facilitate leadership training opportunities for commissioners and key staff.
  - C. Develop an internal communications plan to ensure important initiatives are effectively communicated to commissioners and external stakeholders.
  - D. Launch a platform by which commissioners are effectively debriefed on key issues and topics.
  - E. Develop an internal leadership succession plan to ensure information is efficiently and effectively shared.
  - F. Establish and execute a media training program for Commissioners and key staff.

**Year 2** Coordinate a board retreat to talk about key District issues and communicate with staff the future direction of the agency.

**Year 3** Coordinate annual board retreats to talk about key District issues and agency direction.

#### Priority 3

**Promote Innovation & Thought Leadership:**

Articulate and proactively seek opportunities in key



areas in which the District can position itself as an innovator and thought leader among environmental and conservation organizations.

- Year 1**
- A. Solicit ideas from staff to help identify areas in which the District can claim leadership and subject matter expertise that supports its vision, mission, purpose and values.
  - B. Identify and train appropriate District personnel to represent the District's thought leadership in key areas.
  - C. Build a content library of thought leadership pieces: e.g. public speaking opportunities, white papers, opinion pieces, position papers, etc.
  - D. Develop an editorial calendar for media relations and article placement related to thought leadership areas.

- Year 2**
- A. Actively solicit and provide information to the media and others requiring industry expertise in thought leadership areas.
  - B. Encourage and support innovation within the organization that improves the District's ability to accomplish its mission.
  - C. Plan community seminars and/or conferences to draw together thought-leader expertise to showcase real-world applications of best practices.

- Year 3**
- A. Challenge staff to continue to embrace new methodologies to reach new audiences and communicate expertise.
  - B. Schedule, coordinate and implement community seminars and conferences. Invite local regional leaders and agencies to present and participate.

#### Priority 4

**Create a Culture of Collaboration:** Create an organizational culture in which District values are actively promoted, along with communication, respect, open-mindedness and collaboration.

- Year 1**
- A. Improve the relationship between board and staff by creating opportunities for communication, interaction and understanding.
  - B. Build a platform and process to improve communication and an exchange of ideas between field staff and management to foster greater philosophical alignment, empowerment and coordination.
  - C. Develop a method by which to ensure all staff commits and participates in the District's Centennial celebration.

- Year 2**
- A. Develop a system for cross-departmental collaboration, integrated planning, budgeting, and information sharing. (This would include the design and implementation of a process for creating integrated department work plans shared throughout the District. It would also include interdepartmental committees to facilitate communication and collaboration around District-wide projects.)

- Year 3**
- A. Establish District standards and expectations for quality of work, improved operations, evaluation of program procedures and processes, implementation of new practices, and training programs for employees.
  - B. Update District policies and gain by Board of Commissioners approval.

#### Priority 5

**Invest in Staff Training and Professional Development:** Implement a professional development and training program for staff at different levels throughout the organization to foster a culture of empowerment and innovation.

- Year 1**
- A. Develop a policy for continuing education relating to professional capacity (i.e. advanced training in environmental sciences, business & administration, leadership, etc.)
  - B. Design a professional development program to provide a clear pathway for career advancement within the District and chosen fields. The pathways will focus on team leadership, departmental leadership and organizational leadership roles.
  - C. Ensure directors research and support professional development for departmental staff and are able to articulate expectations for staff to advance within the organization.

- Year 2**
- Identify and design on-going training for staff and leadership in critical areas

- Year 3**
- A. Develop a mentor program by which rising star employees can be encouraged and supported in their professional development endeavors at the District.
  - B. Develop an orientation program and seminar series for entry-level and/or seasonal employees to "show the ladder" for career succession at the District.

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## Goal 2: Sustainability

The District will operate in a manner that is both financially and environmentally sustainable.

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In order to accomplish this the District will:

### Priority 1

#### Engage in organization-wide financial planning:

Focused on ensuring sustainable funding, prioritizing current activities, and finding other areas of funding.

**Year 1** A. Identify and recommend needed financial policy changes that improve the District's ability to function effectively and efficiently.

B. Create a formal operations and financial management strategy that prioritizes District activities and aligns with the District's vision, mission and purpose.

C. Develop a training program to provide a financial overview to staff, commissioners and interested others to ensure a better understanding of the District's financial dynamics.

D. Evaluate, recommend and execute a method by which the District consistently assesses fees.

E. Develop a fundraising plan for the District.

F. Educate District administration about philanthropic opportunities.

**Year 2** A. Develop and execute a long-range financial plan that aligns with the District's vision, mission, and purpose.

B. Identify and recommend financial policy changes.

**Year 3** Develop a plan to better engage staff in financial planning process.

### Priority 2

**Re-engineer and re-focus the organization** (across the agency and by department) to align with the goals & priorities of the strategic plan to support sustainability.

**Year 1** A. Engage staff in identifying areas where the District could function and operate in a more efficient manner. (completed)

B. Engage the services of a reorganization consultant to analyze operations and identify efficiencies. (completed)

C. Develop and execute a District-wide reorganization plan.

**Year 2** A. Evaluate the intended and unintended outcomes of the reorganization plan and make recommendations to fill gaps.

B. Develop a platform by which to effectively communicate District principles to all employees.

**Year 3** A. Work to develop a platform and/or program to formally engage staff in evaluating District operations and further identify additional efficiencies.

### Priority 3

#### Engage in ongoing, collaborative, organization-wide assessment and planning:

**Year 1** A. Initiate the District-wide master planning process.

B. Require all department heads to create annual department work plans with goals that align with the District's strategic plan along with measurable objectives.

C. Develop a platform by which department work plans are shared with other staff and commissioners.

D. Routinely evaluate and update District-wide policies and practices.

**Year 2** A. Execute the District-wide master plan.

B. Develop an agency-wide system to communicate organizational direction.

**Year 3** A. Require all departments to establish key metrics to share and report project status on a monthly basis.

B. Develop a monthly financial statement to help department heads identify budgetary standing.

C. Develop a system to evaluate District success against strategic, master, and financial plans.

D. Begin the process of reviewing and creating an enhanced strategic plan.

### Priority 4

**Exceed standards** for reducing the District's environmental footprint, energy efficiency and waste management.

**Year 1** A. Identify major capital expenses not contained in the ARCADIS Report.

B. Identify deficiencies in the District's landfill operating agreements.

C. Determine need/begin design of river bank stabilization adjacent to the Mallard North Landfill.

- D. Assess the District’s current “green” technology practices as it relates to the District’s carbon footprint.
  - E. Conduct an asset evaluation towards the District’s carbon footprint.
- Year 2**
- A. Evaluate the District’s “green” technology practices to demonstrate a carbon footprint reduction.
  - B. Recommend improvements to the District’s assets for carbon footprint reduction.
  - C. Complete needs assessment/design of river bank adjacent to Mallard North Landfill and submit for permitting to U.S. ACE and DPC. (2-6 year process)
  - D. Recommend changes to landfill operating agreements and potential additional District expenses associated with these changes.
  - E. Begin permitting process for any major capital landfill projects identified in Year

- Year 3** A. Continue permitting/implementation of any major capital projects identified in Year 1
- B. Continue permitting/implementation of river bank adjacent to the Mallard North Landfill.

**Priority 5**

**Achieve a state in which all assets are revitalized**, with a plan for meeting the future maintenance/infrastructure needs for each asset.

- Year 1** Continue all preventative and routine maintenance programs for all District assets.
- Year 2** Evaluate the current state of District assets and determine future needs including those of structures, cultural assets, infrastructure, vehicles and equipment.
- Year 3** A. Prioritize assets to ensure they align with the completed master and long-term financial plans.
- B. Create and implement a plan for ongoing management and evaluation of assets.

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**Goal 3: Community/Public Outreach and Engagement**

The District will proactively provide and promote opportunities to engage communities, affinity groups and individuals in ongoing dialogue to foster greater collaboration, trust, accountability and alignment among the District, the public and its partners.

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In order to do this the District will:

**Priority 1**

**Build Strategic Partnerships:** With mission-aligned municipal, corporate and academic organizations to further the District’s reach, impact and efficiency.

- Year 1** A. Evaluate the District’s portfolio of program offerings to align programs and service strategies to the District’s strategic priorities and customer/visitor needs.
- B. Build strategic partnerships with municipal, corporate and academic organizations to advance the District’s mission, support its positioning as a thought leader and community resource and explore alternative funding streams.
- C. Identify the municipal, corporate and academic organizations where the District can extend technical support and program services to expand community engagement.
- D. Build stronger connections to local and regional conservation groups to establish program partnerships that address the strategic goals of the District.

- E. Identify and work to establish more intergovernmental cost-sharing agreements with other local agencies.
- Year 2** A. Develop event sponsorship relationships with businesses.
- B. Develop programmatic and equipment support from corporations through grants and corporate work days.
- C. Identify key relationships with local, state, and national grantors, starting with existing relationships. Build a regular schedule of applying, reporting, and stewarding these granting organizations.
- D. Continue to grow the Friends of the FPDDC Ambassadors’ Circle to be a key group of engaged donors interested in supporting priority projects of the District.
- E. Cultivate and steward generous donors to the District and the Friends.
- F. Evaluate and refresh training of District volunteers to continue to provide excellent customer service to the public and respect with District staff and leadership

- G. Establish a community advisory group of DuPage residents who are also frequent preserve visitors who can participate in focus groups, and become advocates on District projects, tax levies, etc.
- Year 3**
- A. Work with local hospitals and health professionals on health initiatives to become a health and wellness resource and locations within the county.
  - B. Establish a Land Steward and Preserve Restoration Partner program taught by our naturalists and ecologists.
  - C. Participate in panels, seminars, or classes at local colleges, community colleges, and universities
  - D. Identify and grow relationships with volunteer contacts
  - E. Hold town hall meetings in each Commissioner's District annually to continue to reach out to the community on a regular basis
  - F. Grow relationships with other constituent groups such as clubs and organizations (Rotary, Jaycees, Lions, etc.) to spread our message
  - G. Utilize community advisory groups, companies, and community organizations as advocates for capital campaigns as part of the District's capital improvement plan.

**Priority 2**

**Improve Opportunities for Public Interaction and Dialogue:** Improve existing opportunities and provide innovative ways for two-way interaction and dialogue between the public and the District to improve understanding, trust and accountability

- Year 1** Develop a plan by which to engage key influencers to participate in District programs and events.
- Year 2** Balance the District's portfolio of programs and services to ensure multiple opportunities for target audience engagement.
- Year 3** Measure and evaluate target audience engagement and outcomes.

**Priority 3**

**Proactively Provide Community Education Related to District Initiatives & Services:** Focused on helping the community become better educated about the value of the District

- Year 1**
  - A. Educate the public about issues and initiatives relating to natural resource management and engage them in the services the District offers.
  - B. Continue to integrate the preservation and conservation of nature message into District programs.
  - C. Develop a plan by which the District can turn casual users of District's facilities, preserves and services into advocates of the District.
  - D. Create an interdepartmental focus group to address environmental issues that may have a long-term impact on the DuPage community and the District.
- Year 2** Improve informational exhibits at the education centers to establish consistent messaging and promotion of District initiatives and opportunities.
- Year 3** Articulate the environmental/ecosystem services the District provides to further citizens' appreciation of how the District benefits the county.

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**Goal 4: Natural & Cultural Stewardship**

The District will continue to maintain and improve upon its legacy as responsible stewards of DuPage County's natural and cultural resources through effective resource management, responsible and strategic acquisition, proactive maintenance and appropriate allocation of financial and human resources.

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In order to do this the District will:

**Priority 1**

**Evaluate Current Assets, Infrastructure and Environmental Footprint,** including an assessment of the financial impact on the agency of each natural asset, in order to effectively prioritize resource management

projects based intended use and accurately plan for long-term maintenance and management.

- Year 1**
  - A. Reassess the acquisition and disposition of land to determine what fits within the District's overriding vision, mission and purpose.
  - B. Evaluate the financial implications of the District's properties to inform the District's



- long-term plans and decision-making processes.
- Year 2** Prioritize ecosystem assets and identify and secure funding sources to ensure the creation of functional, diverse and sustainable communities.
- Year 3** Continue the management of prioritized ecosystem assets and work to secure funding sources.

**Priority 2**

**Develop a Natural Resource Plan** for the District that will identify priority initiatives, areas of focus and long-term investment, based on financial resources and intended use of natural assets.

- Year 1**
  - A. Reevaluate the current land management policy to determine if or where changes are required.
  - B. Integrate the agreed upon policy into the upcoming District-wide master plan.
- Year 2** Provide a platform to educate the board and interested others about natural resource policies and regional natural resource planning.
- Year 3** Integrate resource management, recreation development and education costs into the planning process and find efficiencies to help decrease operational costs.

**Priority 3**

**Develop a Cultural Resource Plan** for the District that will identify priority initiatives, areas of focus and long-term investment, based on financial resources and intended use of cultural and historical assets.

- Year 1** Finalize and move to have approved the policy developed by the cultural resources committee.
- Year 2** Evaluate the District’s current investment in cultural resources and assess future investment based on significance, need, viability and the mission-alignment.
- Year 3** Complete a historical asset plan that identifies internal and external funding sources, and present to the board for approval.

**Priority 4**

**Create a Plan for Strategic Acquisition of Land in DuPage County** taking into consideration financial resources

- Year 1**
  - A. Evaluate and update land acquisition policies, with particular consideration given to the current state of available land in DuPage County.
  - B. Develop a comprehensive land acquisition plan by which we will collaborate with other entities to develop ways to protect and preserve natural areas.
  - C. Re-evaluate criteria for our land acquisition program
- Year 2**
  - A. Prepare a comprehensive land acquisition plan that will enhance the connectivity of green corridors.
  - B. Develop funding strategies for the land acquisition program.
- Year 3** Finalize the comprehensive land acquisition plan. Integrate capital, natural resources and operation and maintenance costs into land acquisition decisions.

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**Goal 5: Connecting People to Nature**

The District will actively engage people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life in opportunities to connect with nature, in order to improve the quality of life and health in DuPage County and foster a lifelong appreciation of nature among its citizens

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In order to do this the District will:

**Priority 1**

**Improve Access to the District and its Programs, Services and Sites:** by fostering a sense of approachability, and removing barriers to accessing and enjoying the District’s resources.

- Year 1**
  - A. Upgrade to an online registration system where the public can register for all District-facilitated activities and services

(i.e. licenses, program enrollment, camping site reservations, etc.)

- B. Link the online registration system to the finance department to improve registration efficiencies and program performance tracking
- C. Continue to invest in the District’s website.
- D. Initiate the District-wide master planning process.

- Year 2**
  - A. Execute the District-wide master plan.

- B. Conduct an online survey of District website users to determine online attitude and interests.
- C. Develop a program and communication strategy by which the district begins to focus on new and underserved audiences.

- Year 3**
- A. Using online research surveys, evaluate and update website strategy to launch a possible website redesign.
  - B. Integrate Usage of Mobile /App Platforms: The creation of an app may prove useful as a communication, education and engagement tool for constituents.

### Priority 2

**Promote the Health Benefits of Being in Nature:**

Through its marketing and communications, the District will promote the image of a health-conscious organization as well as the health benefits of an active, outdoor lifestyle.

- Year 1**
- A. Develop and execute a measurable plan to leverage health and wellness and improved quality of life messaging to drive citizen engagement with the District while also reaching new audiences.
  - B. Inventory the health-related opportunities available within the District and develop a measurable plan that helps lead employees to a healthier lifestyle.

- Year 2**
- A. Evaluate and fine-tune health and wellness messaging plan.
  - B. Evaluate and fine-tune plan to improve employee health.

- Year 3**
- A. Assess health and wellness messaging to determine success.
  - B. Assess success of plan to improve employee health.

### Priority 3

**Strengthen District Branding and Marketing:** to better distinguish the District and its assets from other similar nonprofit or municipal organizations in support of increasing visibility, awareness and, ultimately, loyalty to the District

- Year 1**
- A. Leverage the strategic planning survey work to begin to develop a branding campaign complete with brand promise. Hire an outside research firm to fill in gaps where needed.
  - B. Develop and execute a plan that will begin to promote the District's 100-year anniversary.

- C. Develop an online content strategy that reflects a persona that resonates with the District's users while developing a plan to capture new users.
- D. Leverage traditional, social media and networking opportunities to generate increase in awareness of the District, its facilities and initiatives.
- E. Conduct research to determine satisfaction with current outreach methods.
- F. Conduct surveys to better assess the needs and preferences of underserved populations including youth/young adults and Millennials.
- G. Develop an internal communications plan that engages all staff.

- Year 2**
- A. Using survey results, re-evaluate editorial direction for e-newsletters and the Conservationist.
  - B. Proactively develop and promote programs and events to underserved and untapped audiences including youth/young adults and Millennials.
  - C. Optimize current communication channels and integrated messages used in District marketing as well as marketing for specific programs and initiatives

- Year 3**
- A. Continue to proactively expand the District's reach by promoting programs and events to seniors, special needs groups, and ethnically and culturally diverse audiences.
  - B. Create strategic marketing partnerships with affinity organizations to continue to extend the District's reach.

### Priority 4

**Integrate a Customer/Visitor-Service Mindset Throughout the Organization:** Throughout each department the District is operating with a customer-centric mindset focused on creating a positive overall visitor experience.

- Year 1**
- A. Hire a consultant to assist in the development of a quantitative survey to help better understand customer expectations and needs.
  - B. Determine peak and low-traffic flow at District facilities. Adjust customer service and/or front desk hours of operation to provide more convenience to patrons.
  - C. Work with IT to ensure updated technology is implemented.
  - D. Provide necessary insight and support to IT to ensure e-commerce is effectively added to our purchasing and permitting processes.

- E. Provide two in-house seminars facilitated by customer-service experts to begin to outline standards and expectations for enhancing the District's customer-centric mindset.
- F. Develop a plan that standardizes customer service standards across the District. Ensure consistency across all sites.

- Year 2** Roll out new customer service standardization plan to ensure all sites servicing patrons understand expectations.
- Year 3** Measure success of new customer service philosophy.

### Priority 5

**Redefine and re-invigorate the District's Approach to Educating**, inspiring and engaging the public through multiple learning disciplines (i.e. classroom, experiential, new technologies, etc.)

- Year 1**
  - A. Develop goals and measurable objectives for current District education initiatives.
  - B. Develop and promote the idea of forest preserves as living landscapes for learning and for engaging classrooms, teachers and residents in natural and cultural history explorations and experiences.
- Year 2**
  - A. Using research results from the attitude and interest survey (see priority 6), develop an educational plan that aligns to target audience needs and interests for programs and services.
  - B. Focusing on "place," develop unique messaging for all sites.
  - C. Create strategic partnerships with municipal agencies, corporations, schools, and nonprofit organizations through which the District can extend its reach.
- Year 3** Begin executing the education plan that integrates the findings from the attitude and interest survey and also incorporates the ideas of do-it-yourself conservation practices, sustainability initiatives, ecosystem/environment services, and incorporation of native-species within local landscapes.

### Priority 6

**Provide Programs & Recreation** that respond to audience interests and needs, within the context of its mission.

- Year 1**
  - A. Evaluate the current education portfolio to better align with the District's strategic plan.
  - B. Survey and study the District's target audiences in terms of program and recreation needs/interests.
  - C. Reframe relevant programs in terms of healthy life-style, quality of life and increased opportunities to connect with families and communities in nature.
- Year 2** Conduct an attitude and interest survey that aligns with the direction provided by the District's master plan.
- Year 3** Execute a refreshed education program that aligns with the District's strategic priorities.

### Priority 7

**Engage and Empower Volunteers:** by establishing training opportunities for residents and volunteers to participate in natural and cultural resource management projects, administrative functions, and public engagement programs.

- Year 1**
  - A. Evaluate existing volunteer opportunities to identify ways to improve offerings, policies and utilization of volunteers.
  - B. Develop a technological component that allows volunteers to access and exchange information with each other and the District.
- Year 2** Evaluate the need to expand the variety of volunteer opportunities at each location, the frequency and time of day. Execute as appropriate.
- Year 3** Develop an advanced volunteer training program for those who wish to participate in more intensive and highly specialized engagements.

## 6. Conclusion & Next Steps

The strategic plan document provides organizational goals, strategic priorities and initial action steps to carry the District forward in alignment over the next three years. The goals and priorities identified in this document should be used to guide departmental priorities and work plans to ensure all areas of the

organization are ultimately working towards the same overarching goals. It is recommended that, once the plan is finalized, a process is put in place to review progress against the organizational goals and strategic priorities on a regular basis.

## 7. Appendices

### Research Reports

The following additional documents provide comprehensive summaries of primary and secondary research:

#### Executive Summary Slides

FPDDC\_ResearchPresentation\_ExecutiveSummary\_070814\_v4\_1005Am\_ltm

#### Peer Review Research

FPDDC\_MASTERResearch\_PeerReview\_revised\_07.02.14.pptx

#### Stakeholder Interviews & Community Dialogue

FPDDC\_ResearchPresentation\_Interviews & Community Dialogue\_062014\_MASTER\_ltm.pptxsl

#### Quantitative Study

FPDDC Report 6.12.14\_Client\_Ready.pptx

### Research Tools

#### Final Quantitative Survey

FPDDC\_Survey\_structure\_APPROVEDFINAL\_040814\_ltm\_CleanCopy.docx

Strategic Plan Survey.414 (1).pdf

#### Interview Discussion Guide

Davidoff\_FPDDC\_StakeholderInterviewGuide\_v3\_032114\_ltm.doc

FPDDC\_StakeholderChart\_v8\_04.16.14\_ltm.xlsx

#### Community Dialogue Discussion Guide

Davidoff\_FPDDC\_CommunityDialogue\_DiscussionGuide\_v2\_042814.doc

### Retreat Materials

#### Participant Workbook

FPDDC\_ParticipantWorkbook\_FINAL\_08.13.14\_ltm.pdf

#### Participant List

FPDDC\_ParticipantList\_08.13.14\_ltm.xlsx

#### Presentation

FPDDC\_MASTR\_RetreatPresentationDeck\_08.11.14\_ltm.pptx

#### Facilitator Guide

FPDDC\_Retreat\_DETAILED\_FACILITATOR\_GUIDE\_08.13.14\_ltm.docx

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