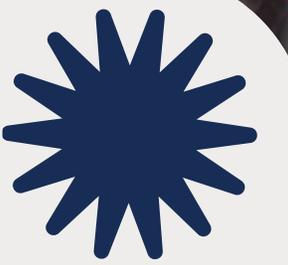




2026

BUDGET IN BRIEF



Superintendent's Letter



Dear Chicago Park visitors,

As General Superintendent and CEO of the Chicago Park District, and on behalf of our Board of Commissioners, I am proud to present the District's Budget-in-Brief which reflects the District's balanced \$637.6 million budget; which is a plan that sustains our core operations while advancing the six goals of our Strategic Plan. Nearly a century ago, in the depths of the Great Depression, Chicago's leaders unified twenty-two park districts into one, creating the Chicago Park District. They acted boldly, ensuring that parks would remain a public right, not a private luxury. Their foresight built the foundation we inherit today, and the 2026 Budget builds upon that foundation by making targeted investments in special recreation, teens, sustainability, public safety, homelessness, and equitable capital infrastructure improvements.

When we began our 2026 budget planning, we faced a projected \$30 million deficit, the largest since the pandemic. Rising personnel and maintenance costs, along with declining Personal Property Replacement Tax revenues, posed real challenges. Rather than retreat, we responded with ingenuity and resolve—finding efficiencies, generating sustainable revenue, and investing one-time resources responsibly. We closed the gap without layoffs, service cuts, or one-time fixes, keeping our focus on fiscal discipline and community care. Our 2026 budget includes the following highlights:

- A balanced, \$637,580,350 budget that includes 3,213.0 full-time equivalent positions, a 14.9 increase from FY2025.
- Responsible use of the \$46 million anticipated TIF surplus including one-time, supplemental investments into pension (\$6 million) and capital (\$10 million). The capital funding includes \$5 million for *Chicago Grows Together*, a new fund that directs resources to deferred maintenance and equitable infrastructure solutions for parks on Chicago's South and West sides.
- An increased general obligation bond from \$35 million to \$40 million to continue to tackle deferred maintenance at our facilities.
- Continued investment into our youth and teens through the Young Cultural Stewards programming and expansion of Lifeguard Explorers.

The Budget-in-Brief is a simplified overview of the Budget Appropriations book that is over 260 pages. The Budget-In-Brief highlights high-level revenue, expenditures, and key highlights. For additional detail, I invite you to review the full FY2026 budget documents, available on the Chicago Park District website at <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/budget-management>. For comments regarding the budget or this document, please send an email to budget@chicagoparkdistrict.com or fill out the Budget Ideas form found here <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/annual-budget-process>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carlos Ramirez-Rosa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "C".

Carlos Ramirez-Rosa
General Superintendent & CEO
Chicago Park District

Chicago Park District at a Glance

Profile

In 1934, the Illinois legislature by way of the Park Consolidation Act consolidated 22 separate park districts in the City of Chicago to officially create the District, as it is presently constituted. The District owns (or leases) 8,963 acres of green space on which rest 617 parks, 250 field houses, a zoo, and 29 miles of pristine lakefront with running and bike trails as well as 29 beaches, making it the largest municipal park manager in the nation.

In addition, the District owns and operates a large number of recreational and cultural facilities, including Northerly Island, Lincoln Park and Garfield Park Conservatories, Buckingham Fountain, and South Shore Cultural Center. Other properties of the District which are privately managed, include Soldier Field, McFetridge Sports Center, Lincoln Park Zoological Gardens, Theater on the Lake, Dr. Conrad Worrill Track and Field Center at Gately Park, the District's system of seven golf courses and three golf driving ranges and ten harbors with a capacity of over 6,000 boat slips and moorings.

Organization

The Mayor of the City of Chicago appoints the Park District's seven-member Board, with approval of the City Council, which is the governing body of the District. Commissioners serve for five-year terms or portion thereof. Commissioners whose terms have expired continue to serve until reappointed or their successors are appointed. The Office of the Secretary serves as the Board's official recordkeeper, prepares the Board minutes, and moderates the meetings.

The reporting structure of the Chicago Park District begins with the Board of Commissioners, General Superintendent/CEO and six Chiefs who manage the District's departments. Individual departments and the three regions (North, South, and Central) are each headed by a Director/Region Manager who oversees central administrative and park/regional staff.



617 parks



518 playgrounds



**697 baseball/
softball fields**



6,163 boat slips



**77 swimming
pools**



11 harbors



**28 miles of
lakefront**



**208 pickleball
courts**



Chicago Park District at a Glance

Our Mission, Vision, & Values

Mission

To give people of all ages, identities, and abilities access to quality recreation, wellness opportunities, and sustainable green spaces in every neighborhood.

Vision

To build a healthier city through an inclusive Park District that connects communities with recreation and their fellow Chicagoans.

Values

Community Anchor, Foster Belonging, Promote Innovation, Thoughtful Stewardship, and Health and Wellness.

2025-2030 Strategic Plan Goals

1. Exceptional Experiences

Enhance local engagement and expand park user base through tailored neighborhood programming. The strategies for this goal center on strengthening local partnerships, tailoring programs to neighborhood needs, expanding outreach, promoting accessibility and offering events that build community connection.



2. Community Wellbeing

Promote a thriving community by advancing wellbeing, offering opportunities to improve health outcomes, and enhancing quality of life. This work includes expanding wellbeing programs, strengthening social connection, addressing isolation, and supporting community health through local partnerships.



3. Parks for All

Foster and cultivate belonging to ensure inclusivity for people of all identities and abilities. This work includes focusing on expanding inclusive programming, improving accessibility and safety, elevating community voices, and celebrating the diversity of Chicago's neighborhoods.



4. A Greener City

Responsibly manage resources for long-term environmental resiliency. The strategies for this goal center on advancing sustainable infrastructure, reducing waste, expanding green technologies, and strengthening climate-resilient practices.



5. Effective Operations

Enhance and strengthen operational effectiveness. To support this goal, the District will modernize systems, streamline workflows, expand non-tax revenue, elevate the customer experience, and use KPIs to guide efficiency.



6. Leading Employer

Support a healthy work environment that promotes teamwork, wellness, and professional growth. Efforts will center on creating career pipelines, supporting employee growth, and fostering a positive, inclusive work environment.



Equity, inclusion, and community belonging remain central to the District's work. Additional information is provided in the District's Land Acknowledgment Statement at <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/land-acknowledgement-statement> and in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Statement located within the District's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/strategic-plan. A comprehensive outline of the strategies guiding the District's goals is also included in the Strategic Plan.

Budget Highlights

Special Recreation

For 2026, the District is proposing a nominal property-tax rate increase totaling \$3.25 million—\$1.5 million for Corporate and \$1.75 million for Special Recreation—which equals about \$2.60 per year, or roughly .20 cents per month for the average Chicago homeowner. This adjustment will maintain and enhance Special Recreation and Special Olympics programming, helping the District manage rising costs and continue providing quality services citywide. Continued investment will help preserve these programs and ensure consistent, year-round access to meaningful and inclusive recreation opportunities for athletes and program participants across the city. Additional funding will also support ADA maintenance and elevator modernization across the District. It also funds a new full-time role in the Disability Policy Office, supporting ADA obligations through on-site accessibility reviews and identification of facility barriers that may limit participation. This added capacity will strengthen how the District evaluates and addresses accessibility needs across parks and facilities.

Goals: Exceptional Experiences, Community Wellbeing, and Parks for All



Public Safety

Safety remains paramount for the District and investments are continued to be made through the budget in 2026. The District is transforming the Security department into the Park Public Safety department and with this change, there will be an additional influx of staff and technology, including a mobile camera trailer and a new communications tool, into the department. In addition to the four additional full-time positions added, the District is working with the Luminary Collective to help the District design a model rooted in prevention, compassion, and collaboration. The results of this partnership will lead to a \$400 thousand investment in additional hourly staff at parks throughout the District. In addition to investments in Park Public Safety, the District is also incorporating a \$250 thousand loss of grant funding to Night Out in the Parks with the belief that public safety also means creating spaces that bring people together.

Goals: Exceptional Experiences, Leading Employer, and Community Wellbeing

Sustainability

For 2026, the District continues its commitment to replacing all lead drinking lines across Park District facilities—an unfunded mandate that has required significant investment. In 2026, the District will dedicate \$10 million toward deferred maintenance, which includes \$1.8 million for lead line remediation and \$5 million for *Chicago Grows Together* to expand equitable infrastructure improvements at parks on the South and West Sides. *Chicago Grows Together* will use its first \$500,000 to launch planning for a new lakefront park at Calumet Harbor, focused on transforming 43 acres of former industrial land into a future community asset. Together, these investments will strengthen the park system, expand access to quality green space, and advance a more equitable park system across Chicago.

Goals: Parks for All and A Greener City



Budget Highlights

Teens

The 2026 budget strengthens the Park District's commitment to Chicago's youth. Two dedicated positions will expand digital arts and cultural programming, supporting Young Cultural Stewards programming, which includes Inferno Mobile Media Arts, TRACE, among other creative youth programs. These opportunities help teens build confidence, connection, and purpose in their parks. In 2026, the District will also focus on growing the Lifeguard Explorers program in partnership with After School Matters, adding more sites and increasing participation. This program is a pathway that prepares young people for summer jobs and meaningful careers in aquatics, public service, and teamwork—while building the diverse workforce needed to keep the District's beaches and pools welcoming and secure. By expanding these pathways, we are investing in the next generation of leaders and strengthening the role parks play in shaping opportunity for Chicago's youth.

Goals: Exceptional Experiences and Leading Employer



Homelessness

In 2026, the District will have a staff member budgeted and dedicated solely to homeless support within the parks. This position will help coordinate with the Chicago Departments of Family and Support Services and Public Health, along with community stakeholders in addressing homelessness in parks. This role will ensure that the District's responses to homelessness are coordinated and solutions-oriented; which aligns with the City's Five-Year Plan on Homelessness.

Goals: Community Wellbeing and Effective Operations



Capital

Equitable investments continue to be at the forefront of the District's Capital Improvement Plan. In 2026, the general obligation bond will increase from \$35 million to \$40 million to assist with investments in facility renovations and site improvements. The 2026 bond will also deliver key energy-efficiency upgrades, tree-canopy restoration, and shoreline resilience projects to assist our sustainability goals. Cragin and Jackie Robinson Parks are scheduled to have field house grand openings in 2026; while Kells, Moran, and Ogden Parks will continue to have their field house projects continue design and construction. In addition to the projects at field houses, notable other projects include the opening of the Garfield Park Conservatory's Elizabeth Morse Genius Children's Garden and the construction of the new DuSable Park.

Goals: Exceptional Experiences, Parks for All, and A Greener City

Budget Process

How We Determine Budget

Each year, the Chicago Park District prepares a balanced budget shaped by input from staff, leadership, the Board of Commissioners, and community members. The process ensures that resources are aligned with the District’s mission, priorities, and strategic plan. The annual budget serves as a financial roadmap, outlining how funds are allocated to deliver programs, maintain parks, and advance the District’s goals.

The goals outlined in the five-year Strategic Plan (2025–2030) guide the development of the annual budget. They help define priorities, inform planning, and direct investments that expand access to recreation, promote wellness, and strengthen neighborhoods across Chicago.

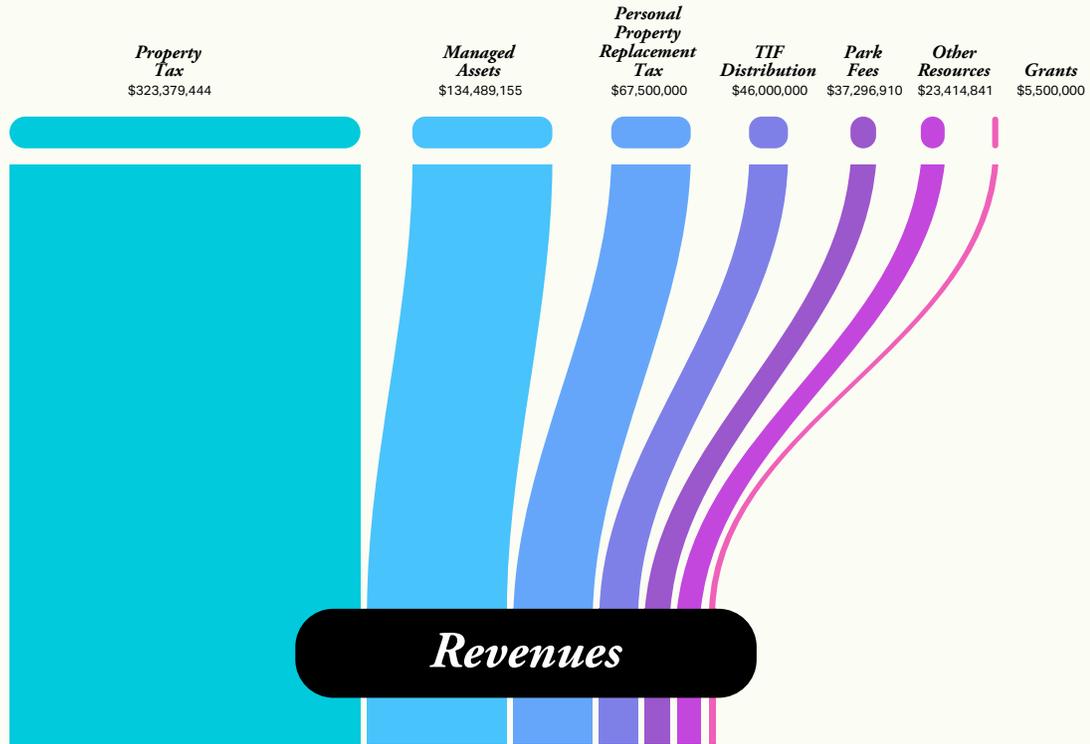
State law requires the proposed budget to be submitted to the Board of Commissioners before November 1, followed by a public hearing and adoption by December 31. Once approved, the Office of Budget and Management works with departments throughout the year to manage appropriations, monitor spending, and report progress toward strategic goals.

The diagram below captures the District’s budget process.

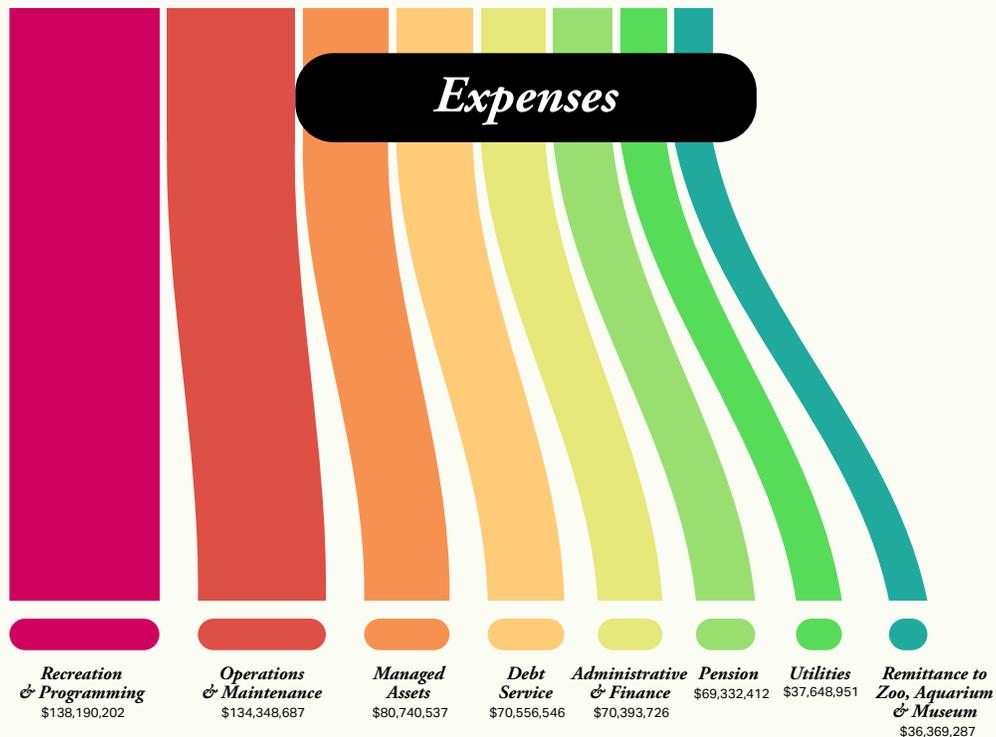


2026 Budget Overview

Budget at a Glance Revenues & Expenses



All Funds: \$637,580,350



Closing & Summary

Summary of Budget (All Funds)

Description	2025 Adopted	2026 Adopted
Corporate Fund	\$ 402,704,016	\$ 427,466,569
Pension Fund	\$ 59,679,376	\$ 69,332,412
Aquarium and Museum Operating Fund	\$ 29,730,610	\$ 29,617,600
Special Recreation Activity Fund	\$ 13,543,629	\$ 15,248,404
Liability Fund	\$ 14,270,000	\$ 15,350,000
Capital Project Administration	\$ 3,503,570	\$ 5,608,818
Park Improvement Debt Service Fund	\$ 69,581,183	\$ 69,456,546
Operating Grants Funds	\$ 5,500,000	\$ 5,500,000
Grand Total	\$ 598,512,384	\$ 637,580,350

Stay Connected with Your Parks

In closing, the Chicago Park District encourages residents to stay engaged and informed throughout the year. Your participation helps strengthen neighborhood parks and ensures that programs and services reflect the needs of all Chicagoans.

Here are ways to stay involved:

Attend a Board of Commissioners Meeting

The Board holds public meetings throughout the year where residents can provide comments and hear updates on District priorities, projects, and programs.

Meeting schedule and materials:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/board-commissioners>

Join a Park Advisory Council (PAC)

PACs are volunteer groups that work with staff and neighbors to support local park programs, build community partnerships, and elevate community needs.

Find or start a PAC:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/advisory-councils>

Explore the Full Budget

The complete 2026 Budget Appropriations document—which includes fund summaries, department budgets and the District’s Capital Improvement Plan—is available online.

View the full budget:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/budget-management>

Additional Ways to Engage

Share your operational-related or capital-related ideas:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/annual-budget-process>

Sign up for District news & updates:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/form/newsletter-form>

Explore programs offered at your local park:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/programs-101>

Volunteer at an event or park site:

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/volunteer>





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Sean Garrett
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GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT & CEO

Carlos Ramirez-Rosa



For more information about your Chicago Park District, visit
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com or call [312] 742-7529

STAY CONNECTED.

