

May, 2012

Dear Park Ridge Senior Center Member,

There have been many changes made by the Park District recently which affect the Park Ridge Senior Center (the "Senior Center") and you as a member of that organization. As your elected representatives, we are writing to explain what has been happening, and to seek your input about which direction you would like us to take on your behalf.

As you probably know, for many years a written agreement with the Park District governed our use of the 100 S. Western building. In early 2011, the Park District refused to renew the contract. Without a contract, we lost any guarantee that we will have continued and/or preferential use of the building, a building we have spent a lot of money improving over the years. Also, without a contract, senior programs and activities could be disbursed to other locations within the Park District regardless of our wishes. Moving activities to other locations would undermine one of the primary reasons that the Senior Center was established in the first place-- to create a centralized place for senior activities to be held, a "drop-in" location to serve as the home of the Senior Center organization.

The Park District's refusal to renew the contract was just the first in a series of actions which dramatically changed the relationship between Senior Center leadership and the Park District (see the attached "Questions & Answers" for a list of these actions.) Perhaps the most important change to date occurred last month, when the Park Board decided that it would no longer consider input from the Senior Senate, which is your elected governing body as a member of the Senior Center. Park District staff publicly described the Senior Senate as "non-productive" and "adversarial," and declared the Park District would create its own select committee to give advice on matters affecting seniors. **This latest act has the effect of replacing your elected Senior Senate with a committee hand-picked by the Park District to represent your interests.**

These actions reflect a fundamental change in the way the Park District is choosing to run things at the building-- a building that we have funneled approximately \$2,000,000 to over 30 years, and now have no guaranteed right to use. The Park District has closed the door on the financing arrangement it had with Senior Services, Inc., our financial arm. Teresa Grodsky is gone. The Senior Senate-- your elected representatives-- have no input, no influence and no involvement anymore, because the Park District has chosen to replace them. You have lost your voice in what goes on at the 100 S. Western building.

But you haven't lost your voice with us.

The independent Senior Center that many community leaders envisioned when it was founded over 30 years ago and its right to govern itself is under attack by the Park District. Senior Senate leaders are being vilified and displaced by the Park District. To regain our independence, many members have suggested that we find a new home. A new home would allow us to continue to be in charge of our own affairs, make our own rules, set our own dues, and plan our own activities. To come together as we see fit. You can still participate in programs that the Park District would most likely offer, but our Senior Center organization members would have a new home, where card games, clubs, classes and our regular activities would take place. It would be a place governed by YOU as the paying members of the Senior Center.

We, your Senate, have appointed a committee to look into our options for a new location, and they have identified some promising possibilities. Should your votes on the attached survey tell us to continue looking for a new home, the committee will contact former long-time employees of the Park District to seek their help with its startup, and

perhaps to stay on longer as consultants. But no further steps will be taken unless we receive strong feedback from members that we should pursue this step. **Please complete and return the attached Survey by May 29th so that we can determine how to proceed.**

We expect the Park District to communicate with you and present "their side." They have repeatedly said that they will continue to provide senior programming and that they don't plan to close the building to senior citizen activities. But without a contract, they cannot be held accountable for promises not kept. Even if we assume that this Park Board will keep its word, this Park Board can never speak for future Park Boards. And their behavior towards seniors over the last two years shows a disrespect of our history, our generosity, our views and our concerns that we find unacceptable. We know that many seniors over the years worked hard to create and improve the Senior Center as we knew it, and we wouldn't be writing to you unless we felt something very important is at stake right now.

When we suggest finding a new place to call home, we do so knowing such a move will not be easy. We would rather not have to be writing this letter and proposing this action. We are all volunteers who would prefer things proceed without problems and difficulty. We believe strongly, however, that moving is something that needs to be seriously considered because of what you are losing as Senior Center members under the current Park Board and staff. Both the Senior Senate and Senior Services stand ready to work toward that goal if it is the goal you seek. Ultimately, though, the decision is yours.

Thank you in advance for completing the important Survey which is enclosed. Feel free to write or email us with your questions or comments-- the contact information is included on the bottom of the survey.

Sincerely,

Barbara Hameder  
President

Don Rusch  
Vice President

Helen Roppel  
Secretary

Fran Johnson  
Treasurer

Rudy Keil  
Immediate Past President

For the Park Ridge Senior Center Senate