

Cosley Zoo Expansion Update: “It’s Just a Parking Lot!”*

Nov. 29th Wheaton Park District Board meeting- What happened?

- The WPD Board voted unanimously to move forward with the parking project, despite overwhelming public commentary in opposition.
- The meeting opened with an impassioned statement by VP John Vires in which he explained how and why **the District taxes at an exorbitant rate, really they have to!**
- LINK to meeting video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3-GsLtlF00>
 - *I suggest paying careful attention around the 5:00 minute mark.*
- WPD staff and board members claimed repeatedly that there is a clear need for expanded parking without presenting any meaningful supporting data.

But, **TO BE CRYSTAL CLEAR**, it isn’t “just a parking lot”, it’s the first step in the master expansion plan- as is **CLEARLY STATED** in the WPD 2022 Annual Financial Report (page 6):

“In 2017, Cosley Zoo launched a new Master Plan – a grand vision for the future...In 2021, the District in coordination with the Cosley Foundation began...the first phase of this master plan which is to expand the parking lot at Cosley Zoo... This parking lot will be situated on the property located on the east side of Gary Avenue ...The initial phase of this master plan project is set to begin in 2024.”

All of which really makes you wonder- why is the WPD making such an effort to promote a blatantly false narrative?

* I highly encourage you to watch the recording of the meeting on the WPD YouTube channel. The intentional disregard of public input is disheartening. The lack of factual supporting information is startling. The absence of accountability is maddening. The entitlement about YOUR taxes is frightening.

Recap- What Is the Parking Project?

- In 2017 the WPD approved a “master plan” to expand the Zoo with the stated goal of becoming the premier visitor destination in DuPage County.
- Visitor attendance goal is 300k annually, around a 2x increase, with the **goal of attracting more non-residents.**
- The **FIRST, MOST CRITICAL STEP**, is to relocate parking across Gary Ave.
- Cost estimates (while not readily available) for the parking lot are ~\$4.8 million, with \$2mm from Cosley Foundation and a state grant, leaving the rest to WPD (~\$3mm)
- Projected **total Master Plan cost** in 2023 prices is **\$64 million!**
- **WITHOUT THE PARKING LOT RELOCATION NONE OF THE PLAN CAN PROCEED!**
- Any reasonable person will conclude that despite the WPD Board’s repeated claims that their vote is about “just a parking lot”, **it is, in fact, “the initial phase of this master plan”.**

Cosley Zoo Pertinent Facts

- The zoo is part of, and operated by, the Wheaton Park District.
- WPD collects property taxes from residents as it’s primary source of revenue (~70%).
- WPD allocates over \$1 million annually of those property tax revenues to subsidize Cosley operating expenses.
- **Cosley primarily benefits non-residents-** attendance averaged 154k annually over the last five years (excluding 2020) with **6 out of every 7 visitors a non-resident!**
- **The single most important fact to consider is that YOUR tax dollars support an attraction designed to benefit non-residents and WPD wants to make it bigger, make it more expensive to operate, and benefit even MORE non-residents.**

Don’t Approve? Take Action!

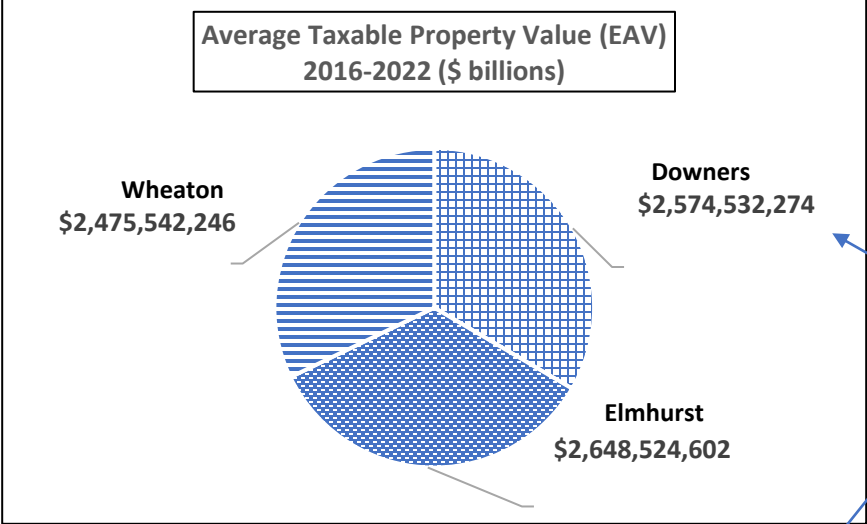
Show your opposition with signs/buttons/flyers- contact us at protectwheaton@gmail.com
Call/write the WPD board to make your voice heard- commissioners@wheatonparks.org
Call/write City Council to oppose zoning approval- allcouncil@wheaton.il.us
Attend WPD board meetings-
<https://wheatonparkdistrict.com/transparency-portal/board-meetings/>

A Tale of Three Suburbs- Which One Doesn't Belong???

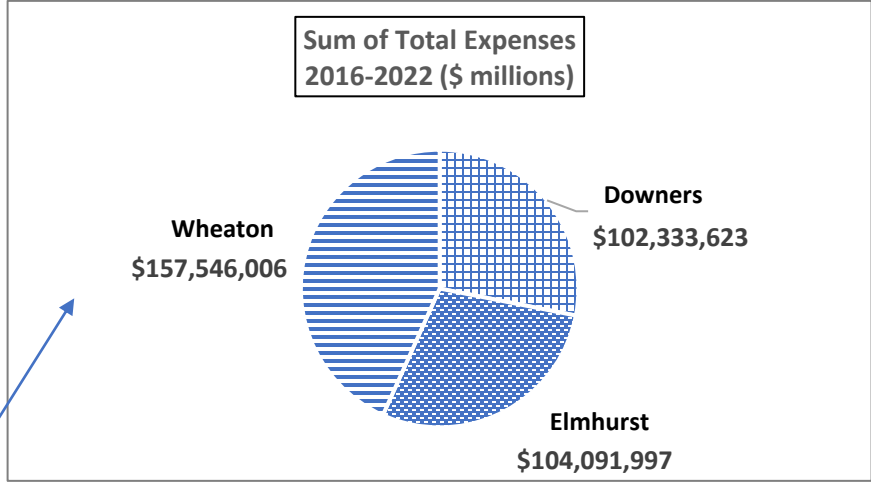
The Wheaton, Downers Grove and Elmhurst park districts are the three largest in DuPage County after Naperville. They are remarkably similar:

District	Population (2022)	Per Capita Income (2022)	Portion of Property That is Residential	Has Rec Center	Has Outdoor Pool	Has Indoor Pool	Has Museum	Has Zoo
Downers Grove PD	50,290	\$ 57,209	78%	1	0	0	3	0
Elmhurst PD	45,326	\$ 61,000	85%	1	2	1	1	0
Wheaton PD	52,984	\$ 55,339	84%	1	2	0	1	1

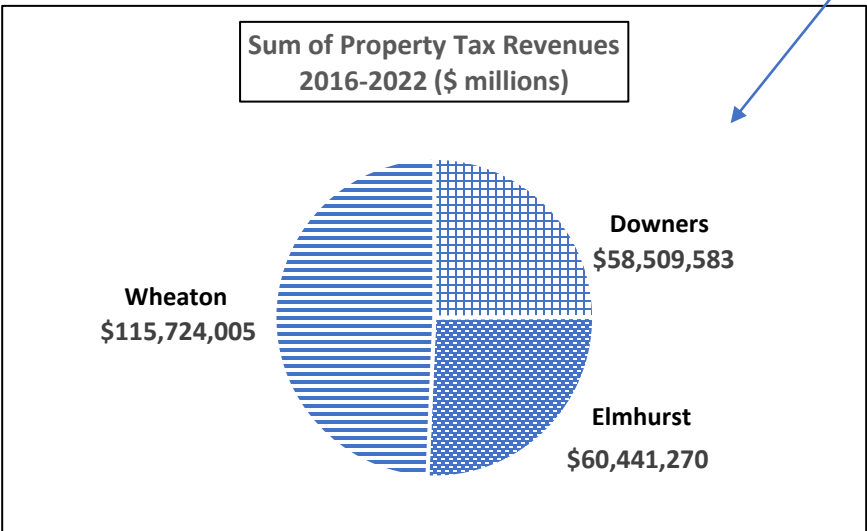
But their financials are remarkably different (excludes Arrowhead for proper comparability):



- The value of taxable property is equivalent, yet WPD collects over twice the amount of tax revenue!
- Property taxes average 65-70% of total revenues for each district.
- Yet WPD taxes at twice the level of Downers and Elmhurst- WHY?



- Spending by WPD is also much greater than Downers and Elmhurst.
- What is different?
 - Payroll
 - Cash & Investments
 - Cosley Zoo



Cumulative 2016-2022 (\$ mil)	Wheaton	Downers	Elmhurst
Covered Payroll Cost	\$ 50,583,841	\$ 22,696,727	\$ 31,823,109
Cash/Investments Increase	\$ 9,218,494	\$ 4,388,259	\$ 4,602,376
Cosley Zoo/ Museums Cost	\$ 10,472,092	\$ 3,073,132	\$ -

- Critical Questions That NEED Answers:**
- WHY does Wheaton Park District tax and spend at such extreme levels compared to neighboring districts?
 - Do YOU as a taxpayer really benefit?
 - Is this how you want YOUR tax dollars used?
 - Finally- do you want EVEN MORE OF YOUR TAXES spent on an expanded zoo that primarily benefits non-residents?