



NEWS RELEASE

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SEVERSON DELLS ACQUIRES FORMER ELLIOT GOLF COURSE FROM ROCKFORD PARK DISTRICT

Additional Location Extends Programming, Creates Urban Nature Preserve, and Complements Popular West-Side Education Center

Rockford, IL (June 25, 2024) – [Severson Dells](https://www.seversondells.org/), which works to promote awareness, respect and enjoyment of the natural world through nature programming and preservation efforts, today announced its plan to acquire Elliott Golf Course from the Rockford Park District to add to the community's nature education and habitat restoration efforts. The project includes restoring the golf course to native prairie, oak savanna, and wetland; transforming the clubhouse into a dynamic nature center for public education; and serving as a model for nature-based tourism and sustainable building practices.

"We are thrilled to expand our impact by establishing an urban nature preserve alongside our well-loved nature center. This initiative enables us to offer educational opportunities in both urban and rural environments, enriching our community," said Ann Wasser, Executive Director of Severson Dells. "We're so grateful to the many partners who have made this project possible."

Severson Dells is purchasing the land from Rockford Park District, helping to achieve the Park District's goals of strategic divestment while still allowing the land to continue to contribute to the quality of life for residents and positive economic impact for the region.

"This project aligns to the goals established by the community for the park district on multiple levels," said Jay Sandine, Executive Director of the Rockford Park District. "We heard loud and clear from our community when we last surveyed them in 2018 that we needed to right size the District and free up financial resources to invest in top priority areas such as neighborhood parks, youth programs, trails, and aging infrastructure. Reducing our golf footprint by closing Elliot Golf Course in 2021 has already allowed us to increase investment in Sinnissippi, Ingersoll, and Sandy Hollow golf courses."

Sandine continued, "Selling 168 acres to Severson Dells means we can replace the existing fairway irrigation system at Ingersoll Golf Course which is roughly 55 years old. The system is controlled by outdated and obsolete hydraulic controllers, resulting in inconsistent watering times and replacement parts are becoming obsolete. Elliot Golf Course land had the highest potential for being sold or redeveloped into something other than a golf course and by Severson Dells restoring this land we know that generation after generation will be educated about environmental sustainability, and it will create exceptional opportunities for residents and visitors to connect to the natural world. It's a win-win for both organizations."

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In addition to the enhanced nature education and programming that will be offered at the location, Severson Dells' habitat restoration plans for the property will improve ecosystem biodiversity, stormwater management, and the water quality of Manning Creek, which flows into the Kishwaukee River.

Additionally, the renovation of the Elliot Club House further amplifies the impact. The building will be a phenomenal community space that supports a wide range of environmental education programming designed with sustainability in mind. The plans will be designed to achieve Living Building Challenge certification, making the building itself a teaching tool on sustainable practices.

The purchase of the land is largely made possible thanks to support from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

"The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation is pleased to help support the acquisition of Elliot Golf Course for a new nature preserve and nature center," shared Bradley Hanzel, Program Officer, Natural Areas with Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. "It's rare that such a large space becomes available in a well-developed, urban area. We are excited to help transform this land into a conservation area, wildlife habitat and more. This large new conservation area will serve the Rockford area well for generations to come."

"This project is so perfectly aligned to the mission and vision of Severson Dells," said Wasser. "Our board, donors, and community partners all helped make today possible. We can't wait to begin the restoration and welcome residents and visitors alike to this new urban nature preserve."

About Severson Dells Nature Center

Founded in 1976, Severson Dells Nature Center connects people to nature through education and research. Severson Dells provides nature education programs for all ages including school field trips, summer camps, guided hikes, canoe trips, natural history lectures, citizen science monitoring and much more. The Nature Center is located in southwest Rockford, but we provide programming across north central Illinois. For more information about Severson Dells Nature Center, visit: www.seversondells.org.

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