

POPLAR GROVE LIONS CLUB
229 Summit Street
Poplar Grove, IL 61065

November 9, 2023

Village of Poplar Grove
200 N. Hill Street
Poplar Grove IL 61065

Re: Lions Park

Dear Poplar Grove President and Board of Trustees:

This letter is in response to a proposal to amend an agreement between the Poplar Grove Lions Club, a not-for-profit charity (the “Poplar Grove Lions” or the “Club”) and the Village of Poplar Grove relating to Lions Park. Before addressing the amended agreement, the Poplar Grove Lions would like to provide brief history both on the Club and on the development of Lions Park.

Lions International is the world’s largest service club organization with over 46,000 clubs and approximately 1.35 million members worldwide. The Poplar Grove Lions is one of the oldest chapters in the State, having been chartered and active in the community for over 60 years (established in 1961). One of the Charter Members of the Poplar Grove Lions was Roger Day, who later served as Poplar Grove’s mayor for 19 years. Since its inception, the Poplar Grove Lions and the Village have worked cooperatively and collaboratively to better the community.

The Poplar Grove Lions are a 501(c)(4) charitable organization. All money raised by the Club goes back into the community, be it through scholarships for local high school seniors, improvements to Lions Park, or financial support to community members or community organizations (with an emphasis to help community members that are visually impaired). The Lions International moto is “We Serve” and every member of the Poplar Grove Lions participates in the Club to serve the community. No members or officers receive pay or any other tangible benefit for their service. Club members pay out of pocket to a separate dinner and dues account to ensure 100% of all money raised goes back into the community to serve the Club’s charitable purposes.

One of the Poplar Grove Lions’ proudest achievements has been the establishment, development, and maintenance of Lions Park in Poplar Grove. Lions Park is open to the public, contains 4 baseball diamonds, a half mile walking path, pavilion, concession stand, and playground among other amenities.

Lions Park enables the Poplar Grove Lions, partnering with other local organizations, to provide for affordable youth sports and an area for public recreation and gathering. The Poplar

Grove Lions recognize not every local family is able to afford the high cost of travel and club baseball, softball and other sports and are proud to help coordinate programming that is affordable to a wide array of families in Boone County. The Club, through volunteer sports directors, concession workers, and the like, strives to ensure that any child that wants to participate in baseball or softball close to home has the opportunity to do so.

Lions Park was developed over the course of 30 plus years and was only possible due to the generosity of local families, fundraising of the Poplar Grove Lions, and the volunteer labor and in-kind donations of countless members of the Club. Lions Park consists of two tracts of land, one donated by the Johnson family and the other conveyed by the Simerl Family at a sub-market price (paid by the Poplar Grove Lions), both transferred for the purpose of the Poplar Grove Lions developing the land into a community park focused on providing little league/youth sports opportunities to local children.

In 1989, the Poplar Grove Lions conveyed legal title of the property to the Village of Poplar Grove in exchange for the Village's agreement that the Poplar Grove Lions retained the right to develop the property "into a community park in any manner that they see reasonably fit" (the "1989 Agreement"). This exchange was not a gift to the Village, it was an exchange for value. The Village of Poplar Grove agreed to take legal title to the property and insure for liability purposes, and in exchange, ensured the property would remain a community park. The Poplar Grove Lions gave up legal title to the property (forgoing the ability to later resell the property or use it for another purpose), but retained development and use rights of Lions Park.

Acting and relying upon this 1989 Agreement, the Poplar Grove Lions proceeded to develop the land into a community park at great expense. Baseball diamonds with bleachers and fences were constructed, a concession stand and pavilion were built, playgrounds were constructed and replaced over the years, and a walking path was constructed and eventually expanded. The vast majority of the money and labor expended to develop Lions Park over the past 30 plus years has been donated and/or raised by members of the Poplar Grove Lions.

The 1989 Agreement also contemplated cooperation between the Village of Poplar Grove and Poplar Grove Lions in developing the Lions Park. Over the years, the Village of Poplar Grove has recognized the value of the Lions Park and offered efficiencies to help maintain Lions Park (such as mowing and maintenance) and capital contributions (such as funding to enable the walking path to be expanded to be ADA compliant). This has allowed the Poplar Grove Lions to focus the funds it has raised on other projects within the park (such as replacing the playground in ~2015, replacing bleachers, and upgrading diamonds, etc.).

The Poplar Grove Lions want what is best for the community, while also honoring and recognizing the agreement between the Poplar Gove Lions and the Village of Poplar Grove and the contributions past and current members of the Poplar Grove Lions have made in developing Lions Park. This cooperative and collaborate relationship between the Poplar Grove Lions – a charitable, non-taxing organization – and the Village of Poplar Grove is extremely beneficial to

the community in that it provides for a community park, but does not result in the entire cost burden being shouldered by the taxpayers of Poplar Grove.

In 2021 the Poplar Grove Lions were approached about amending the 1989 Agreement. The Poplar Grove Lions initial reaction was that the 1989 Agreement has been effective and workable for over 30 years, but the Poplar Grove Lions agreed to discuss potential changes to the agreement. After some back and forth, the Poplar Grove Lions proposed an agreement that addressed concerns raised by the Village. The Club agreed to cooperate in providing financial information and records to the Village (as a public charity, this is public information anyways), agreed to a termination provision in the event the Club dissolved, agreed to a set schedule of fees, and so on. The Club never received a response to the last draft agreement it sent to the Village.

Recently, the Club was sent a new proposed agreement. The new agreement is vastly different from even the Village's last draft in 2021 and is inconsistent with the bargain struck between the Poplar Grove Lions and the Village in 1989. This new proposed agreement has the effect of cutting the Poplar Grove Lions out of Lions Park. The only rights retained by the Poplar Grove Lions would be a preferential right to reserve the park for a club use – up to one event per month. The result of this, amongst other things, would be that the Poplar Grove Lions would be unable to run the baseball and softball programs as they are currently, if at all. We hope this is not the intent of the Village.

As noted above, and emphasized again, the Poplar Grove Lions want to do what is best for the Poplar Grove community. We feel the cooperative and collaborative relationship between the Village and Poplar Grove Lions serves the community best. If the Village would like to discuss amending the 1989 Agreement, the Club is willing to have that discussion. We propose, rather than exchange drafts of an agreement, that representatives from both the Village and the Club sit down and have an open and candid discussion, with the draft agreement we proposed in 2021 to serve as the foundation for discussion (attached for ease of reference).

We are happy to invite Trustee(s) to a Club meeting to have a discussion, or we are happy to set up a special meeting. We are confident we can all reach an agreement that ensures that Lions Park remains a source of community pride and resource for everyone in and around Poplar Grove.

Sincerely,

Poplar Grove Lions Club