

Official minutes
Parks & recreation advisory commission

Members present: Amy Brandli, Bruce Cantor, Jay Jaffee, Adrienne Krill, Sonya Rippe and David Yakes

Members absent:

Staff present: Jason West, Parks and Recreation Director, Andrew Redepenning, Fall Intern, Jim Lombardi, Recreation Supervisor, Mark Oestreich, Nature Center Manager, Carrie Mandler, Recording Secretary

Guest present: Patrice Howard, Executive Director Community Education

1. Call to order

Commissioner Yakes, chair, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

2. Introductions / roll call

Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

a. Patrice Howard, School District representative

Mr. West, Parks and Recreation Director, advised that Patrice Howard, Executive Director Community Education, represents the St. Louis Park School District. He added Commissioner Yakes, former school district appointee, is now a city appointee. Ms. Howard introduced herself and added that she is happy to be of assistance and a part of the meeting.

b. Andrew Redepenning, fall intern

Andrew Redepenning, Parks and Recreation Intern, was introduced by Mr. West. Mr. Redepenning advised that he graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Sports Management. He has worked in the AmeriCorps and has worked with the City of St. Louis Park since August and appreciates the opportunities that he has been given to grow and learn. He thanked Jim Lombardi, Recreation Supervisor, and Mr. West. He noted that parks and recreation careers often go unnoticed in high school career planning. He also mentioned that he appreciates the opportunity to learn how commission meetings operate.

3. Approval of minutes – October 22, 2025

It was moved by Commissioner Rippe, seconded by Commissioner Jaffee, to approve the meeting minutes of October 22, 2025, as presented. The motion passed 6 – 0.

4. Presentations

a. Program Update (*Jim Lombardi*)

Mr. Lombardi advised that he works with youth athletic associations, adult athletics and facilities. He advised that pickleball remains very popular. In St. Louis Park there were adult pickleball mixer programs that served 80 participants, and lessons that served 37 participants from May through September. He added that Wednesdays were very busy, however, rarely were all courts full. The numbers were slightly down this season, most likely due to a rainy spring. Mr. Lombardi advised that private court rental revenue totaled \$4,775. He highlighted a cancer fundraiser tournament that has become very popular.

Mr. Lombardi advised that summer softball included six men's leagues and one co-rec league. Both men's and co-rec summer softball leagues included playoffs. He added that there were four fall men's softball leagues, however, there were no playoffs in fall due to questionable weather conditions. He indicated that he may consider fall playoffs next year. Due to ballfield construction this season, he advised that softball numbers were a little lower.

In response to a request from Mr. West, Mr. Lombardi highlighted the picture of a well-received wheelchair umpire who worked in St. Louis Park for several seasons.

Mr. Lombardi highlighted summer and fall kickball. He advised there was a Sunday night summer league and a Thursday night fall league. In response to a question from Commissioner Brandli, Mr. Lombardi advised that the games were played at Dakota Park.

A new bowling league partnership with Park Tavern was highlighted by Mr. Lombardi. He advised that the league is filling quickly. There are teams of four players. Each player registers individually and the fee is \$126 per player. He advised that one session begins in January and another begins in February. He added that the January session is already full. In response to a question from Commissioner Jaffee, Mr. Lombardi clarified that the fee includes three games, pizza and a beverage (pitcher) of choice. Park Tavern will receive 75% of the fee to cover their costs. The league is for ages 18+.

Broomball remains popular in St. Louis Park, advised Mr. Lombardi. The fall ROC (Recreation Outdoor Center) league filled very quickly. He noted that if there was any additional space at the ROC in the fall it could be used for more broomball. He mentioned that there are already teams registering for the winter league at Nelson Park. Broomball offers no playoffs.

Mr. Lombardi indicated the city partners with Benilde-St. Margaret's High School to provide a seven-week co-rec soccer league. The games are played at the Benilde-St. Margaret's stadium field.

Indoor volleyball is played at the middle school and basketball is at Central Community Center, advised Mr. Lombardi. Volleyball will play in fall, winter and spring. Then it shifts to

outdoor sand in the summer. There are no volleyball playoffs in the fall, winter and spring, however, there are playoffs in the summer. In response to a question from Commissioner Brandli, Mr. Lombardi advised that players register as a team. There are six basketball leagues that run for 12 weeks plus playoffs.

Mr. Lombardi presented a slide listing St. Louis Park fields and how they are used. He noted that Louisiana Oaks field (currently resting) will open in the spring of 2026 and that Walker Park field is closed to rest through April of 2027.

Another slide listed the outdoor tennis, pickleball and volleyball courts. Mr. Lombardi noted that Benilde-St. Margaret's High School uses the Aquila tennis courts for their home courts.

Mr. Lombardi was thanked for the updates by the commission.

b. Program Update (*Mark Oestreich*)

Mark Oestreich, Westwood Hills Nature Center Manager, noted that the Westwood Hills Nature Center building turned five this summer. He advised that the planning of the building allowed Westwood to connect with community education and the school district. He added that ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education) meets weekly on Wednesdays at Westwood and the class always involves an outdoor component.

Mr. Oestreich advised that Westwood staff recently reconnected with the school district administrative staff, and it is now confirmed that the school district will fund program fees and transportation for every student through eighth grade to attend at least one field trip to Westwood for the 2025 – 2026 school year. He advised that Westwood also provides outreach to the schools as well as other groups that might otherwise not be able to come to Westwood. Mr. West advised that this commitment to work with the schools was directed by the St. Louis Park City Council. Mr. Oestreich indicated that this year Westwood provided new community education programming such as archery, forest bathing and senior nature walks. Commissioners viewed slides of some of the new programming including a slide of the middle-school sustainability program.

Facility rentals are also very busy, advised Mr. Oestreich. He added that he works closely with Heidi Batistich, Recreation and Facilities Supervisor, to provide quality rentals for the community. The longer 12-hour rentals have grown from eight in 2024, to 14 currently booked for 2026. He noted that, although not all long rentals are for weddings, most are, and more weddings are using the upper picnic shelter in combination with room rentals. He added that Bader meets regularly at Westwood along with several other large, noteworthy businesses.

Commissioner Jaffee recommends some kind of parking lot accommodation for families with small children, especially when large groups meet. He has observed meeting attendees using the electric vehicle charging stations for parking and not for charging their vehicles. Mr. West advised that Ms. Batistich is aware of these issues and has communicated with the groups. It was noted that STEP hired a valet to park cars for their large event. Mr.

Oestreich advised that parking issues were discussed in the planning of the building. He added that most events are not large. While deciding on the size, natural space was more important than building a larger, paved parking lot. In response to a question from Commissioner Yakes, Mr. Oestrich indicated that the previous parking lot contained 40 spaces compared with the current 70 spaces. The maximum number of attendees for a wedding is approximately 125 people, advised Mr. Oestreich. He added that the fire capacity for the building is 300. Mr. Oestreich advised that prior to the new building, approximately 35,000 - 40,000 people visited Westwood Hills Nature Center per year. In 2024, over 226,844 people visited the nature center.

In 2025 Mr. Oestreich advised that 512 children participated in 19 different summer camps at Westwood. He added that the camps ran Monday through Thursday. Mr. Oestreich noted that outreach is growing as well. Over 900 participants were served by Westwood's outreach staff in 2025 thus far.

Mr. Oestreich highlighted the non-camp summer groups. He listed fieldtrips, Puppet Storytime, community education archery classes, nature-based therapeutics, forest therapy sessions, Project Soar and Born Abel, a group founded to help families with children battling complex medical circumstances.

Mr. Oestreich noted the special events in which Westwood either partnered or contributed to programming. He advised that there were over 1,300 attendees at the Trail of Small Wonders grand opening in July. Other events included Ecotacular, raptor outreach at the library, Penny Carnival, Fishing with a Cop and Summer Reading Festival at the library and Westwood.

Mr. Oestreich provided pictures of programs including some restoration and planting service projects. He highlighted the 44th Annual Halloween Party with 1,200 participants. He noted a group home that donated 40 – 50 carved pumpkins for party decorations. Commissioners viewed pictures of the Halloween Party and volunteer Junior Naturalists.

The 2025 CIP projects were highlighted by Mr. Oestreich. He noted the Tree Trust partnership with Westwood since 1976. He advised that Tree Trust rebuilt part of the boardwalk this summer. He noted other projects such as bridges that were improved and new concrete poured for better accessibility in the water garden area. Mr. Oestreich highlighted the apiary exhibits that the artist, Chris Tully, is creating. Mr. West indicated that the City of St. Louis Park social media interviewed Mr. Tully. Commissioners viewed pictures of the Apiary artwork in progress. Mr. Oestreich advised that a new nature center entry gate is up and running, and five new memorial benches were installed. Commissioner Brandli inquired if there is a limit on memorial benches at Westwood. Mr. Oestreich indicated that there is a limit. He advised that there are potential sites on the west side of the lake, however, most donors do not want a site that far away. In response to a question from Mr. West, Mr. Oestreich noted that the apiary art will cost approximately \$9,000.

Mr. Oestreich advised that the Be the Light Winter Solstice Event is approaching quickly. He added that there are volunteer opportunities at this December 21 event. The event is

almost full even though more space was added this year. The solstice event won an MRPA award.

Commissioner Jaffee commented that the use of the new nature center space is phenomenal. Mr. Oestreich agreed and added that the old building was not welcoming. Commissioner Cantor recalled some struggles and revisions of the budget in the early meetings. He recalled the same with building the ROC, however, it is successful beyond expectations. Commissioner Cantor commented that he is glad we stayed the course.

Mr. Oestreich was thanked for his updates.

5. Business

a. Protocol setting for Commission meeting guests (*Jason West*)

Mr. West recommends having a protocol in place for when residents attend PRAC meetings. He asked the commissioners how they would like to proceed with resident requests. Commissioners viewed five protocol examples set by other commissions. Mr. West advised the city council allows a resident to speak for three minutes and there are lights to indicate when time is up. He advised that the sustainability commission allows three minutes for a resident to speak as well. There is also an option for the commission to decide if a subject should be added for discussion at a future meeting.

Commissioner Cantor indicated that the first bullet point would seem reasonable to acknowledge that the guest is in attendance, and to meet following the meeting for further discussion. Commissioner Rippe advised not to ask how much time a resident will need, tell them how much they have. She added that staff may need preparation time if a request is made. Commissioners agreed that if a topic is new, it can be placed on the next agenda if the commission deems it worthwhile.

Commissioner Brandli expressed concern that residents will listen to the commission discuss if their item is worthwhile. She also inquired as to what criteria will be used to determine if an item will be placed on a future agenda. Commissioner Rippe advised that although an item may be urgent for a resident, it might not be urgent to the commission. Commissioner Jaffee commented that if staff are contacted ahead of time, a topic could be placed on the agenda, perhaps as an open forum item. Commissioners agreed that an open forum could be added to the agenda. A time limit was discussed and determined that three minutes is an acceptable amount of time to allow a guest to speak. Commissioner Yakes added if something is already on the agenda, a resident can wait and be given a limited amount of time to speak at the time the item appears on the agenda. Commissioner Cantor summarized that the first bullet point could work, however, open forum on the agenda with a time limit might be the best place for residents to provide their comments on items that are not on the agenda. If the item is on the agenda, comments can be held, then allowed at the time of the discussion.

Commissioners agreed that residents should state why they are attending the meeting. If the item is not on the agenda, they may speak for the allotted time in the open forum. Commissioners will determine if the item will be added to a future agenda. In response to a question from Commissioner Cantor, commissioners agreed that they will decide how many times an item can be carried over to the next meeting,

Mr. West summarized that commissioners would like to offer an open standing forum on the agenda. A guest should state why he or she is attending the meeting. If the item is on the agenda, the guest can speak at the time of the agenda item. If the item is not on the agenda, a three-minute time limit was recommended for the open forum. Commissioners decide whether to place the item on a future agenda.

b. Discuss Minnehaha Creek cleanup date/season (*Jason West*)

Mr. West advised that Mike Bahe, Natural Resources Manager, can facilitate either spring, fall or both for the creek cleanup. If there are two sites, participants can choose their site. Mr. West advised that this event can be published in the spring/summer parks and recreation catalog and participants can register on the city website. Commissioner Cantor advised that there are benefits to running the event in either season. Commissioner Rippe advised that fall can be tough due to all the plant growth. Mr. West suggested that perhaps the first year the event be offered in the spring and fall, however, only at one site each time. He suggested monitoring how participation fills in the spring and fall at each site. Commissioner Jaffee suggested two sites in the spring since the Knollwood area has not been cleaned for a while. Commissioner Brandli agreed. Commissioner Krill advised the NHS (National Honor Society) should be invited and that the best way to notify the group is through the school. Ms. Howard advised that she would help get the word out to the school and NHS. Commissioner Krill advised that the NHS Coordinator can let the group know, and that e-mail is best for communication. She suggested that the school make it a group project. Commissioner Yakes advised that spring is a good time to recruit NHS students. Mr. West advised that the spring catalog is in production now. He inquired if the commission would permit him to confirm dates with Mike Bahe as soon as possible, to which the commissioners agreed.

In summary Mr. West confirmed that for spring the cleanup will take place at Knollwood and the MSC (Municipal Service Center). Participants can register for free on-line through the city website and he will discuss with community education to coordinate with the schools.

c. Approve 2026 workplan (*Jason West*)

i. Athletic association presentation discussion (workplan item 8)

Mr. West noted the change in the workplan that shows the actual priority rather than a number to reference a priority. He acknowledged that it was changed due to their comments.

Mr. West requested commissioners to consider whether there is still a need to invite youth sports associations to give presentations at commission meetings now that YAPS (Youth Association President Summit) is established. Commissioner Rippe noted that the associations have an opportunity to speak at the summit. She added that when sports associations come to commission meetings, they appear to expect something. She noted that association needs can be addressed at the YAPS meeting. Commissioner Yakes commented that the presentations are more formal and detailed when organizations give presentations at the commission meetings. Commissioner Brandli inquired as to what the commission would miss and how valuable the statistics presented at the commission meetings are. Commissioners agreed that most association needs can be discussed in common with other associations at the summit.

Commissioner Brandli acknowledged that if an association is struggling with a specific issue, they can be allowed to attend a commission meeting. She added that other organizations can still attend, however, the youth sports associations have the YAPS platform to express concerns and share successes. Commissioner Yakes inquired if new issues can be solicited prior to YAPS. Mr. West advised that, yes, that is how the fundraiser topic was initiated. Commissioner Rippe noted that most issues will come from previous meetings. Mr. West inquired if the meetings should be extended. Commissioner Jaffee advised that if there is a pertinent topic perhaps the meeting could go a little longer, however, most of the commissioners agreed that the meeting should not be scheduled for more than an hour and a half.

ii. By-law review discussion

Mr. West recommends adding a review of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission by-laws to the facility naming policy item on the 2026 workplan. Commissioners agreed.

It was moved by Commissioner Rippe, seconded by Commissioner Jaffee to approve the 2026 Commission workplan and initiatives, with an amendment to include a review of the Parks and Recreation Commission by-laws with item 5, review and update naming policy, as presented. The motion passed 6 - 0.

d. Elect officials for 2026 (Commission)

i. Review position duties

Commissioners read 2.1 officers, 2.2 chair, and 2.3 vice-chair position descriptions in the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission by-laws. Mr. West asked which commissioner would like to be chair. Commissioners discussed that three of the six commissioners' terms end in May 2026. Mr. West indicated that council recently started the two-term limit which begins in 2025, however, commissioners will have to reapply to renew terms. Commissioners determined that those whose terms end in May, perhaps should not assume the role of chair since their term may not be renewed. Commissioner Brandli inquired if elections should be held at a different time of year

since so many commissioners' terms end in May, to which Mr. West advised that elections and by-laws require a decision by December. Commissioner Rippe advised that if no other commissioner is willing or able, she would be willing to chair again.

In response to a question from Commissioner Krill regarding the duties of the chair, Mr. West advised that there may be a few extra conversations and e-mails between him and the chair. Commissioner Yakes assumed that the chair position was for two years, so he advised that he would be willing to serve another year. In response to a comment from Commissioner Krill, Commissioner Rippe advised that a youth member should not have to assume the added pressure and responsibilities of chair. Commissioner Yakes agreed and added that they are very happy to have a student's fresh perspective without added pressure. Mr. West suggested that if Commissioner Yakes is not re-appointed, perhaps Commissioner Rippe could step in, to which Commissioner Rippe agreed.

Commissioner Brandli moved, seconded by Commissioner Jaffee, to nominate Commissioner Yakes for 2026 Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission chair. The motion passed 6-0.

Commissioner Cantor inquired if Commissioner Krill would consider vice-chair, to which Commissioner Krill agreed.

Commissioner Jaffee moved, seconded by Commissioner Brandli, to nominate Commissioner Krill for 2026 Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission vice-chair. The motion passed 6-0.

e. Youth Association President Summit (Jason West)

Mr. West thanked Commissioner Krill for speaking up and showing concern for the mental health of athletes at the November YAPS meeting. He added that a mental health discussion will be a part of the next YAPS meeting.

6. Staff Communication

Mr. West advised that Westopolis would be sending him to conferences to help bring large events to our city. When he attends the conferences, he will represent St. Louis Park. He listed some potential events including NFL Flag Football, iPride and national pillow fighting. In response to a question from Commissioner Jaffee, he advised that the next conference is in Lexington, Kentucky. He added that Westopolis will cover the cost for him to attend.

Mr. West indicated the city would have an answer within a couple weeks if St. Louis Park received the grant for the all-inclusive playground. He added that the city recently received \$2,000 for the National Day of Racial Healing event.

7. Member communication

In response to a question from Commissioner Brandli, Mr. West noted that commissioners may attend and observe all parks and recreation events, however, if they choose to participate, they should register.

8. Adjournment

It was moved by Commissioner Rippe, seconded by Commissioner Brandli, to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m. The motion passed 6 – 0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carrie Mandler

Recording Secretary