Official minutes
Parks & recreation advisory commission

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

Members absent: Sonya Rippe

School District present: Patrice Howard

Staff present: Geoff Clarke, rec center manager, Jason Eisold, facilities superintendent, Amber Karcher-Ramos, recreation center supervisor and Jason West, parks and recreation director

Councilmember present: Sue Budd

1. Call to order – roll call

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Chair Yakes. Roll call was conducted with the following members present: Commissioner Jaffee, Commissioner Brandli, Commissioner Cantor (6:09 p.m.) and Commissioner Krill. Also present were Mr. West, parks and recreation director; Jason Eisold, facilities superintendent; Geoff Clarke, rec center manager; Amber Karcher-Ramos, rec center supervisor; Patrice Howard community education director (6:20 p.m.), and Councilmember Budd.

a. Amber Karcher-Ramos, Recreation Center Supervisor, introduction

Mr. West introduced Amber Karcher-Ramos, the recreation center supervisor. Mr. Clarke noted that she has been with the city for 14 years, with 12 years in her previous role as skate school director. He explained that she had transformed the skate school from a small program to a very large-scale program encompassing youth through adults that continues to grow each year.

Ms. Karcher-Ramos shared her background in community development and city planning, along with experience in facilities and sports management and extensive nonprofit management work with the Girl Scouts of River Valley and the Ann Bancroft Foundation. She had worked at the National Hockey Center at St. Cloud State for about eight years and most recently at the Pagel Activity Center at Minnetonka High School.

In her current position, Ms. Karcher-Ramos explained that they are incorporating concessions and expanding opportunities at the rec center now that the city is taking over concessions during the school year, where previously the hockey association ran operations during that time. She noted that during the pool season, the city managed operations.

Mr. West emphasized that the city is extremely fortunate to have Ms. Karcher-Ramos in this full-time position, as the skate school is the largest grossing program in the parks and recreation division at approximately $350,000 in 2025.

Ms. Karcher-Ramos promoted the upcoming ice show scheduled for that weekend, describing it as their biggest event of the year with the theme "Party in the SLP." She explained that it is a family-friendly event showcasing over 130 skaters ranging in age from 4 to their 50's, with all choreographed programs put to music and prepared in about three weeks. The show would feature performances on Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 1 p.m., lasting about two hours with a 20-minute intermission. Mr. Eisold noted that Park TV broadcasts the show and will rebroadcast it throughout the year.

Commissioner Jaffee inquired about changes to concessions for pool users during the summer season. Mr. Clarke explained that the pool season setup would remain similar to previous years, with the main change being that users inside the building would now have access to concessions, whereas before they were not encouraged to go outside the pool deck to purchase items.

Mr. West clarified that the city had always operated concessions during the three-month pool season, while the new arrangement involves taking over the nine-month hockey season that the hockey association previously managed. The contract had expired and the association was agreeable to the change due to volunteer challenges.

Chair Yakes asked about keeping lifeguard staff year-round through concession positions. Ms. Karcher-Ramos confirmed they are trying to maintain consistent concession staff throughout the season to ease training and provide overall staffing consistency.

2. Approval of minutes- February 18, 2026

Chair Yakes noted one edit was needed regarding a comment about indigenous peoples that had been attributed to Commissioner Rippe but was made by Chair Yakes.

It was moved by Commissioner Jaffee, seconded by Commissioner Krill, to approve the February 18, 2026 meeting minutes as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Presentations

a. Facilities Capital Improvement review (Jason Eisold)

Jason Eisold, facility superintendent, presented the facilities capital improvement plan, explaining that the city has 17 capital projects for 2026 totaling $2,872,000, with four carryovers from the previous year.

Mr. Eisold also mentioned that all seven city buildings are undergoing facility condition assessments this year, which provide data to support capital improvement project requests to council and help plan for aging infrastructure needs. The Westwood Hills Nature Center building, despite being new, will need technology upgrades as audio-visual equipment has about a five-year lifespan.

Ms. Howard inquired if old equipment, when replaced, is then sold to which Mr. Eisold advised if in good condition, it would go to state auction.

Mr. Eisold presented a significant city hall project resulting from last year's facility condition assessment, which identified critical infrastructure needs including electrical systems from 1963, inefficient HVAC air handlers from the 1960s and 138 extremely inefficient windows. Fire suppression improvements are also needed for server rooms and document storage areas. These improvements total approximately $1,300,000 and will be designed by summer for implementation over the next 18 months.

Additional citywide projects include facility condition assessments for remaining buildings, city hall carpet replacement, access control system improvements, CO and NO2 sensor replacements for buildings housing vehicles and fire station carpet replacement in both stations.

Commissioner Cantor commented positively on the new digital signage at the Rec Center. Mr. Eisold noted the signage cost approximately $260,000 for two signs and serves multiple communication purposes including citywide announcements, elections, snow emergencies and community promotion.

b. Rec Center campus Capital Improvement review (Geoff Clarke)

Geoff Clarke, rec center manager, presented several capital improvement projects for the rec center campus.

The first project involves replacing the aquatic park electrical panel in the pool pump room, which dates back to the pool's construction in 1997. Mr. Clarke explained that the current breaker panels are extremely outdated and have required multiple repairs in recent years. The project will create a dedicated electrical room with walls built within the pump room area, providing better access and keeping electrical equipment outside the chemical room to meet current code requirements. This improvement will create efficiency for staff operating pool pumps and update vital equipment. The work is scheduled for fall to avoid disrupting the pool season.

The second project involves refacing the dasher boards in both the East and West rinks. Mr. Clarke explained that the whiteboards around the inside of the rinks take significant wear from hockey activities over months of use. As part of a 10-year maintenance process, they remove ice from both rinks and have a company reface the dashboards, including all white and blue sections, gates and doors with new materials. This extends the life of the rinks, enhances the facility and addresses safety concerns when gaps or cracking boards could catch sticks or skates. The work begins March 23 with the west rink, followed by the east rink, in a three-week process during the end-of-season period when all activities have concluded.

Mr. Clarke explained the ice removal and painting process, noting that they paint the ice white using water-soluble paint, then add logos, lines and other markings before building the ice to about 1.25 to 1.5 inches thick. When removing ice, they aim to catch it before it melts and move 15 to 20-foot sections with a bobcat into a melt pit.

The ROC roof assessment project involves a visual inspection by IFS (Integrated Fabric Structures) specialists using proper equipment to conduct an intensive assessment of the 10-year-old roof. With a 30-year expected lifespan, this proactive maintenance assessment will identify any needed repairs or deficiencies. The assessment is budgeted at approximately $10,500.

The final project involves upgrading point-of-sale equipment for both the Rec Center and ROC concession operations. With year-round concession operations, they need improved POS systems to handle lines more efficiently during hockey period breaks. They have allocated $10,000 for equipment upgrades and are working with finance and IT departments to determine the best solutions for their tight spaces.

Commissioner Jaffee asked about app-based payment options. Mr. Eisold explained that while many options exist, they must work through Finance and I.T. departments for PCI compliance approval and prefer solutions that can work across multiple city departments to avoid exclusive fees.

Mr. West advised all capital improvement projects have been approved by the city council.

Mr. West reiterated various Parks and Recreation divisions which include Rec Center, Westwood Hills Nature Center, parks maintenance, natural resources, city facilities and fleet.

4. Business

a. Review recommended changes to naming policy and application (Jason West)

Mr. West presented the revised naming policy, explaining that based on commission feedback from the previous meeting, staff had created both a red-lined version showing changes and a new policy format version that mirrors the city's memorial bench and tree policies. The revised policy condensed the original wordy format into a more manageable two-page document with a one-page application form.

Mr. West walked through the policy changes, noting that the memorial piece had been removed from the naming policy as discussed. The commission had agreed to change the service requirement from 10 years to 25 years. Staff had also made the policy more inclusive by removing specific lists of eligible categories and instead referring to "outstanding persons" rather than exclusive lists of presidents, military leaders, and other specific roles.

Commissioner Cantor asked about defining "reputable," and Mr. West explained that the commission would make that determination based on the criteria outlined in the policy.

Mr. West inquired whether the commission's recommendations would always need to go to city council. He suggested potentially adding "if applicable" to provide flexibility for smaller items like plaques versus major renaming. However, commissioners expressed preference for maintaining council oversight for all naming decisions to ensure proper documentation and accountability.

Commissioners suggested language stating that the commission would make recommendations "per guidelines for the city council to accept or reject the proposal" to provide guardrails while maintaining council authority.

The application form includes standard contact information, the proposed name and location, criteria checkboxes and space for detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the naming request. Commissioners reviewed.

b. Advise of annual meeting with city council, June 1 (Jason West)

Mr. West informed attendees that all commissions meet with the city council annually. This year, the Commission will meet with the city council on June 1, similar to last year when the Chair presented a PowerPoint about the commission's work plan. This year's format may differ as Pat Coleman is working to make presentations more uniform across commissions. Commissioner's Krill and Brandli expressed willingness to attend.

c. Discuss Youth Association President Summit May 27 meeting agenda (Jason West)

Mr. West presented a streamlined agenda for the May 27 Youth Association President Summit, removing several components from the previous year including sports engine presentations and waiver discussions. The agenda will focus on association changes since the last meeting, best practice sharing, questions about increases in underrepresented youth participation and mental health of athletes.

Mr. West suggested adding the mental health of athletes' presentation component toward the top of the agenda, potentially asking association presidents for recommendations. Commissioner Krill agreed but unsure who would be presenting. Ms. Howard suggested introducing the awareness of mental health and wellbeing with data obtained a year ago from students in 6th - 11th grade. She advised myHealth for teens and young adults, in Hopkins, has a youth advisory board as well as mentioned Claire Weiss, their Director of Education Programs, would be a good contact. Ms. Howard will provide Mr. West with Ms. Weiss' contact information.

The agenda will also include school district facilities discussion by Justin Grays and city facilities information from Jim Lombardi and Larry Umphrey, plus redistribution of contact information flyers. Ms. Howard suggested an update on the school district fields also, which commissioners agreed.

Ms. Howard provided an update on facility monitor challenges, explaining that many users cannot afford monitor costs and community education has absorbed some costs, but it's not financially sustainable. They are seeing security issues in buildings without monitors, including propped doors and theft incidents. They may consider training a dedicated member from the various groups to monitor doors but require commitment to proper procedures.

Commissioner Cantor suggested exploring grants for safety and security funding, though Ms. Howard noted current state grants focus on other areas like mental health services rather than facility monitoring.

Chair Yakes asked about inviting non-sanctioned groups that use facilities regularly. Mr. West explained the priority system where school and city functions come first, followed by approved associations, then other groups. Chair Yakes offered to be a conduit between the ultimate frisbee group, which use the facilities. He will discuss with the group and bring their response back to the Commission. The Commission will then determine if additional groups should be invited to the YAPS meeting.

Commissioners discussed obtaining a list of non-sanctioned youth groups in St. Louis Park, including those through the school district. Mr. West advised adult groups also exist. Chair Yakes feels it would encompass whoever uses the fields, regardless of age. Mr. West advised staff will supply a list of renters as well as what makes a group an association.

d. April meeting and workplan item discussion regarding Environment and Sustainability Commission (Jason West)

Mr. West reported that the Environmental and Sustainability Commission requested changing the joint meeting format to having chairs visit each other's meetings instead of a combined meeting. He also noted that the workplan is a fluid document. Chair Yakes agreed to attend one of their meetings while their chair would attend the Parks and Recreation Commission's April meeting. The previous year's format involved both commissions meeting together with presentations from the natural resources manager and nature center manager. Commissioners discussed topics to be covered at the Environment and Sustainability Commission meeting which included the Minnehaha Creek clean-up information.

5. Communication

a. Staff

Mr. West highlighted several items in staff communication. He presented the new summer catalog, noting it is award-winning and contains impressive facts and figures on page 17, including information from the Youth Association President Summit meeting work. Commissioner Brandli commended the “new” icon.

He explained that city council is revamping strategic priorities based on Vision 4.0, with a presentation scheduled for March 23 and adoption at the following meeting. The new priorities should be available for discussion at the April commission meeting. Council member Budd and Mr. West shared the strategy used at the council retreat to discuss wording of the new priorities. Mr. West advised they are important for staff to guide council reports. He noted that parks and recreation would likely be well-represented in at least 4 of the 5 or 6 priorities, which is an improvement from the previous strategic priorities.

Mr. West also mentioned a staff survey about city values that identified integrity, belonging, collaboration and public stewardship as core values, which align with the parks and recreation visioning efforts.

b. Community Education / School District

Patrice Howard provided updates on community education and school district activities. She announced that summer registration opened February 15 electronically, with spring/summer catalogs coming to homes later in March and adult program registration opening April 1.

Ms. Howard reported that the district is aligning with city initiatives through a staff climate survey connected to their new strategic plan. The district is recognizing International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21.

She explained that after three years of budget reductions, the district faces an additional reduction to maintain an eight percent fund balance as board-approved policy. Rather than cutting $2 million, they are reducing about $220,000 through restructuring and reallocating resources from district level to school sites.

Superintendent Dr. Hines is conducting eight listening sessions over the next month or two, with the first being held recently. Some program reductions include elimination of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

The district is approaching an election question to increase both technology levy and bond funding. Ms. Howard explained that Lenox, their 100-year-old building, needs continued updates through referendum phases. Most buildings have outdated water heaters and boilers that are 70+ years old, requiring expensive updates. Three buildings still need updates after recent middle school improvements.

The technology levy increase is needed to address safety and security technology gaps compared to metro area districts, including updated cameras, door infrastructure systems and other security measures.

Commissioner Krill asked about IB program impacts, and Ms. Howard confirmed it affects high school students currently in the program. This is the last year of the program. She suggested students speak with the principal about individual arrangements for testing and college credit opportunities.

c. Council member

Council member Budd mentioned there's still a workgroup, working on Boards and Commissions, put in place to ensure the groups were good. She reviewed commissioner applications and inquired if the school district seats had been transitioned into city seats. Mr. West advised the city runs and operates the election process with the city council appointing all positions. Ms. Howard is part of the commission meetings as the school district representative. Mr. West described the council systems code and months of the infrastructure systems.

d. Commissioner members

Commissioner Brandli asked about promoting the Minnehaha Creek clean up through sign-up systems and email blasts. Mr. West confirmed the cleanup is listed in the catalog and they would add it to email communications and social media promotion. He also agreed to create flyers for Commissioner Krill to share with National Honor Society (NHS), Ms. Howard to share via Peachjar and other youth groups seeking service hours.

Commissioner Jaffee asked about community service recognition for students, and Commissioner Krill confirmed that volunteer hours count toward NHS recognition and graduation honors.

The commission discussed doing cleanups twice yearly and at two locations given the success of the previous event with 34 participants. They noted fall cleanups can be more challenging due to overgrowth, while spring cleanups offer better visibility and access. The fall cleanup is dependent on interest at the spring cleanup.

Chair Yakes reported leading a career pathways tour for 17 St. Louis Park High School students through teacher Mark Miller's program, visiting a specialized Toro manufacturing plant in Shakopee. He emphasized the value of exposing students to career opportunities they might not otherwise consider, including parks and recreation careers beyond summer positions. Mr. West mentioned St. Louis Park along with many municipal parks and recreation departments have attended high school career fairs to help student know about the park and recreation field and occupations.

He also mentioned being elected vice chair of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and highlighted the importance of career exposure through various speakers and presentations.

The commission was reminded of Carrie's retirement party scheduled for the following Wednesday, noting her 40 years of service to the city beginning in January 1986. Mr. West announced that Susan Bauer from Fridley Parks and Recreation has been hired as Carrie's replacement and will be introduced at a future meeting.

6. Adjournment

It was moved by Commissioner Brandli, seconded by Commissioner Cantor, to adjourn the meeting at 8 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.