



**CITY OF ALBERT LEA
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD**

*October 2025 Meeting
10/20/2025, 6 pm
City Arena*

1. CALL TO ORDER:
 - Roll Call
 - Adopt Agenda
2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:
 - September 15, 2025 Meeting Minutes
3. PUBLIC ITEMS:
4. OLD BUSINESS:
 - Rec facilities project update and tour – Rec staff
5. NEW BUSINESS:
 - Park on Adams Ave Discussion and Recommendation – see attachment
<https://www.cityofalbertlea.org/public-notices/>
6. STAFF REPORT DISCUSSION:
7. BOARD MEMBER ITEMS:
8. ADJOURNMENT:

MISSION STATEMENT

“To provide quality recreational opportunities and to plan, acquire, develop and maintain attractive and safe parks and facilities that enhance the quality of life in the community of Albert Lea.”

PARKS & RECREATION
ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

September 15, 2025 6 pm
Edgewater Bay Pavilion

Members Present:

Amy Leach
Kent Rahn
Therese Salazar
Whitney Sauer
Jason Howland, Ex-Officio

Members Absent:

Steve Ball
Wende Taylor
Tony Segura

Staff in Attendance:

Cathy Malakowsky, Community Engagement and Enrichment Director
Ryan Hajek, Assistant Director of Public Works
Ben Bangert, Parks Superintendent
Dani Bakken, Recreation Coordinator
Afton Wacholz, Recreation Office Manager

Others in Attendance:

none

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Amy Leach at 6:06pm.

Adopt Agenda:

Therese Salazar made the motion to approve the agenda for tonight's meeting and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 4-0. Motion declared passed.

Approval of the Minutes:

Therese Salazar made the motion to approve the minutes from the July 21, 2025 meeting and Whitney Sauer seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 4-0. Motion declared passed.

Public Items:

None

Old Business Items:

Parks project updates – Ryan Hajek
- Bridge Ave Public Dock –

- Waiting for financial contribution from the DNR. The City will be contributing \$30,000 for the project.
- There has been a delay as design and changes in companies has set back the kayak launcher section of the dock.
- Splash Pad Bathroom
 - Kelly plumbing and Heating has the rough in completed.
 - Josh from Parks has let the construction of the main frame of the building.
 - The security camera for the building came in \$2,5000 under budget.
- Blazing Star Trail Bike Shelter at Frank Hall Park
 - Bids are still out for the project
 - Electrical bids are back, and there is one that came in very low.
- Pollinator Gardens
 - There will be a public permit process for community members wanting to have pollinator gardens as their yard. There will be a one-time charge for the permit.
 - The City will inspect the plan prior to awarding approval. There will be certain setbacks required.
 - There will be signs that are put up signifying the pollinator garden.
 - There are concerns that community members will use this as a way to not have to mow their yards.
 - There was discussion on these gardens would be impacted by mosquito spraying.
- SRRWD channel clean up
 - There are plans with an environmental consultant to complete a significant channel clean-up with possibly up to \$3.6 million in funds
 - This project would include the design of a new dam, similar to the one on South Shore Dr. with a portage. There would be trails and paths added between the two lakes.
 - The design would not manipulate the current water capacity
 - This project is seeking public input.

Rec facilities project update – Cathy Malakowsky

- Provided the board with an update on the Rec facilities projects at the City Arena, Aquatic Center and Marion Ross Theater
 - Reviewed the update that was provided to the City Council on September 8 with InBylt. The update revealed a delay in the completion of the Colstrup rink to January 8, 2026. Nystrom rink is on schedule to up and running by October 17 with use of a temporary chiller.
 - There is currently an issue with the fire alarm system for the new addition at the City Arena. There were wrong assumptions on the existing system and it's capacity for the additional sensors for the new addition. The City building official has agreed to a 90-day certificate of occupancy as long as there is progress toward completing this work. The City Attorney sought direction from the Council on whether the City should absorb this additional cost of nearly \$146,000 or if the City should seek financial contribution from InBylt and JLG Architects through arbitration.

New Business Items:

None

Staff Report Discussion:

- Jason Howland asked Cathy Malakowsky to provide an update on the Songbird Trail

- Cathy shared that the group met today and that there is currently \$1.5 million designated to the project.
- The plan is to complete the work in segments, starting with the first segment and bridges
- The project is progressing quickly, finally and will hopefully start in the spring of 2026.
- The cost has almost doubled unfortunately due to MNDOT changing their minds on what they will approve for the access over Hwy 13. A bridge over the highway will cost roughly \$3.8 million.
- Cathy also discussed the City's discussion on the old Merrick property off of Front St/Adams Ave, also known as the old Freeborn Foods building. There are plans to apply for an EPA grant to possibly turn space into a park along the trail.

Staff Updates:

Recreation: Report provided by Bob Furland and Dani Bakken;

- Rec staff will be participating in Viva La Independencies (Mexican Independence Day) on Friday, September 12, from noon to 8:00 PM in the North Lot of Albert Lea. Food trucks all day, 4 to 6 pm kids activities, bounce house, food, music, and cultural activities.
- Safety Day will be held on Tuesday, September 16, at Morin Park from 4-6pm. A great way for families to learn about local resources and meet the people who offer all kinds of support. Everyone is welcome to attend. 22 organizations are participating this year.
- The fall guide was mailed out.
 - Registration is open for Young Athletes and workout classes with Annie
- Oktoberween is at the Freeborn County Fairgrounds, October 23-26

<https://www.oktoberween.com/>

Oktoberween is a Partnership of Recreation, Albert Lea Convention and Visitor Bureau, and The 112 on Broadway. This year will have kids' events and activities, music, and the Haunted House. Sunday admission to the grounds is free for music and the Third annual Trunk or Treat.

Parks: Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Ben Bangert;

- Ongoing maintenance with trees, grass, and flowers downtown.
- Final repairs for Fountain Lake Park vandalism from the spring. Albert Lea Electric set last bollards and electric panel repairs.
- Beginning fall seeding and dirt work at Ginkel Park, Inclusive Playground, etc.
- Big Island Rendezvous preparations again for annual event. Trail maintenance, mowing, early stage items.. tables, benches, electrical.
- First electric vehicle – Ford F-150 Pro arrived. Primary use will be at Edgewater Park.
- Special thanks to the Street Department mechanics Joe and Steve for help on repairs, modifications and support work with the Art Sculpture projects throughout the park system.

City Arena: Report provided by Bob Furland/Josh Heilman;

- Facility updates –
 - See Facilities Project Update below
- Events -
 - None

- Other events –
 - None

Aquatic Center: Report provided by Bob Furland/Dani Bakken;

- Aquatic Center is now closed for the season.
- Please see Facilities Project Update below.

Senior Center: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- Trips -
 - Sept. 24 - "A Fall Day to Remember" day trip to Cracker Barrel, Fergusons Orchard, and Minnesota's Largest Candy Store.
- Programs/Events –
 - October 8th 11:30a Singing Cowgirl at the Senior Center
 - Chair tai chi started September 3rd
 - September 17- Art with Emelia

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- **Facility Updates –**
 - Windows and doors arrive September 27, with installation set for later October to work around productions..
- **Upcoming events –**
 - On Golden Pond will run from October 9-12 and 15-18 at the Marion Ross Theater.
 - September 20th from 9a-5p ACT will be holding a garage sale at the Vitality Center, their wardrobe and prop storage location.
 - September 14th, Rachael Kilgour, Minnesota singer-songwriter, live performance "My Father Loved me" Kilgour poses questions about belonging, inheritance, and grief, and triumphantly affirms the value of one ordinary working man's life.
 - October 25th, The Vee Gees – Tribute band to the Bee Gees. A great tribute to the music of the Bee Gees. Saturday night fever and all the hits.

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

- Songbird Trail: The City of Albert Lea is applying for an EPA grant to clean out the hazardous materials from the former Merrick buildings on Adams Avenue and remove the buildings. The long-term plan for the site is a trailhead for the Songbird Trail that will go from Front Street to Hartland. Freeborn County is applying for regional designation of the trail to qualify for additional grants to develop the trail.
- Blue Zones: Annie Olson, local fitness instructor, is leading walking moais on Sunday evenings at United Preschool and Thursday evenings at the Blazing Star Trail, starting at Frank Hall Park. Both start at 6 p.m. and are open to the public.

Referendum Project Updates

Lobby/Office Areas

- Lighting was installed in the new lobby and will continue in the office areas.
- Awning was installed on the front of the new lobby entrance.
- Cabinetry and counters are scheduled to be installed the week of September 15.
- Epoxy flooring for the lobby and carpet for the office areas will be installed end of September/early October, with the planned finishing punches scheduled for the second week of October.
- Recreation staff plans to move back to the arena once carpet is in, likely the second week of October.

Ice Arena

- Contractors are removing supplies from the Nystrom rink to prepare for ice making.
- Nystrom Arena schedule provided by INBYLT in preparation for the first skate, no later than October 17:

	Duration	Sub	Start	Complete
Leak fix	5	Total Mech	September 8, 2025	September 12, 2025
Set Temp chiller	1	Total Mech	September 17, 2025	September 17, 2025
Electrical/Power to chiller	2	ALE	September 19, 2025	September 22, 2025
Piping, purge/Fill glycol	14	Total Mech	September 22, 2025	September 30, 2025
Start-up test	2	Total Mech	October 6, 2025	October 8, 2025
Make Ice		City of AL	October 8, 2025	October 15, 2025

- Underground plumbing in the compressor room is completed.
- Below-grade inspections were done in the compressor room.
- Compressor room, vestibule, and perimeter areas in Colstrup have been backfilled, and floors will be poured by September 16.
- Below-grade sump pump installed.

Aquatic Center

- Demolition of front doors and the dividing wall in the main bathhouse is complete.
- Forms are ready for the footings to be poured for the new admission building.
- Demo is complete of the outdoor showers on the family bathhouse.

Marion Ross Theater

- Windows and doors will be delivered on September 26.

**** Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- Update during presentation by Ryan Hajek

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- Update under Cathy Malakowsky's updates

Develop an off-season field house –

- Status of the non-city group working on this idea?

Upgrade Snyder Fields –

- No new update

Update aging facilities, including the City Arena and Aquatic Center –

- See update under Referendum Project Updates

Board Member Items:

None

Adjournment: Therese Salazar made a motion to adjourn the Park Board meeting and Whitney Sauer seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 4-0. Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Afton Wacholz
Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Secretary

Approved:

Amy Leach
Park & Recreation Advisory Board Co-Chair

October Parks and Recreation Department Updates from Staff

Recreation: Report provided by Bob Furland and Dani Bakken;

- Young Athletes, which is an inclusion program through special Olympics, started on Monday October 7. There are 15 kids registered between the ages of 4-6.
- Fitness classes with Annie began on Monday, October 13. She is offering weight training and Pilates. There are 23 registered for weight training and 17 registered for Pilates
- Oktoberween Kids Carnival
 - The Kids Carnival will be held the following days:
 - Thursday, October 23 from 5-7p.m.
 - Crafts, bounce house, yard games
 - Friday, October 24 from 5-7 p.m.
 - Crafts, bounce house, yard games, kids bingo
 - Saturday, October 25 from 3-7 p.m.
 - Train rides, crafts, bounce house, face painting, yard games
 - Sunday, October 26 12-4 p.m.- free admission
 - Trunk or treat, kid friendly haunted house, music by Brett Feis, Dales train rides and a costume contest
- Working with Glenville schools to offer a fall volleyball league
- The Recreation Office will be moving back to the City Arena on Thursday, October 16. The office will be closed to the public on October 16 and 17 to allow staff time to move and organize their new space. The Rec Office will reopen to the public at the City Arena on Monday, October 20 with office hours of 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Parks: Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Ben Bangert;

- Beginning seasonal maintenance; water shut offs, leaf mulching, Hayek Field turf preparations.
- Electric Vehicle Ford F-150 is set up at Edgewater Park for maintenance duties. Electric services will be installed by A.L Electric.
- Fall tree planting: 70 Blvd./park trees. 16 spade/transplant 5ft white pines from Bancroft Bay Park to Water treatment Facility windbreak.
- 15 Christmas tree pole decorations getting a makeover. New lights/ garland etc.... Small steps for large project.
- Splash Pad Bathroom construction remaining steps; insulation in roof, interior wall finishing, install amenities/partitions, floor coating.
- Two new dog waste stations installed.

City Arena: Report provided by Bob Furland/Josh Heilman;

- Facility updates –
 - See Facilities Project Update below
- Events -
 - None

- Other events –
 - First skate on Nystrom will be Sunday, October 19 for Albert Lea Youth Hockey and High School Girls captain's practice.

Aquatic Center: Report provided by Bob Furland/Dani Bakken;

- None

Senior Center: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- Trips -
 - Treasure Island casino trip is scheduled for November 6
- Programs/Events –
 - A Mahjong group started meeting on Thursdays
 - Halloween party with themed bingo on October 31
 - 80's brunch will be held on Friday, October 24 at 11 a.m.

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- Facility Updates –
 - See Rec facilities update below.
- Upcoming events –
 - On Golden Pond finished up this weekend at the Marion Ross Theater.
 - October 25th, The Vee Gees – Tribute band to the Bee Gees. A great tribute to the music of the Bee Gees. Saturday night fever and all the hits.

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

- Songbird Trail: The City of Albert Lea is applying for an EPA grant to clean out the hazardous materials from the former Merrick buildings on Adams Avenue and remove the buildings. The long-term plan for the site is a trailhead for the Songbird Trail that will go from Front Street to Hartland. Freeborn County is applying for regional designation of the trail to qualify for additional grants to develop the trail.
- Blue Zones: Annie Olson, local fitness instructor, is leading walking moais on Sunday evenings at United Preschool and Thursday evenings at the Blazing Star Trail, starting at Frank Hall Park. Both start at 6 p.m. and are open to the public.

Referendum Project Updates

Lobby/Office Areas

- Punch list walk-through complete for lobby and office area
- Doors completed
- Rubber flooring is being installed in the lobby, the refs room, and the skate office area

- Cleaners work to dust and clean to open the Recreation Department at the Arena on Monday, October 20
- Epoxy flooring installed in the refs shower area

Ice Arena

- New compressors and chillers delivered
- New electric service for ice arena refrigeration equipment installed
- Exterior front doors installed
- Interior doors and glass installed
- Installing hot water boilers for ice-making water
- Finishing front doors
- Electric updates continue for the facility
- Front sidewalk poured

Aquatic Center

- Finishing concrete work
- Crew will be starting block on ticket building

Marion Ross Theater

- Front doors are installed. Crews will be back on October 20th to start windows and install the drop ceiling and electric ADA door opener.

**** Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- Update under Parks updates

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- Update under Cathy Malakowsky's updates

Develop an off-season field house –

- Status of the non-city group working on this idea?

Upgrade Snyder Fields –

- No new update

Update aging facilities, including the City Arena and Aquatic Center –

- See update under Referendum Project Updates

October 2025

Open for public input: Proposed park on Adams Avenue

The City of Albert Lea plans to apply for a \$1.25 million federal grant to help remove hazardous buildings and their contents – known as the Merrick facility – at 620 Adams Ave. The city would like to gauge public support for the following three options for the site.

All three options would include parking for the proposed [Songbird Trail](#) along the former UP rail corridor. The City of Albert Lea and Freeborn County have received three state grants to start developing this trail that would eventually run from Front Street to Shoff Park, across Minnesota Highway 13, and then to Hartland.

1. **Mini Park:** Remove all the buildings and develop a minimal park with greenspace and parking.
2. **Mixed Use Area:** Remove the hazardous buildings and leave the three structurally sound buildings to sell to a private business for reuse. The City would develop the rest of the area into greenspace with parking and perhaps other amenities.
3. **Full Trailhead:** Remove buildings and develop a full trailhead with parking, a shelter, restrooms and other amenities. This option could also include leaving the three structurally sound buildings to sell to a private business for reuse.

Background

The city acquired the 1.37-acre site through tax forfeiture after the former owner, Merrick's of Minnesota, went bankrupt and abandoned the site in 2018. The company manufactured animal feed and feed ingredients. The site includes a series of buildings that need to have asbestos removed, along with materials such as bird feces, improperly stored cleaning supplies and chemicals. The soil underneath may also be contaminated from materials seeping from the buildings, and would need to be remediated. In addition, some of the buildings are structurally unsound and need to be removed.

Removing the materials is estimated at \$850,000 with demolition costs depending on the number of buildings removed. The city may be able to salvage some buildings for sale to a private business.



The City of Albert Lea is applying for federal grant to remove hazardous buildings and their contents from an abandoned industrial site at 620 Adams Ave., as outlined in the aerial image above.



The Mini Park option would remove all the buildings and develop a minimal park with greenspace and parking.

Benefits of proposed project

- Protecting public safety by removing the environmental hazards of the existing structures.
- Protecting public safety by reducing soil contamination at the site.
- Removing blight from the area.
- Improving lake water quality by increasing stormwater treatment and reducing runoff.
- Improving aesthetics of the site.
- Improving access for residents and visitors to the proposal trail.
- Supporting tourism and its economic benefits through trail access.

Next steps

The City of Albert Lea will incorporate public input into the application for the grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. If receiving the grant, then the City Council will decide on the next steps in early 2026.

For updates, subscribe to the [free Week-Lea email newsletter](#) or follow the City of Albert Lea – City Hall on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

How to learn more and provide input

- Learn more, ask questions and submit comments at an open house on Tuesday, Oct. 21, from 4 – 6 p.m. at City Hall, 221 E. Clark St. The open house will be held in the City Council Chambers on the top floor of City Hall.
- Send questions and comments to:
Building Official Wayne Sorensen
City of Albert Lea
221 E. Clark St., Albert Lea, MN 56007
wsorensen@ci.albertlea.mn.us.

The deadline for comments is 4:30 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 3.

To be helpful, comments should include your preference for one of the three options for the site and why you support that option. Comments on the potential impact to the surrounding neighborhood and community as a whole would also be helpful.



The City of Albert Lea is applying for federal grant to remove hazardous buildings and their contents at 620 Adams Ave., formerly used by a private business to manufacture animal feed.

Option 2: Mixed Use Area



The Mixed Use Area would leave three buildings to sale for private business use with greenspace, parking and perhaps other amenities.

Option 3: Full Trailhead



The Full Trailhead would include parking, a shelter, and restrooms. Some buildings could also remain for private business use.