

PARKS & RECREATION  
ADVISORY BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES

February 23, 2026 5:30 pm  
City Arena

**Members Present:**

Amy Leach  
Kent Rahn  
Wende Taylor  
Tom Jones  
Joe Staloch

**Members Absent:**

Whitney Sauer  
Therese Salazar  
Ted Herman (ex-officio) City Council Meeting

**Staff in Attendance:**

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

**Others in Attendance:**

Jill Bangert

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Amy Leach at 6:00pm.

**Adopt Agenda:**

Wende Taylor 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 5-0. Motion declared passed.

**Approval of the Minutes:**

Kent Rahn made the motion to approve the minutes from the December 15, 2025 (January 2026 meeting was cancelled) meeting and Amy Leach seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

**Public Items:**

None

**Old Business Items:**

**Bridge Avenue Dock – Ryan Hajek**

The dock is scheduled to ship early March and we have already received the kayak launcher. Tom Jones asked about the lake bottom near the new dock area and Amy Leach discussed the rocks that could be an issue near the bumper rail.

### **Splash Pad Bathrooms**

It is getting close to being finished. Staff are waiting on the bathroom partitions and the possibility of an epoxy flooring install. The goal is to finish by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Staff discussed the locking situation for the bathrooms to avoid vandalism. The doors will lock and unlock automatically like the Lakeview Park public bathroom.

There will also be security cameras installed and staff are deciding on the best line of sight. The internet will come from the theater.

### **New Business Items:**

#### **Welcome new board members – Tom Jones and Joe Staloch**

#### **Election of board chair and vice-chair**

Amy Leach voiced her interest in the chair position for 2026. Kent Rahn made the motion to appoint Amy Leach as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Chair for 2026 and Tom Jones seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Wende Taylor voiced her interest in the vice-chair position for 2026. Joe Staloch made the motion to appoint Wende Taylor as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Vice-Chair for 2026 and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of the said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

#### **2026 Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Priority Project Discussion**

Cathy Malakowsky discussed as part of a Board Development effort a few years ago, the Board set its top 5 priorities to focus on: 1) Restrooms by the Splash Pad. 2) Upgrading aging facilities including the Arena and Aquatic Center. 3) Indoor off-season fieldhouse. 4) Developing the trail along the former UP rail line. 5) Upgrading Snyder Fields.

The restrooms near the Splash Pad will open this year. The upgrades to the Arena and Aquatic Center will be done this year. Developing the UP rail line – named the Songbird Trail – is starting this year. The trail and upgrades to Snyder Fields are part of the proposal to fund with a local sales tax.

With so much progress on its priorities, the Board decided in December to reviews its priorities and perhaps set new ones.

Setting priorities helps staff and the Council focus their resources to move projects forward. While some projects are moving forward, the Board may decide to keep them as priorities to help ensure they keep progressing. Or the Board may decide its confident in the plan for the projects and decide on different priorities. There are numerous ideas. While all may be worthwhile, which ones should move forward first? What will help the Board achieve its mission?

The **Top 5** projects the board voted on to set for the 2026 are as follows:

**6 votes – Songbird Trail**

**4 votes – Miracle Field**

**4 votes – Mini Golf Course – possibly at the 300 Broadway block location**

**4 votes – City Beach marina**

**3 votes – Security cameras at City facilities and parks**

Other projects were voted on as follows:

2 votes – Outside patio City Arena

2 votes – Channel Rehab

2 votes – Trail from New Denmark Parks to Blazing Star Trail

1 vote – Edgewater Bay Pavilion enhancement (outside patio, A/V equipment, etc)

1 vote- Teen Programming

1 vote – Replace portable toilets with use of park buildings as public bathrooms

**Presented projects from staff:**

- Developing the Songbird Trail (sales tax proposal)
- Snyder Field upgrades (sales tax proposal)
- Pickleball courts (sales tax proposal)
- Building the Miracle Field next to the Inclusive Playground (sales tax proposal)
- Flume speed slide at Aquatic Center (CIP)
- Outside seating area at Arena entry such as benches around a firepit (CIP)
- Channel rehab with Watershed District (CIP)
- Trail from City Beach to New Denmark Park (CIP)
- Trail from New Denmark Park to Blazing Star Trail (CIP)
- City Beach marina (CIP)
- Security cameras for parks and facilities
- Developing an area for teen programming
- Sports areas for other cultures like caneball
- Replacing portable toilets with restrooms (Brookside boat landing as example)
- Creating a park space from the vacant lots on the 300 block of Broadway Avenue (mini golf course, cornhole, teen space)
- Mini Golf Course (very popular with staff)
- Hayek Field back stop netting/reconstruction of press box and bleachers
- Outdoor archery range
- ADA accessibility to warming houses/play park buildings from street or parking area
- Indoor off-season field house
- Enhancements to Edgewater Bay Pavilion:
  - Keycard system
  - Patio area
  - Gas fireplace
  - AV equipment
- Mountain biking course
- Skate Park Replacement – just equipment at current location or moving skate park completely; some funding in CIP

- Long term plan for Aquatic Center

### **Staff Report Discussion:**

#### **Recreation Manager Position Update –**

Cathy reported that there were approximately 41 applications and the interview committee decided to offer an interview to eight candidates. Six of those eight accepted an interview. The top two candidates will go through a second round of interviews next week with the hopes of having an advisory board member included in the interview committee.

### **Staff Updates:**

#### **Recreation:** Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Dani Bakken;

- Young Athletes will wrap up on Tuesday, February 24. There are 17 kids registered for this program
  - Young Athletes is an inclusive recreation program for kids ages 4-6
- Adult fitness classes with Annie – Weights and Pilates will run through Wednesday, March 11. There are currently 25 people signed up.
- Adult women’s volleyball completed their winter season on Monday, February 16. Adult co-ed volleyball will run through mid-March.
- The candle light walk at the Myre-Big Island State Park was held on Friday February 13, in conjunction with the Big Freeze weekend event. It was a beautiful night for the event, with roughly 325 people participating.
- Warming houses closed for the season on February 17. There was a total of 1,923 visitors in the 34 days that we were open.
  - Hawthorne- 151
  - Hayek- 765
  - Academy-138
  - Lakeview- 869
- Summer jobs are now posted on the City’s website. The Recreation department will be hiring for Rec Assistants, Lifeguards, Play Park Leaders, Pool Attendants, Pool Managers and Adult Volleyball Supervisors.
- Community dock and garden renewal applications for the 2026 season will be mailed out February 25. Renters from 2025 will have until March 31<sup>st</sup> at 4p to return their renewal applications and pay appropriate fees to secure their locations.
- Rock on Ice will be making a return again on Friday, March 6 from 7-9p at the City Arena. There will be a glow in the dark theme. This is a family friendly event with DJ Abrego bringing the tunes appropriate for all ages. Cost is \$5 per skater, with free skate rentals while supplies last.

#### **Parks:** Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Ben Bangert;

- Emerald Ash Borer List #4- Annual treatment program is compiled and will be edited and submitted for spring treatment.
- Kayak Launcher for Fountain Lake Dock addition has been delivered, awaiting hardware and assembly instructions.
- Splash Pad Bathrooms Project- Collected estimates for epoxy floor sealing, awaiting approval for project addition.

- Kelly Plumbing will follow up with sinks, and stool installation.
- Parking bollards will be added to prevent cars from parking over sidewalk and safety
- Seeking estimates for back stop net replacement at Hayek Fields. Looking into internet connection for improved Live Game Reporting.
- Several pieces of equipment were approved to be replaced. Mower, woodchipper, Toro ball field vehicles/ drags, F-350 Ford Pickup
- Christmas Pole Decorations- Refurbishment materials delivered and assembly continues. Candy Canes and Stockings.
- City of Hartland – Proceeding with purchasing older- unused decorations and trailer.
- New Banners for Broadway and Bridge Ave are in and will be installed this spring. CVB paid for half of the expense.

**City Arena:** Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Josh Heilman;

- Facility updates –
  - See Facilities Project Update below
  - Updating HSEM Tier II reporting with Ethylene Glycol, Ammonia, and Chemical Map
  - Working on CIP vehicle purchases and Zamboni quotes
- Events -
  - C Peewee Youth Tournament Feb 6-8
  - ALHS Girls Section Semi-Final game vs Simley Feb 7
  - Albert Lea hosted the U12 Girls District tournament Feb 13-15
  - Albert Lea will be host to the MCH Regional Hockey tournament Feb 20-22
  - Rock on Ice March 6 7-9p
  - Albert Lea Figure Skating Club annual show will be March 28-29
- Other events –
  - Weekday public skate and stick and puck calendar can be found on our website or Facebook page. Special skating schedule for during Spring Break will be available.
  - Game 7 Industries from Mankato will be putting on a mini hockey camp March 8, 10 and 12. This will be open for ages Mites to high school. Registration can be found on their website:  
<https://frontofficehockey.com/program/1770316444094x749043852330664000>
  - Ducks Unlimited Banquet April 11 on Colstrup rink floor

**Aquatic Center:** Report provided by Josh Heilman;

- Surge pit repair will begin early spring
- Final construction will resume shortly on completion of the ticketing building and other project items needing to be completed such as fencing, gates, concrete work, etc.
- Staff is working on 2026 budget purchases as preparation for the summer 2026 season are underway.

**Senior Center:** Report provided by Dani Bakken;

- Trips -

- Treasure Island Casino Day Trip will be held on March 24.
- Programs/Events –
  - Valentine’s Day Dance and Luncheon was held on Feb. 13. 25 people attended the event. Dale Peterson played the electric guitar and there was lasagna served for lunch.
  - Art with Emelia - Feb. 25

**Marion Ross Theater:** Report provided by Afton Wacholz;

- **Facility Updates –**
  - See Rec facilities update below.
- **Upcoming events –**
  - Nunsense runs Feb 19, 20, 21, 22(m), 25, 26, 27 and 28(M).

**Other:** Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

- The Albert Lea City Council is voting tonight, Feb. 23, on ordering bids for the first construction phases of the Songbird Trail: From Fountain Street to Highway 13; from Sunset Street to roughly County Road 74; and repair or rebuild of four bridges. Note there will be a gap across the highway until determining a crossing acceptable to MnDOT.
- The City received 41 applications for the Recreation Manager position and is interviewing 6 candidates this week. If a member of the Parks and Recreation Board would like to participate in the second interviews, likely to be held the week of March 2, please let Cathy know.

### **Referendum Project Updates**

#### **City Arena**

##### *Lobby and office area*

- Staff are continuing work on furniture for the skate office, new lobby and Rec office.
- Glass is expected to be ready in the next week for the Rec Window. Southern Lock and Glass will be creating a custom sliding glass service window for that space.

##### *Refrigeration and arena floor*

- 90% complete with insulation for the mechanical room and refrigeration lines for the new cooling system
- 90% complete with electrical for the new cooling system
- Ahern is designing a new sprinkler head layout for the mechanical room
- Cedar Creek is completing the communication panel for the Solar System Feb. 18-19
- Rink Systems will start dasher board installation Feb. 23
- Harris Mechanical finished the duct sock and heater installation in Colstrup Arena Feb. 9-11
- Service Master deep cleaned Colstrup Arena Feb. 9-14
- Total Mechanical filled the new cooling system with Ethylene Glycol Feb. 16-18
- Total Mechanical will fill Ammonia for the new cooling System Mar. 2-3
- Total Mechanical will do a test start up on the new cooling system Mar. 3

- Jet Ice and R&R Specialties will complete updates for the new RO system Feb.25
- Working with Jim and Dudes & Harris Mechanical on HVAC programming for the City Arena and Marion Ross Theater

#### **Aquatic Center**

- Work will resume early April on the new ticket building as well as fencing, and finishing concrete work around the new building.

#### **Marion Ross Theater**

- Final punch list items are being completed, including finishing paint in lobby, touch up areas around thermostats, window cleaning, replacement of lights around the front arched windows, etc.

#### **\*\* Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- Update under Parks updates

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- No new 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:**

Tom Jones –

- Has interest in seeing an adult softball pick-up game option available, possibly on Sundays at Snyder Fields

**Adjournment:** Wende Taylor made a motion to adjourn the Park Board meeting and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

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Afton Wacholz

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Secretary

Approved:

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Amy Leach  
Park & Recreation Advisory Board Chair