

PARKS & RECREATION
ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

July 21, 2025 6 pm
City Arena

Members Present:

Steve Ball
Kent Rahn
Therese Salazar
Wende Taylor
Amy Leach
Whitney Sauer (arrived at 6:03p)
Jason Howland, Ex-Officio (arrived at 6:03p)

Members Absent:

Tony Segura

Staff in Attendance:

Cathy Malakowsky, Community Engagement and Enrichment Director
Ryan Hajek, Assistant Director of Public Works
Bob Furland, Recreation Manager
Mike Westney, Outgoing Parks Superintendent
Ben Bangert, Incoming Parks Superintendent
Dani Bakken, Recreation Coordinator
Afton Wacholz, Recreation Office Manager
Emma Barclay, Arena and Aquatic Center Technician
Teresa Kauffman, Communications Coordinator

Others in Attendance:

none

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Steve Ball at 6:00pm.

Adopt Agenda:

Amy Leach 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 (Whitney Sauer absent for vote). Motion declared passed.

Approval of the Minutes:

Wende Taylor made the motion to approve the minutes from the June 16, 2025 meeting and Amy Leach seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0 (Whitney Sauer absent for vote). Motion declared passed.

Public Items:

None

Old Business Items:

None

New Business Items:**Discussion on community requests for use of Recreation Department games and equipment –**

Dani discussed the current challenges that the Recreation Department faces with requests from community groups to borrow City equipment for their own private events. There is currently no formal process in place for this type of request.

The Freeborn County Relay for Life has been an organization that has requested use of a bounce house for many years. There has been recent requests for additional equipment as well.

Staff Report Discussion:

- Congratulations to Mike Westney on his retirement as Parks Superintendent. His last day will be Friday, July 27. After nearly four decades of employment with the City of Albert Lea, Mike looks forward to hitting the golf course and traveling with his family.
- We welcome Ben Bangert as the new Parks Superintendent. Ben brings over 15 years of experience with the Parks department and a wealth of knowledge, as he has served as the department arborist.

Staff Updates:

Recreation: Report provided by Bob Furland and Dani Bakken;

- Neighborhood parks opened on Monday June 2
 - Our first week attendance was:
 - Academy- 25
 - Lakeview-62
 - Troy-Hammer-6
 - Sondergaard-17
 - Hawthorne- 58
 - Valley-40
- We are partnering with Freeborn County 4-H Extension to provide programming at the neighborhood parks this summer
- Our first Movie in the Park will be held on Friday, June 13 – Trolls Band Together
- Recreation will be participating in Wind Down Wednesday on Wednesday, June 11
- Teen Takeover events kicked off on June 5, with Recreation partnering with the Albert Lea public Library hosting an escape room on June 5. There were roughly 40 who participated.

Parks: Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Mike Westney;

- Working on tree trimming and take downs.
- The Inclusive playground is open and held it's Grand Opening event on June 5.
- Inclusive Park Star mentorship garden is done (west side of driveway)
- Splash Pad bathroom build has started; electrical has been moved & sewer and water is in. Footings and foundation will start the week of June 9.

- Edgewater Cottage has been reroofed.
- Work has started on Ginkel playground.
- Summer help is all hired & have started.
- Downtown planting of pots & baskets is done.
- Mowing, rough mowing, & spraying have started.
- Most of the vandalism repairs at Fountain Lake park are complete.
- Bridge Ave dock is close to being ordered. Design has been established and now just looking at cost with the DNR.
- Frank Hall Park Bike Shelter plans are still out for structural review. The new location has been established.

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/Josh Heilman;

- The aquatic center opens on June 6th.
- See Facilities Project Update below for updates.

Senior Center: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- Trips -
 - July 16, 2025 Wild Rose Casino Trip
- Programs/Events –
 - Coffee and Conversations June 12, 2025
 - Enjoy coffee and donuts as you learn more about the value of planning!
Andrew T. Schwarz, Advanced Funeral Planner

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- **Facility Updates** –
 - No new updates
- **Upcoming events** –
 - Matilda - June 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 28
 - Peter Antoniou, Physic Comedian July 30

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

- **New website:** The City of Albert Lea plans to launch a revamped website on June 24 that is more secure and easier to use. While the new site will have the same address at cityofalbertlea.org,

the [test site](#) is ready for review and comment. The new site includes a directory of parks, trails and fun spots. Please visit the [test site](#) and email any corrections or suggestions to Cathy Malakowsky at cmalakowsky@ci.albertlea.mn.us. Other new features include accessibility features such as bigger text for browsers with visual impairments, a staff directory, translation into other languages such as Spanish and online submissions for Public Works issues such as streetlight outages and potholes.

- **Blazing Star State Trail:** The contractor is making progress on building the bridge to extend the [Blazing Star State Trail](#) between Myre-Big Island State Park and Hayward. After pausing work to allow the bridge foundation to settle, crews recently resumed work. This Minnesota Department of Natural Resources project is slated for completion late this year.
- **Council supports grant to restore channel:** The Albert Lea City Council voted May 12 to support the Shell Rock River Watershed District's grant application for restoring the channel between Fountain and Albert Lea lakes. The [watershed district](#) is seeking more funding for the proposed project from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. This project would help reduce erosion, improve accessibility, and build upon past funding to improve lake water quality and habitat.

Referendum Project Updates

Aquatic Center

- Electric will be completed on Friday for exterior lighting.
- Construction on the new ticket booth and entrance will start in September 2025.

City Arena

- Excavating for the under-ice tile and sump pump in the compressor room and under the rink floor continues.
- Albert Lea Electric continues to update the building's wiring and add transformers.
- Steel beams, bar joists, and decking for the new lobby are complete, and the masons have started laying the block.
- Framers are working in the Recreation office and new lobby.
- Interior masonry is ongoing in the new referee room.
- Solar panels continue to be installed in the Colstrup arena.

Marion Ross Theatre

- Continue to work on controls for Heating and Air conditioning.

**** Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- See update under Referendum Project Updates

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- No new update

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:

Steve Ball – Inquired about how we can get the word about Ginkle Park and how to access it since it is located in a more secluded area.

Amy Leach – Amy asked staff about the curb cut-out near the east entrance to Edgewater park for access from the sidewalk across Lakeview Boulevard to the park. Staff assured her that the work will be done, the timeline is just uncertain at this point.

Jason Howland – Jason discussed ash trees with the Parks staff and how they are addressed the private vs public trees that need to be either treated or removed. Staff informed him that when a tree becomes hazardous and is on private property, they will send a letter to the home owner and allow 30 days for them to take care of the issue. After 30 days another letter will be sent and they are given 7 days as a final warning. At this time the City will hire a company to do the work and the home owner will be assessed for the expense.

Adjournment: Amy Leach made a motion to adjourn the Park Board meeting and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 3-0 (Wende and Theresa were absent). Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Afton Wacholz
Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Secretary

Approved:

Steve Ball
Park & Recreation Advisory Board Chairman

