

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